

IN FAST FRIENDSHIP BOUND



IN FAST FRIENDSHIP BOUND:  
SPENSER'S HEROIC MODEL OF  
NATIONAL UNITY

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## Abstract

Spenser's concern with English sovereignty is evident throughout *The Faerie Queene*, and in "The Legend of Holinesse" he promotes an entirely indigenous faith structure aligned with the state as the basis for a unified nation. I argue that in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser presents an allegorical model of England through the Redcrosse Knight, Prince Arthur, and Una. These three characters represent the English citizenry, monarchy, and Protestant church, the three institutions proposed as necessary for a unified nation. Spenser's heroic model is presented as an emblem in Canto ix, where through the efforts of Prince Arthur, Redcrosse is reunited with Una. These three characters are similarly used in this paper as a structuring device to organize this thesis into three self-contained, interrelated essays, and issues relevant to each character/institution are explored in his or her chapter. After a brief discussion of the poetic emblem in Canto ix, where all three characters are present and exchange tokens of friendship, Redcrosse, Arthur, and Una are considered individually.





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## I. Introduction

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is a testament to its political context, and the issues compelling the English Reformation dominate his heroic epic. As Spenser penned his poem, Elizabethan England had broken from Roman authority for a second time, and the European strongholds of Catholicism had yet to accept the loss. Philip II of Spain sent the Spanish Armada to reclaim England only a few years before publication of *The Faerie Queene*, and Protestant officials were anxious over recent efforts of the Jesuits to infiltrate the country. Elizabeth I herself had been excommunicated years before by Pope Pius V, who also charged those loyal to Rome with ending her reign. Early modern England existed in a siege mentality, fostering a rather pragmatic need for national unity. Spenser's deep concern with English sovereignty is evident throughout *The Faerie Queene*, and although the reinstatement of Protestantism by Elizabeth was celebrated as a triumph, it was by no means definitive – there was more work to be done. Spenser and his fellow Reformers recognized the necessity of an entirely indigenous faith structure, one aligned with the state, as the basis for a unified nation.

In Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's heroic model is presented allegorically through the Redcrosse Knight, Prince Arthur, and Una. I argue in this thesis that these three characters respectively represent the English citizenry, monarchy, and Protestant church, the three institutions necessary for a unified nation. Spenser's heroic model of national unity is presented as an emblem in Canto ix, where through the efforts of Prince Arthur, Redcrosse is reunited with

Una. These three characters are likewise used in this paper as a structuring device to organize this thesis into three self-contained, interrelated essays, and issues relevant to each character/institution are explored in his or her chapter. After a brief discussion of the poetic emblem in Canto ix, where all three characters are present and exchange tokens of friendship, Redcrosse, Arthur, and Una will be considered individually. But first, a brief overview of the general issues relevant to my thesis.

English Protestantism, or in more general terms an indigenous faith removed from foreign authority, is crucial to Spenser's model and characterized in Book I as the underlying impetus bonding people and state. Spenser tailors his own literary production to continue initiatives begun in the Reformation, demonstrating how the rise of literacy and the printing press were used to further England's religious autonomy. Early modern Protestantism is heavily invested in print technology, evidenced by the English translations of the Bible, and the numerous theological treatises made available to promote this comparatively new form of Christianity. The proliferation of information and ideas is instrumental in making Protestantism a fully accessible faith structure, and Richard Mallette points out that the Reformation is a cultural revolution built on the belief in the power of its texts (21). The English Reformation depended on the ready availability of theological literature, and those concerns are present in Spenser's text as well. For the poet concerned with national unity in this period, the first step in creating a loyal, morally responsible English citizen, a "gentleman or

noble person” (Spenser *Faerie Queene* 714), is honing his or her religious ideology. That entire enterprise, in keeping with the tenets of Protestantism, is accomplished through intellectual engagement, and the primary concern of The Legend of Holinesse is the Redcrosse Knight’s – and by extension the reader’s – education. In English Protestantism true Christian faith is attained through reason and knowledge, which in Spenser’s text are inseparable from poetry.

Poetry has a long history, and in Renaissance England it was an esteemed literary form with connotations of courtly refinement. It was also invested with a degree of mystery, and “sixteenth-century poets, like their medieval counterparts, were reluctant to detach the poet’s golden worlds from the actuality of the divine Creation or to claim absoluteness for poetic creativity” (MacCaffrey 22). Classical authors such as Homer and Virgil commence their literary efforts with formal appeals to the muses for divine guidance, thereby establishing epic convention and the belief that poetry is not the exclusive property of the author. For authors composing in the tradition of Homer, poetry is a mediating vehicle between humanity and divinity, the means through which the poet expresses the voice of the gods. In the early modern period, the idea of heavenly inspiration continued to infuse poetry with the authority of divine revelation. The belief in this power “gave poetry its almost divine status ... and enabled Puttenham or Sidney alike to claim that the poets were ‘the first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and politicians in the world’” (Evans 8-9). Like Homer and Virgil

before him, Spenser directs his divinely inspired poetry towards the creation of a unified nation.

Spenser's relationship with state authority, or what he hoped it would be, determined both his choice in profession and the literary form used to promote his heroic model. Protestant morality obliged Spenser to use his extensive learning in ways beneficial to the community. Learning and civic responsibility coalesce in *The Faerie Queene*, and "For Spenser, men of 'learning' ... have a special knowledge of the historical past and of ideal values that makes them fit to advise princes" (Oram 515). As a learned recipient of divine inspiration, "The epic poet is supremely qualified to serve as a royal counselor" (515). To revisit the idea of poet as heavenly spokesman, it is worth considering who else Spenser appeals to for inspiration in his epic. Along with the "holy virgin chiefe of nyne" (I.proem.2), or Clio, the poet appeals to the "Great Ladie of the greatest Isle" (I.proem.4), Elizabeth. As William A. Oram states, "The queen is Spenser's divine muse" (518). Oram's insight is significant, and worth elaborating on. The implications of having political, rather than divine, inspiration signal the nation building impetus of the work, and Renaissance poets often recruit classic mythology to further political agendas. A humanist like Spenser is not only a poet, but "a mythographer, justifying and glorifying the deeds of the prince with the poetical trappings of classical fable" (Hulse 379). Politics are inseparable from religion in early modern England, and in *The Faerie Queene* both are enlisted to further English sovereignty. Below I argue that Spenser's poem is itself an



important Reformation document, as does Darryl J. Gless, who declares that the “Legend of Holiness treats features of doctrine and ecclesiology that were just beginning in many areas to receive adequate formulation and dissemination by the authorities” (11). Distinctions between myth and history become blurred in *The Faerie Queene*, where both are used to argue for a unified nation.

Myths are, essentially, stories, and as such are the providence of poets. Throughout history, poets are the ones who invest stories with cultural relevance. Through poetry, historic events and those who inspire them are elevated, granted a status not readily available to strictly historic interpretations. An elevated sense of mythology motivates Spenser’s epic, and Evans explains that “It is the poets who turn heroes into gods and ‘feign’ the myths by which men attempt to govern their lives; and it is of special relevance to *The Faerie Queene* that poetry, particularly heroic poetry, was credited with this power and this responsibility of myth-making” (8). Through strategies such as allegory and classical references, Spenser uses mythology as an established literary vocabulary to create an inclusive culture for Protestant England. Cultural myths address the shared emotional impulses that motivate the formation of a community, lionizing existence and shaping ideologies. Understood in this way, mythology becomes powerful propaganda, a usage not lost on the rulers of the day: “A striking feature of the political world of the sixteenth century is the attempt of European rulers to control ... beliefs by manipulating classical myths into a political vocabulary” (Hulse 378). Spenser’s heroic triad of people, state, and church is best articulated

through mythopoeiac language, which can often exceed the demands of intellectual reason. The English Reformation itself was understood as an epic struggle, its mythological connotations playing an important role in its accomplishment. As Richard Mallette puts it, “In reforming the work of centuries of Christianity, powerful forensic weapons would have to be devised” (21). A key “forensic” instrument in accomplishing the re-invention of the Christian church in England was the scripting of a new mythology, though one still built on the fundamental myths of Christianity.

Two central stories on which Christianity is founded are the Fall and the Incarnation. The first chronicles humankind’s disobedience towards God and subsequent estrangement from him, and the second, his entry into corporeal existence to redeem humanity. For Christians of any denomination, these complementary stories explain human existence. The Fall has had long lasting effects on language, where the word, or signifier in modern parlance, is divorced from meaning, or the sign. The broken relationship between sign and signifier becomes a negotiable space through which meaning can be obscured and lost. The space between signifier and sign is, essentially, the distance between humankind and God, explored further below in the chapter dedicated to Una. The Fall, an unquestionable truth for Renaissance Europeans, is used by Spenser as the starting point for his own Protestant mythology. In the poet’s mythos, the Roman Catholic Church is situated into the broken space between signifier and sign, becoming a

grievous misinterpretation of Christian truth that Reformation England must overcome.

Spenser's theology is discussed at length in the Una chapter, but I am briefly contextualizing it here. The theology expressed throughout *The Faerie Queene* is a generalized Protestantism. The break with Roman authority left a traumatic absence of an organized faith structure, and many alternative interpretations of Protestantism sought to fill the gap. Theological contentions threatened to fragment the nation, which would leave it dangerously exposed to Rome and foreign invasion. Aligning himself with any one denomination would detract from Spenser's nationalist agenda, and *The Faerie Queene* advocates an English faith structure subject to the state. With a national religion, the two institutions of state and church combine to fortify power, creating what Gless cleverly calls "Elizabethan Protestant Orthodoxy" (16). The theology Spenser outlines is general enough to appeal to anyone disenchanted with Catholicism. As befitting a poet, though, one of the few definitive statements one can make concerning Spenser's theology is that it is heavily invested in language, and its ability to affect change in the individual is seen as more effective than any specific doctrine.

Rather than outlining a traditional treatise that would be limited to the demands of that particular genre, Spenser uses heroic poetry to disseminate his politically oriented theology. Book I promotes Protestant morality by translating sacred history into romance, thus using popular literature to continue the

evangelical project begun with the New Testament. In the words of Åke Bergvall, “There can be no doubt that Spenser designed *The Legend of Holiness*, immersed as it is in biblical allusions, to be a vessel for the Word” (37). Spenser’s “vessel” is composed of allegory and literary intertextuality, and “Spenser’s unique quality as a myth-maker lies less in his ability to invent new myths than to recombine old ones and bring them into new and fruitful relationships” (Evans 46). Spenser’s somewhat “pastiche” approach to literary structure is evident in his characterization as well.

Redcrosse, Arthur, and Una conform to stock characters found in European chivalric romance, and the figures of the knight, the prince, and the maiden would have been familiar *dramatis personae* to Spenser’s audience. As a literary motif, each type of character is invested with readerly expectations, and in the narratives they inhabit, knight, prince, and maiden must conform to accepted ideas about how they function for Spenser to effectively articulate his heroic model. When developing this project, I initially thought of the characters as “archetypes.” Archetypes are defined by Northrop Frye as complex “associative clusters” that contain “a large number of specific learned associations which are communicable because a large number of people in a given culture happen to be familiar with them” (Frye 102). At first glance, identifying Redcrosse, Prince Arthur, and Una as archetypes seemed perfectly suited to Spenser’s nationalist triumvirate, relying as they do on associative meanings as much as their immediate narrative applications. Archetypes are, after all, effective forms of

communication because, according to Frye, “The stream of literature ... like any other stream, seeks the easiest channels first: the poet who uses the expected associations will communicate more rapidly” (103). Others have enlisted Frye’s critical apparatus in approaching *The Faerie Queene*, and critics like Richard Helgerson declare that “Freed from all particular location in time or space, the poem resides in triumph with the immortal archetypes” (“Tasso” 159).

However, I am no longer convinced that Frye’s concept of archetype is precise enough for the argument that follows. Frye was concerned with universals, the narrative figures and patterns that underlie all of Western literature. Such generalization, I think, is not quite applicable to Spenser’s epic. Questing knights, noble princes, and troubled maidens are more localized ideas, being long established residents of English literature with a great deal of cultural investment. In his remarkably helpful book *Spenser’s Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and The Faerie Queene*, David A. Summers coins the term “cultural icon” to denote figures that have become “shorthand representations of rather complex collections of ideas, narratives, and values” (9). Summer’s concept is more sensitive to region than Frye’s and is the critical framework used throughout this paper. Cultural icons are further explained in the Prince Arthur chapter. My argument approaches these characters as metaphors for the English institutions that a unified nation depends on, recognizing that “Spenser’s metaphors provide a concentrated form of shorthand which harnesses the force of the whole poem to every individual statement” (Evans 85). Spenser’s emblem of

national unity is such a metaphor, unobtrusively presented in the latter part of the Legend where Redcrosse and Arthur exchange tokens of friendship.

In Canto ix, after Prince Arthur rescues the Redcrosse Knight from Orgoglio's dungeon, the two knights give one another "goodly gifts" to formalize their newly established friendship (I.ix.18). The exchange is understated, not even spanning a full two stanzas. It is situated between Redcrosse's imprisonment and his almost fatal encounter with Despaire, and seems to be overlooked by most critics. When it does come up it is usually discussed in passing, with the focus on such questions as the significance of Arthur's gift, or speculations about what book Redcrosse offers. I have yet to come across a satisfying interpretation of the entire episode. In discussing Spenser's narrative techniques, Andrew D. Weiner proposes "we must assume that every detail exists to draw our attention to itself, to make us respond to it in some way, and to prepare us to accept the new ways of seeing into which the poet has forced us" (34), and I agree. The exchange is a pivotal moment in "The Legend of Holinesse," a poetic emblem of Spenser's heroic model of national unity through the mutually beneficial relationship of Redcrosse, Prince Arthur, and Una, allegorical figures for the English citizenry, the crown, and the church. Aside from the characters' allegorical functions though, the gift exchange has three significant elements that must be considered individually, and then relationally: Arthur's gift, Redcrosse's gift and the implications of their exchanging them.

Prince Arthur gives the Redcrosse Knight a “boxe of Diamond sure” that contains “drops of liquor pure, / Of wondrous worth, and vertue excellent” (I.ix.19). There are two components of Arthur’s gift to be considered: the diamond box, and the liquor it contains. The gift-box is directly related to Arthur’s shield, which is also made of diamond, and both should be included in a discussion concerning the significance of this material in Book I. Unlike the box, the shield has received a fair bit of attention: John Erskine Hankins traces its literary lineage through Ariosto and Tasso, their epics having long been recognized as sources for Spenser’s own poem. Hankins also relates the shield to the Book of Psalms, specifically 84:11, ‘For the Lord God is a sun and shield’ (109). Frederick Morgan Padelford associates the shield with Christian faith, comparing it to the sun and its ability to illuminate all hidden things (47). Douglas D. Waters seems to agree with Don Cameron Allen that the shield represents repentance (90). Virgil K. Whitaker, however, does consider the gift-box as well, suggesting it is Holy Communion (52). Most criticism tends to isolate the shield from the gift, considering each article independently. Although such an approach is reasonable considering the different purposes of each object (the shield is a defensive weapon, the box a container and token of friendship), I believe their similarities demand that they be viewed together. Both shield and gift-box are made of diamond and exclusively associated with Arthur, and an interpretation of either should be able to accommodate both articles.

When developing the correspondence between weapon and gift, Isabel G. MacCaffrey's elegant interpretation of Arthur's shield is useful. For her, it "symbolizes both heavenly light and the magic arts (including this poem) which make that light visible on earth" (137). She goes on to say that "Its 'blazing brightness' daunts the eye (I.vii.19); it is the cause of epiphanies" (137). An external impetus that causes epiphanies comes closest to articulating the subtle, potentially elusive phenomenon signaled in the metaphor. For all its refinement, diamond is an earthly substance and irrefutably material. Its very physicality complicates ascribing the diamond articles to any purely abstract concept such as faith or repentance. Diamond does, however, reflect and concentrate light, and the sunlight that Arthur's shield (and by extension the gift-box) reflects is of heavenly origin, associated by the narrator with divinity (I.viii.19). The diamond shield and box evidence divinity, becoming material signifiers of the presence of God. Viewing diamond in this manner accommodates both shield and box in a unified interpretation that is sensitive towards their separate functions. In theology – and certainly in *The Faerie Queene* – the presence of God is both a precious gift, and an unassailable defense.

The "liquor pure" contained within the diamond gift-box gives the metaphor a further level of significance. The liquor itself has generated substantial discussion, and most of the conclusions reached are of similar mind. Padelford views the magical elixir as Communion wine (48), and in a footnote A.C. Hamilton identifies it as the blood of Christ (116). Humphrey Tonkin's reading is



a bit more abstract, associating the liquor with “the heavenly aspects of faith” (222). For most critics (including myself) the liquor is the spiritual manifestation of faith. The gift-box, as discussed above, is the material manifestation of divinity. The diamond gift-box, when considered together with the liquor, becomes a physical metaphor for the Incarnation, the Word made flesh in Christ. Prince Arthur giving Redcrosse a token of the Incarnation is hugely significant, making him, as Waters puts it, a “minister of grace.” (87).

Redcrosse returns Arthur’s generosity by giving the prince “A booke, wherein his Saueours testament / Was writt with golden letters rich and braue” (I.ix.19). His doing so can be confusing to the reader – it just seems odd that Redcrosse, who up to this point in the narrative is having a hard time with his own faith, should be the one to bring its tenets to someone else. Waters dismisses the gesture as ironic, “since it is not the Prince but Red Crosse himself who needs it” (94). Spenser is, of course, quite capable of irony, and is not in the least shy about including it in his epic: examples include Redcrosse's conversation with Fradubio in Canto ii, in which the knight cannot recognize his own plight, or Duessa's belief that her Prince (Christ) remains deceased, “spoild of liuely breath” (I.ii.24). The exchange of gifts between prince and knight, however, is an inopportune moment for Spenser to slip into such an attitude. Doing so would turn the solemnity of the occasion into satire, investing Redcrosse with a pompousness usually reserved for morally questionable characters (Braggadochio from the later Books comes to mind, as does Paridell). Irony here would only undermine the

potential for deeper significance, and if we accept that everything in Spenserian allegory is deliberate, then we must give serious thought to the implications of each symbol and action.

The first order of business, then, is determining exactly what Redcrosse's book is. Padelford insists it is the English *Book of Common Prayer* (48), but I tend to agree with critics like Waters and Tonkin who see it as a bible (94, 222). The narrator's reference to it as the "Sauerours testament" and "A worke of wondrous grace" meant for "soules to saue" (I.ix.19) identifies it as the New Testament. This identification brings us back to the problem of the allegory's appropriateness; how do we reconcile ourselves with Redcrosse giving Prince Arthur, who at this time is the more virtuous knight, a bible? It makes more sense when we remember that at this point in the narrative Redcrosse is, spiritually speaking, illiterate.

Most critics agree that throughout Book I the Redcrosse Knight gets into trouble because he is incapable of sophisticated reading (see, for instance, Hester Lees-Jeffries's "From the Fountain to the Well: Redcrosse Learns to Read"). When the exchange of gifts takes place, he has yet to visit the House of Holiness, where only Fidelia can teach him how to read the "sacred Booke" (I.x.19). As Whitaker points out, in the House of Holiness episode "Spenser distinctly implies that the Bible is not open to every man and must be interpreted" (53). Redcrosse's gesture of giving the New Testament to Prince Arthur can be read as an admission of dependency, a humble acknowledgment of his need for a mediating authority

in theological matters. The knight's gift qualifies Reformation demands for access to scripture; while the rejection of Roman authority is understood as necessary, having no interpreter at all has proved to be detrimental. The Redcrosse Knight's entire quest has led him up to this point, where he is able to admit his own shortcomings in matters of faith (a long way from his battle with Error in Canto i). This interpretation does not detract from Redcrosse's action; the gesture itself is a gift, one that has historical precedence.

The gift exchange between Prince Arthur and The Redcrosse Knight echoes a similar occasion from early in Elizabeth's reign, after the death of her predecessor Mary in 1558. Upon Elizabeth's entry into London, amidst boisterous celebration, nobles presented the virgin queen with an English bible, and she promised 'diligently to read therein!' (Padelford 4). Padelford suggests that Spenser, born around 1552, would have remembered the relief and sincere enthusiasm Protestants greeted Elizabeth with, making a deep and lasting impression on the future poet laureate. The reference would be immediately recognizable to Spenser's contemporaries; as Joanne Craig points out, the historical materials in the epic "must have been very familiar to his audience" (523). The exchange in the "Legend of Holinesse" is usually discussed in terms that are not overly complicated. Whitaker tentatively proposes that when the liquor and book are viewed together, Spenser might be equating Holy Communion with the New Testament (53). Padelford sees the exchange in generalized terms as the Protestant establishment of Holy Communion and the

final adoption of the *Common Book of Prayers* (48). Tonkin, more assertively, sees the gift-giving as a meditation on the dual nature of Christian faith, Arthur rendering up the heavenly aspect, Redcrosse the earthly. He also suggests that English readers at the time of publication would have seen the exchange as God bestowing grace upon the English church, and the church's promise of fidelity to the true teachings of Christ (Tonkin 222). Although that comes close to a satisfying interpretation, it is still not specific enough (though admittedly, when it comes to allegory precision is negotiable at best). Following identification of the Book's three main characters outlined above, Prince Arthur, representing the English monarchy and the House of Tudor, brings the Incarnation to Redcrosse. The Redcrosse Knight, standing in for the English populace, gives his monarch the earthly authority and responsibility of interpreting the Word. This exchange is performed in the presence of Una, who is Christian Truth and has brought the two knights, representing the English citizenry and the monarchy, together. With "right hands together ioynd" (I.ix.18), prince and knight enter into a solemn agreement in which Redcrosse pledges fidelity to Protestant Christianity, and Arthur promises to respect Redcrosse's trust by facilitating direct experience of the Incarnation. Both box and book are material signifiers of Christian Truth, of Una, and are tokens exchanged for "fast frendship for to bynd, / And loue establish each to other trew" (I.ix.18). In the gift exchange between Prince Arthur and the Redcrosse Knight, brought about through Una, the entire English Reformation is summarized in a literary emblem advocating the unity of

commonwealth, state, and church. To better understand Spenser's heroic emblem, however, each character/institution must be considered individually.

## II. The Redcrosse Knight

In Spenser's heroic model of a unified nation, the Redcrosse Knight represents the English citizenry, the common populace. As such, he is the vehicle through which the average reader enters into the "Legend of Holinesse" and *The Faerie Queene* in general. He is "Everyman," to borrow Michael O'Connell's term (67). Redcrosse's status as an average citizen is indicated through his heritage, which he would have shared with Spenser's contemporary readers. He is a "Saxon, an ordinary Englishman, unlike the Faerie and Briton characters, whose ethnic origins are literary" (Craig 530). Redcrosse is characterized at the beginning of *The Faerie Queene* as being "Right faithfull true ... in deede and word" though "his cheere did seeme too solemne sad" (I.i.2). In his *Letter to Raleigh*, Spenser describes the knight as "a tall clownishe younge man" (*Faerie Queene* 717). These indicators create an image of a somewhat unrefined young man who has just attained adulthood and is perhaps too eager to establish himself. Such an image could well describe early modern England after the Reformation and its continuing efforts to establish independence from Church authority. Though we are introduced to Redcrosse long before he meets Duessa, who represents Roman Catholicism, his overly serious demeanour anticipates Spenser's critique of that faith structure, which is viewed as one that subjugates the individual and leads him or her into despair. The "bloodie Crosse" on his armour and shield identify the young knight as Saint George, the patron saint of England.

As Saint George, he has been interpreted in several interesting ways. Padelford declares the knight to be “England as a militant spiritual force” (*Allegory* 17) though both he and Whitaker see Redcrosse as Henry VIII, Elizabeth’s father. Hamilton does not map any particular historical personage onto the Knight of Holinesse, simply stating that he represents “the Protestant power under Elizabeth” (“Langland” 547). Anne Lake Prescott asserts that George is “more or less” Greek for Adam, and possibly “pilgrim” as well (170-1). These various interpretations are all interesting, and Spenser’s allegories are structured in such a way as to allow for multiple readings, quite often simultaneously. In my argument, Redcrosse represents the average English citizen in Renaissance England, as well as the citizenry as a whole. I argue below that, in Spenser’s model, a single citizen holds within him or her the entire nation, just as the nation houses each citizen.

As the representative of the English commonwealth, the Redcrosse Knight lives out the story of the average civilian, living with the lingering effects of the English Reformation and trying to negotiate between two available Christian ideologies. Essentially, the Redcrosse Knight – and those he represents – progress through “The Legend of Holinesse” in preparation to stepping up and claiming their places in Spenser’s heroic nationalist model. This chapter employs the Redcrosse Knight as the vehicle to explore issues and institutions relevant to the average English citizen, broadly organized into literature and literary culture, identity, and religious denomination.

In many ways, *The Faerie Queene* is a poem about English literature. Spenser's use of Arthurian typology as the narrative context for his epic announces the poem's close relationship with the English literary canon. With his epic, Spenser takes an active role in the larger project of nation-building by contributing to indigenous literary production. Nation building, understood here as the conscious effort to define the character of an entire people, is fostered through the literary history of a people, and was a popular impetus in early modern England. As David J. Baker and Willy Maley say, "State formation and canon formation go hand in hand" (6), and that process is evident in the construction of *The Faerie Queene*, which incorporates countless foreign and domestic sources in a staggering organizational effort. English native literature is, however, the most immediately influential material. Lake Prescott discusses Spenser's relation to Stephen Bateman and his 1569 work *The Travayled Pylgrime*, which she characterizes as "a chivalric pilgrimage allegory" (167). Published twenty years before the Redcrosse Knight took up "mightie armes and siluer shielde" (I.i.1), Bateman's work is, according to Prescott, "England's only significant nondramatic Protestant quest allegory before Spenser" (169). Aside from texts like Bateman's that are now somewhat obscure, most critics agree that the two major native influences on *The Faerie Queene* are William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer.

The impact of Langland and Chaucer on Spenser has been noted by many critics. Hamilton best summarizes the thinking on the matter when he asserts that



“Spenser combines Chaucer’s literary sophistication with Langland’s intense religious spirit” (“Langland” 536). Hamilton goes on to qualify his assertion by adding that “his affinities are clearly with the latter poet” (“Langland” 536). Langland’s *Piers the Plowman*, from around 1360 - 1387, provides the literary template for Spenser’s epic. Much like the Legend of Holiness, it is an allegorical narrative poem, though written in unrhymed alliterative verse, in which the narrator is led through a distinctly Christian allegorical landscape, encountering anthropomorphic embodiments of theological concepts. The entire work is built around a Judeo-Christian framework, incorporating Pauline typology and biblical intertextuality. Another important aspect of Langland’s text is its underlying didacticism; as well as being a compelling literary work, *Piers* functions as a spiritual ‘guidebook’ with multiple layers of significance to engage the reader beyond a purely aesthetic level and address moral concerns. It makes a great model for anyone composing a theological allegory.

Spenser consciously refined his poetic voice through study and critical imitation. Before approaching *The Faerie Queene*, he spent considerable effort working his way up through the established hierarchy of poetic writing. He developed his skill systematically through lays, satire, sonnets, and the pastoral before graduating to the heroic epic. His education was not limited to poetic forms, though, and Hamilton asserts that “During [Spenser’s] apprenticeship to poetry when decorum demanded that he follow earlier poets, the Piers tradition of satire was the only continuous poetic tradition in England which he could imitate”

("Langland" 535). Spenser was a good student, learning from Langland social commentary, allegorical construction, and didactic narrative. Hamilton compares Spenser's relationship to the earlier poet with that of Virgil to Homer, asserting that in a 'generational' organization of English literature – 'the English tradition' – Spenser is Langland's "son" ("Langland" 548). Spenser seems to acknowledge as much in "The Legend of Holinesse" when the hermit Contemplation explains to Redcrosse that he was raised as a Plowman's son (I.x.66). Given the strong intertextuality established from the very beginning of the poem, the comment immediately calls to mind Langland's poem in a narrative strategy that engages in a nationalist dialogue. Spenser situates his own literary production in relation to prior English texts, consciously building on them to further the English canon. In doing so, he deliberately shifts literary precedents and models from the Roman tradition used by Italian humanists, in a move that can be described as cultural patriotism. Spenser invokes the vast history of English literature in the effort to perpetuate it and insure its continuity. In Renaissance England, Langland's work was considered one of the greatest works from the English canon, and remains so to this day. The other major indigenous contributor to *The Faerie Queene* is Chaucer.

In one of several references to Chaucer throughout *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser unabashedly calls him the "well of English undefyled" (IV.ii.32), seeing in the earlier poet's work what he felt should be the defining characteristics of an indigenous literature. John A. Burrow claims that "No Elizabethan writer ...

displays a closer relationship to Chaucer than does Spenser” (*SEnc* 144), and John M. Steadman asserts, in a somewhat colourful manner, that “in Spenser’s eyes, Chaucer provided a model of linguistic purity, a language still uncontaminated by inkhornisms and barbarisms” (551). The poet’s own suggestion that Chaucer is a “well” is suggestive, announcing a further removal of literature from Italian predecessors while promoting native authors. This is not to say that Spenser overlooks his European peers; the influence of Ariosto and Tasso is also important to *The Faerie Queene* and is discussed further below. He takes more care, however, to acknowledge his countrymen, referencing them specifically in the effort to “establish more firmly what he regards as the native English poetic and linguistic tradition” (Steadman 552). Spenser’s championing of Langland and Chaucer advances his nation building project by situating a collective literary tradition as a defining characteristic for an entire people. With its intertextuality and generous references to earlier English poets, *The Faerie Queene* can be viewed as a testament to the entire English literary tradition. In approaching English literature, however, Spenser does not limit his scope to canonical texts. He is quite willing to move away from them and draw upon lesser genres as well.

Spenser dresses up his Protestant allegory in several genres, some more respectable than others. *The Faerie Queene*, and Book I in particular, is easily recognizable as a historic epic, the term Spenser used himself in his *Letter (Faerie Queene* 715), although he moves away from the expectations that go along with that type of literature. Steadman notes that “The tradition of ‘historicall epic’, as

Spenser apparently conceived it, afforded ample license for the poet's own inventions" (537), and Jeffrey Knapp calls attention to the theological underpinnings throughout the work, confidently asserting that "'sermon discourse' pervades *The Faerie Queene*" ("Priest" 62). The precision of Knapp's wording is worth commenting on. A sermon is, normally, a preacher's interpretation of a biblical passage, organized into accessible language and delivered to an audience with the intention of educating them in spiritual edification. As a form of communication it relates to rhetoric, another literary mode present in the epic. The sermon, as a literary sub-genre, translates to Spenser's project, where theological concerns are expressed in ways that are not only accessible, but enjoyable. To make his work enjoyable, Spenser relies on popular literature.

Chivalric romance was a relatively new genre in the early modern period that Robert B. Burlin characterizes as anti-classical, or "at least outside the received, codifiable literary tradition" (1). Helgerson comments on the hostility English humanists had towards chivalric romance, particularly Italian models, finding them to be filled with "bold bawdry and open manslaughter" ("Tasso" 159). Controversies over Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* "all point to the controversial nature of the genre in which Spenser chose to write his major poem" (159). In Renaissance England, chivalric romance was a popular literature removed from the pretenses of more established genres, and Burlin reminds us that "Recognizing genre is essential to the proper reception

of a text” (1). The use of a specific genre is, in many ways, an agreement between the text and the reader, signaling what expectations an audience can bring to a given work. A tragic drama will bring the audience to a point of catharsis, for instance. A heroic epic will include themes of nation-building. Adhering to a particular genre is an author’s way of letting the reader know what to expect, and a chivalric romance is “unashamed of its fictivity and without prescribed formal markers” (Burlin 2). With chivalric romances, the use of the vernacular announces what type of reader is invited to enter into the text – basically, anyone capable of reading it.

Spenser’s use of chivalric romance has multiple functions. It is a vehicle for his theological concerns, but one that is accessible, and even attractive, to readers unconcerned with scholarly nuances of Protestant doctrine. Someone interested in a chivalric romance may not necessarily approach a treatise written by Calvin with quite the same enthusiasm. In dressing up his epic – which also incorporates more elevated genres such as history and theology – in a chivalric mode, Spenser situates his epic on the “common ground” of early modern literature, removing it from purely academic discourse and placing it squarely into popular culture. Such a move is philosophically in keeping with England’s continuing Reformation project, which insists upon the accessibility of God and the individual’s agency in that relationship. Framing a spiritual allegory within a chivalric romance makes the theology accessible, but also demands active engagement with the text to understand the allegory. It is up to the reader to

penetrate the chivalric veneer to fully appreciate the spiritual didacticism of the work. Spenser's use of chivalric romance also dignifies the genre, demonstrating the importance of all native literature regardless of established canons. That said, Spenser does not incorporate a less respected literary forms for purely ideological reasons, nor to make a point about literature; he puts chivalric romance to work.

The central literary trope of "The Legend of Holinesse" is that of the quest, a motif which is "appropriated by Spenser to keep his *Faerie Queene* in order and provide a generic marker" (Burlin 5). On a purely pragmatic level, questing propels the narrative, providing a literary "road-map" for the allegory to develop along. It engages the reader intellectually by imitating the internal processes that he or she should be undergoing while reading. Spenser, like Langland, recognizes the elegant economy of the metaphor in articulating the process of individual growth. The motif carries with it a moral imperative as well; the Redcrosse Knight and the other heroes throughout *The Faerie Queene* embark on quests through a sense of obligation. In true chivalric tradition, they take up arms and set out for the good of entire communities. Redcrosse, for example, dons armour and weapons to save Una's parents and their kingdom. The point of his quest is not exactly to slay the dragon, but to liberate the kingdom, a subtle difference that he fails to comprehend at the beginning of Book I. Una explains to Prince Arthur that she went to Gloriana's court "There to obtaine some such redoubted knight, / That Parents deare from tyrants power deliver might" (I.vii.46). Personal honour or glory should be secondary to how the knight's

actions benefit the many, and each hero in *The Faerie Queene* is expected to act in a manner beneficial to his or her community. As Helgerson says, “Spenser’s chivalric romance ... enlarges the sphere of honour and identifies private virtue with public obligation” (“Tasso” 167).

*The Faerie Queene* expands chivalric romance and redefines the conventions of that genre in an act of appropriation on Spenser’s part, in which he consciously employs established forms and their conventions in an original manner. Literary appropriation, the act of taking existing textual material and using it to further one’s own authorial project, is a central narrative strategy of Spenser’s and was common in the early modern period. According to Mary Ann Cincotta, “literary borrowing in the Renaissance is both to invoke the authority of common wisdom and also to exploit that wisdom in the service of one’s own ideas” (35). Literary borrowing provides the raw material for *The Faerie Queene*, and is the means through which Spenser establishes his authority as an epic poet. It is also the way he asserts the prominence of English literature in general, thereby furthering his nationalist project. In true Spenserian fashion, authority is understood as multi-layered and is approached as such in Book I, where concerns of morality and theological independence pivot around issues of agency and fidelity. The poet chooses to build his credibility from the ground up, starting with oral culture.

One of the ways Spenser establishes his authority is by incorporating common sayings directly into his poem. In Book I, sayings such as “great grieve

will not be tould” (I.vii.41) or “Each goodly thing is hardest to begin” (I.x.6.1) are directly related to common folk proverbs. Charles G. Smith has studied Spenser’s use of axioms, declaring there to be 892 proverbs and 1125 proverbial variations in *The Faerie Queene*. “The Legend of Holiness” has the most, featuring 234 (qtd. in Cincotta 28). Cincotta examines Spenser’s use of proverbs in establishing his authority, asserting that his epic “acts as an encyclopedia of commonplaces that extends the narrative suggestiveness of the materials which it collects, so that in absorbing and rediscovering his predecessors’ and contemporaries’ authority, Spenser establishes his own as a continuation of theirs” (52). The use of folk proverbs, traditional “truisms” that are accepted as authoritative, is a compelling literary strategy. These proverbs are essentially intellectual proposals couched in familiarity. Spenser employs common wisdom as a support structure for his own proposals, presenting them as elaborations on what has gone before. The presence of common proverbs greatly contributes to the credibility of the text. In *The Faerie Queene* recognizable axioms occur so often that they create an authoritative context. The reader, in turn, participates in the claim to legitimacy by recognizing these culturally agreed-upon truisms. A familiarity with the oral genre of folk proverb creates within the reader receptivity for other, more sophisticated proposals. If common folk truism can be accepted, then perhaps the arguments that they support can also be – validation through association, if you will.



Another way Spenser establishes his authority is through the incorporation of earlier texts. Craig points out “the three books in which *The Faerie Queene* first appeared encompass an enormous cycle of classical and medieval historical myth” (522), which testifies to Spenser’s thorough knowledge of established literary canons, both domestic and foreign. That in itself is demonstrative of his highly refined knowledge of Western literature, not to mention the considerable expertise needed to organize so many diverse sources into a single, cohesive narrative. Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser is able to reconcile classical and pre-Christian texts with Old and New Testament sources seamlessly, rounding out the effort with indigenous literary culture in a manner that does not seem at all incongruous to the reader. For instance, in Canto x the Mount of Contemplation is compared to Parnassus, Sinai, and Olivet. Parnassus is the classical home of the Muses, Moses climbed Mount Sinai, and the Mount of Olives is associated with Christ (I.x.54.note). In two stanzas, Spenser combines pre-Christian classicism, the Old Testament, and Christianity as a chivalric setting for the site of Redcrosse’s self-discovery. Incorporating such precisely composed references is a feat of authorial finesse that firmly establishes Spenser’s literary credentials. His methods of establishing authority, though, also include a more subtle strategy.

Spenser’s text is the vantage point from which the entire development of literature is viewed, and his extensive intertextuality creates a progression that leads directly to his epic. Through Spenser’s poem, the reader views the history of

literature from Homer and Virgil through the Bible, and straight up to *The Faerie Queene* itself. The long history behind the epic is present within the text itself, and the reader's awareness of that lineage furthers Spenser's placement of his own work into the literary canon. It is a strategy adapted from Virgil, who, according to O'Connell, was the "first to create typology in a fiction that, through the allusive symbolism peculiar to him, 'prophesies' the present" (40). Like his predecessor, Spenser too "prophesies" his political present, but also establishes himself through the use of literary typology by creating a backwards movement through prior texts which then returns to his own. Viewed in this way, *The Faerie Queene* is situated as the culmination of Western literature. Spenser's use of intertextuality is not limited to ancient poets though, and he is quite comfortable borrowing from more contemporary sources as well.

Most critics agree that Spenser is heavily indebted to his Italian humanist contemporaries, extensively borrowing from them, and/or critically engaging with their texts to shape *The Faerie Queene*. Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, from 1516, and Torquato Tasso's 1581 *Jerusalem Delivered* are Italian heroic epics, and critical sources for Spenser's English national poem. Lake Prescott notes that aside from Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso "are Spenser's most significant subtexts" (170) (it is not possible to discuss *The Faerie Queene* without Virgil, and I will return to him frequently throughout my argument). Ariosto's epic is structured into Books and Cantos, creates a fantasy world of chivalric romance, and is designed to glorify his patrons (Reynolds 16). O'Connell asserts that one

cannot imagine *The Faerie Queene* without the *Orlando Furioso*, and “In a number of important ways, Spenser discovered in Ariosto the kind of poet he was to be” (31). He goes on to discuss specific elements taken from *Jerusalem Delivered*, such as Spenser’s Bowre of Blisse from Book II, which is almost directly taken from Tasso’s description of Armida’s garden. Such borrowing did not have the same stigma in the early modern period as it does now and was an accepted, even respected practice. In deploying it, “Spenser pays tribute to those predecessors whose influence upon him is constructive, and earns recognition himself by respecting the integrity of his classical, medieval, and Renaissance sources and fashioning an individuating utterance in dialogue with them” (Vaught 72). Direct literary borrowing was considered a respectable way to establish one’s authority. Spenser’s appropriation of Italian humanist texts, however, does relate to his nationalist agenda and Reformation concerns.

I have mentioned above Spenser’s ability to create conceptual movements in his work, sending the reader back through the literary canon and then bringing him or her forward again. He traces the large progression of the Western literary canon, from the classical world, through the Roman Empire, up to Renaissance Italy. The development of literature, in this proposed narrative, follows the development of civilization, closely linking literary production to large centres of political and cultural prominence. Nationalist epics are essentially expressions of world power that in themselves help to perpetuate it. As Virgil proclaims the might of the Roman Empire (even while critiquing it), Ariosto’s and Tasso’s

works are prestigious humanist texts from the height of early modern culture, promoting the cultural dominance of Italian humanism. The epics of Ariosto and Tasso were considered the pinnacle of literary enterprise in the Renaissance, the works which the entire history of literature had led to. Spenser takes that movement and continues it towards England, thus establishing indigenous literature within the European literary canon. It is an act of literary colonialism, in which Roman and Italian literary sources are taken and Anglicized. In doing so, Spenser claims the upper echelons of literature for England, establishing the nation's claim to literary dominance. The Redcrosse Knight is not only Una's champion, but England's as well. In a very clever way, Spenser has England's patron advance the literature of his country.

I suggest that all this literary background relates to my reading of the Redcrosse Knight as representative of the English populace. The texts mentioned above collectively form his family genealogy, which can be traced through early modern England's numerous inherited literary traditions, both native and continental. Redcrosse is the son of a long epic tradition, directly descended from the likes of Aeneas, Brutus, and Arthur, and an Anglo-cousin of Orlando and Rinaldo. He is also the child of English history, specifically the Reformation. Though the English Reformation got under way with Henry VIII, the issues and concerns associated with it continued to cause anxiety long into Elizabeth's reign. Her half-sister and royal predecessor Mary reinstated Catholicism as the official denomination, and her persecution of Protestants persisted as a reminder that

religious reform was an on-going project. In the words of O'Connell, "England's civil wars had been concluded a century earlier, but the religious turmoil of Mary's reign had left traumatic memories in the minds of Elizabeth's subjects" (4). That cultural anxiety pervades *The Faerie Queene*, and is manifested through such characters as Archimago and Duessa, both of whom embody English Protestant critiques of Roman Catholicism. Their covert malevolence reflects underlying anxieties about remembrance and forgetting, a preoccupation in "The Legend of Holinesse."

The chief failing of Redcrosse is his inability to remember or, to put it another way, his willingness to ignore what he knows to be right. First the knight forgets his oath to Una, which soon leads to the abandonment of his quest. Later, after removing his armour to get "Poured out in loosnesse" (I.vii.7) with Duessa, he even forgets himself. Redcrosse's "forgetting" progresses from personal obligation, to civic responsibility, and finally concludes with the loss of his sense of self, demonstrating how, in the words of Christopher Ivic, "In the early modern period, forgetting, as opposed to remembering, is tantamount to moral or ethical failure, and it leads to the loss of one's identity" (293). The compromise of Redcrosse's selfhood is the final consequence of his separation from Una, and concludes his long degradation. In Canto vii, by the fountain with Duessa, the Pauline armour the Redcrosse Knight took up with a sense of responsibility becomes mere "yron-coted Plate," an uncomfortable costume that gets in the way of immediate personal gratification (I.vii.2). The knight's debasement allegorizes

Reformation complaints against Rome, and Spenser “has taken [up] the Protestant charge, traditional since the Lollards, that Rome had fleeced the English faithful” (O’Connell 51). Spenser’s criticism, though, goes far beyond concerns over the monastic lands Henry VIII reclaimed, or even the monetary wealth the Church accumulated in England. Duessa “fleeces” Redcrosse by robbing him of his own identity, which he must afterwards learn anew.

After nearly succumbing to Despaire in Canto ix, Redcrosse is educated in the House of Holiness, where his identity as a Christian is restored and Contemplation teaches the knight his true name, assuring him “thou Saint *George* shalt bee” (I.x.61). The knight is also reminded of his duty to Una, a “virgin desolate foredonne” (I.x.60), whom he had abandoned, underscoring how in Renaissance England, “The social act of remembering ... is a central prop upon which an exemplary model of being – including fictional knighthood – is built” (Ivic 293). To properly situate Redcrosse’s negotiation with forgetting and remembrance, it must be measured against England’s continuing concerns with the Church. In Early Modern Europe, every major political event is invested with religious significance. In Renaissance Protestant ideology, Catholicism is equated with the Antichrist, an utterly malevolent force bent on the destruction of true Christians. After Mary’s terrifying reign, which saw Protestants martyred in the hundreds, “The deaths of ‘true Christians’ [became] the most damning charge brought against the representatives of Antichrist” (O’Connell 59). Elizabeth’s reign, on the other hand, was one of relative peace and prosperity. The Spanish

Armada of 1588, which threatened to violently reinstate Catholicism and subjugate England, was defeated with what seemed like divine providence. All these circumstances taken together seemed to indicate, conclusively, the triumph of English Protestantism over Rome – the Antichrist. Viewed in biblical terms, “the victory was achieved by the English people, who, though they had fallen into the captivity of Antichrist, suffered through their martyrs and returned to the reformed church” (65).

There is an implicit critique in Spenser’s *Legend* though – *Redcrosse* willingly subjugated himself to Duessa, as England had done to Mary. Looking back on her government, the nation itself is seen as complacent in her rule, as well as the atrocities she sanctioned, and “Only the faithlessness of individual Englishmen had made possible England’s captivity by the forces of Anti-christ” (60). As Geoffrey of Monmouth used the story of King Arthur to criticize disloyalty and political inconstancy (discussed in detail below in Chapter III), so Spenser cautions his fellow Protestants against forgetting their hard-won English national identity and complacency in their on-going Reformation efforts. Religious reform is a continuous project, one in which the goals must be ever present in the minds of the each citizen. As John N. Wall Jr. elegantly summarizes it, “People and king, Church and state, one national body living harmoniously in charity and obedience: this is the goal of the English reformers” (156). As the individual is an integral piece of the nation, so the nation is a construct of the individual, which must never be forgotten: “The vigilant remembrance of oneself

... safeguards one's station, position, or character" (Ivic 293). In Spenser's model, the individual is not only an integral component of a unified nation, but the nation itself is determined by the individual. Each member of the commonwealth houses the nation within him or her, and what defines the individual's sense of self is a crucial determinant for the nation. Spenser's model of nationhood is founded, in part, on the individual, the specific idea of one's self. Through Redcrosse's adventures, Spenser examines two different concepts of the Christian selfhood, weighing Catholic individuality against the Protestant self.

The drastic differences in their methods of government situate Mary and Elizabeth as representative of the two ideologies available to the average English citizen. Although Elizabeth herself was staunchly Protestant, her refusal to marry and subsequent lack of an heir raised concerns about what would happen after her reign ended. It was conceivable (and feared) that Catholicism could be reinstated as country's official denomination. When the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1589, Mary's rule was still very present in the English memory. Her government provided a model of comparison for Elizabeth and, by extension, the collective character of England itself. Spenser literalizes the choice between a national relapse into Roman Catholicism and the continuation of an indigenous form of Protestantism through the Redcrosse Knight's two romantic interests, Duessa and Una. If Duessa can be read as representative of Mary Tudor (as she sometimes is) or as Queen Mary of the Scots (as her son James I did,



much to his displeasure), she is, basically, a Roman Catholic monarch. Una, in this instance, stands in for Elizabeth.

Before continuing, I must clarify my position. Below I argue that Prince Arthur represents Elizabeth, while Una is the English Protestant Church. Together with Redcrosse, they form Spenser's model of English nationhood, a model that I propose is represented in "The Legend of Holinesse." However, interpretation within the poem is a "fluid" endeavour – characters accommodate many meanings, shifting from one to the next depending on context. They often take on specific roles for specific issues, as I argue they do in this instance. In the specific question of English national identities, Duessa is, in broad terms, the Roman Catholic church, and Una the Protestant one. The Redcrosse Knight, still representing the English citizenry, must choose whom he will serve, essentially deciding which ideology he will adhere to. As Catherine G. Canino points out, "In *The Faerie Queene* ... we see the plight of 1590s Englishmen dramatized in epic poetic form" (125). The "plight," at its most basic level, is that of deciding what concept of the self the English citizenry will adapt. Spenser clarifies the choices.

Roman Catholicism, as demonstrated through characters like Duessa and Archimago, represents an immature individualism. English Protestantism as defined by the likes of Una and the hermit Contemplation, on the other hand, offers a civic-oriented autonomy. The secular nature of the Protestant concept of the self is exemplified in Contemplation's vision of *Hierusalem*, the heavenly city built by God "For those to dwell in, that are chosen his" (I.x.57). That emphasis

on communal harmony can be contrasted with Redcrosse's relationship with Duessa, which is one of blind, uncritical subjugation. Through deception and manipulation, she fosters in the knight a false sense of individuality, such as when she upbraids him by the fountain in Canto vii and then indulges his "goodly court" (I.vii.7). Although the knight undoubtedly believes himself to be acting on his own volition, he succumbs to Duessa's will, leaving him prone to an attack from Orgoglio (pride). Redcrosse's immature individuality, encouraged by Duessa, causes him to value individual accomplishment over divine grace. The detrimental effect this has on one's character is demonstrated through Redcrosse's misfortunes, all of which emphasize "the insufficiency of human glory and human heroism" (O'Connell 52). Human glory, or what I call immature individualism, can too easily lead a person into an inflated sense of pride. Redcrosse's growing self-absorption is evident in his courtship of Duessa and his willing participation in her seduction which, as mentioned above, results in a devastating loss of self.

What best exemplifies Redcrosse's relationship with Duessa is the tournament in the House of Pride in Canto v. The Redcrosse Knight battles Sansioy for the shield of his brother Sansfoy, defeated by the knight in Canto ii. When Redcrosse is dealt a blow that almost knocks him unconscious, he hears Duessa cry out "Thine the shield, and I, and all" (I.v.11). Although he is mistaken about whom his lady addresses, the promise gives the knight incentive to defeat his opponent. The knight's inflated sense of individuality is here stressed in two ways: he defends his trophy as a signifier of his prowess (ironically, the shield of

Sansfoy - “faithlessness”), while also accepting Duessa’s objectification of herself, thus viewing her as another prize. Both are debased, Duessa for objectifying herself, and Redcrosse for accepting it. This episode also demonstrates how Duessa deprives Redcrosse of his autonomy through her ability to determine his actions (even if unintentionally).

Though Redcrosse always believes himself to be acting on his own accord, he is, in truth, subject to the whims of Archimago (who tricks the knight into abandoning Una, or truth) and Duessa, illustrating how “Subject to his own misguided will, [Redcrosse] cannot yield to others’ council, except when it misleads” (Mallett 33). They have instilled in him a false sense of individuality, which ultimately leaves him alienated and prone to Despaire. Despaire, as much as Duessa, appeals to Redcrosse’s inflated sense of self, asking the knight “Is not the measure of thy sinfull hire / High heaped vp with huge iniquitee” (I.ix.46). Although an arguably well-founded criticism, Despaire’s rhetorical question is a covert appeal to the knight’s pride, suggesting that his sins are too great to be forgiven. Such an attitude presumes a person is able to exceed God’s capacity for forgiveness. Despaire prompts the knight into taking pride in his debasement by encouraging his belief that his actions are beyond divine grace. Spenser views Roman Catholicism as an ideology that bereaves its adherents of personal agency, deliberately fostering morbid self-absorption that will leave one alienated. It is characterized as a religion that obscures God from the individual, leaving only despair and death. Redcrosse’s attraction to Duessa is interesting, and his

continuing willingness to subjugate himself troubles the reader, as when he “pluckt a bough” to make a “girlond for her dainty forehead” in Canto ii (I.ii.30) or follows her into the House of Pride in Canto iv. Whenever the knight behaves in such a way, he willingly forfeits his autonomy, unknowingly discarding responsibility to mindlessly accept predetermination by external forces. Such a way of living is much different than the alternative Spenser advocates.

Una does not want blind devotion from her knight. She did not ask for his service, but accepts it with gratitude when the Pauline armour she has brought to Gloriana’s court fits the young rustic (*Faerie Queene* 717). In allowing him to don the armour, she gives him the means through which he can achieve autonomy. Una would never offer herself as incentive for victory. When the inexperienced youth is having trouble with the monster Error in Canto i, Una tells her knight, simply, “Add faith vnto your force” (I.i.19). Compare Una’s encouragement with Duessa’s during the tournament. Duessa offers herself as prize, thereby degrading both herself and her champion by appealing to the knight’s immature individuality. Una instead reminds Redcrosse that he does not act alone, nor does he have to. She reaffirms his relationship with God, and relieves him of the burden of individuality, which in Christian ideology will only lead to failure. Unlike Duessa, Una does not subjugate Redcrosse by feigning subjection, but rather chooses to relate to him as an intelligent, autonomous being. She reminds her knight that “Man’s source of strength lies not within himself but within Christ; because he knows himself weak, he must depend not upon his own

strengths but upon God's aid" (Weiner 37). When understood as an appeal to God's aid, the idea of Redcrosse "adding faith" emphasizes that it is his choice to do so or not. Una offers Redcrosse mature selfhood that, through faith, can overcome anything detrimental to his well-being. Individual selfhood in the Protestant concept of identity is the critical difference between the two Christian ideologies as Spenser represents them.

I mentioned above that with Duessa, or Catholicism, the idea of absolute subjugation is seductive. On the surface, subjection relieves the individual of personal responsibility and the demand for intellectual engagement – the need to think for him or herself. Una, or Protestantism, on the other hand, demands that the individual bring personal agency into his or her faith. The Protestant adherent is expected to critically engage with his or her spirituality, thereby practicing an active concept of Christianity, as opposed to a passive one. Evans summarizes this approach to spirituality in heroic terms, declaring that "Everyman carries both Hercules and Christ within him and is free to fulfill or deny this heroic potential" (41). English Protestantism is characterized as a "heroic" faith structure that situates itself in relation to the whole community, and this fundamental choice of identity is available to every English citizen. Protestantism, as designed by its English architects such as Thomas Cranmer and Archbishop Grindel, gave birth to a new, community-oriented self "In place of late medieval individualism", which offered "an image of the Christian life as one of active charity lived out in the

world through service to one's neighbor and one's king" (Wall "Community" 152).

In epic poetry, the state is defined by the individual, but the individual's sense of self is also defined by the state, creating a reciprocal relationship that has become a convention of the genre. That relationship is not necessarily confined to the texts, but is applicable to those who create them as well. Spenser's literary influences have been discussed above, with particular emphasis on indigenous sources like Langland and Chaucer. The other major poet Spenser models himself after is, of course, Virgil. In the next chapter, which deals with Prince Arthur, the similarities between Virgil and Spenser are explored in terms of how each poet specifically engages in nation building and the defining of their respective people. The affinity between the two poets, though, is even more rudimentary than that, and O'Connell notes that "The common poetic ground that Virgil and Spenser share is their position as poets confronting the complex experience of nations that had emerged from the darkness of civil war into a period of peace and creativity" (36). The epic poems of Virgil and Spenser essentially come from the same philosophic perspective, an attitude of forward-thinking relief. Both poets lionize their hard-won civic harmony, and express hopeful anticipation of its long continuance. The epics themselves are an active investment in maintaining and furthering that communal accord and each poet, looking back on periods of civil strife, celebrates the peace he and his fellow countrymen enjoy. The concern then

becomes sustaining that peace and unity for generations to come. To accomplish this both Virgil and Spenser propose the concept of the nation.

What “nation” means here, and how it is applied in this argument, should be clarified. In *Between Nations* David J. Baker states “the term ‘nation’ should be understood equally, but depending on context, both as a distinct geopolitical entity *and*, variously, as one among the ‘peoples,’ ‘ethnic cultures,’ and/or ‘locally defined communities’” (6). In a general sense, “nation” signifies the political construction of “wholeness” and unity, or wholeness, was an urgent impetus during the early modern period in all aspects of life. According to Richard Helgerson, “In both the political and the literary cultures of sixteenth-century Europe wholeness was emerging as a dominant value” (“Tasso” 161). As many critics have done before, I suggest that with *The Faerie Queene* Spenser is engaging in nation building. When Spenser composed his epic, England was not yet Britain, the political entity encompassing England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. As Baker says, “Britain was, and continued to be throughout the early modern period, a powerful but unrealized trope” (*Nations* 8). According to some historians and critics, England itself was barely established, and according to Clark Hulse “Spenser’s England was not yet a centralized and homogenized state, but rather several estates with an infinite gradation of ‘place’ and precedence” (380). Spenser’s project, in composing his national epic, is to move these collective “estates” towards a unified nation, a movement that begins with the individual citizen.

My usage of the term “individual” is here shifting from the immature, alienated self to the more neutral denotation of a single person. As discussed above, the individual citizen is a necessary component of a harmonious community. Each citizen held within him or her the nation, just as the nation contained each person. The citizenry formed the bedrock of the nation, and political culture in late Tudor England aspired towards “the creation and watchful maintenance of wholeness: i.e. on the effective incorporation of the individual into the body of the realm, under its head the queen” (Helgerson “Tasso” 161). The “realm” is a collective, understood as being composed of individual citizens organized under one indigenous monarch, in a hierarchy that is not meant to be one of blind obedience. Rather, the realm or nation is a single organism with the queen acting as common, unifying figurehead for the people. The queen is the government, which in turn functions (ideally) as representative of its citizenry. Every citizen participates in the government through loyalty to the queen and state, each perpetuating the other.

Such interplay is reflected in *The Faerie Queene*, where the Redcrosse Knight is simultaneously an individual citizen and the collective citizenry. Wall, quoting William C. Johnson, declares that “Spenser everywhere in *The Faerie Queene* moves from the individual to the communal” (145), and as such the history of the Redcrosse Knight is that of the entire English people. The grand narrative of England itself is told through the adventures of the Redcrosse Knight, as he conceptually moves from individual to nation. In the words of O’Connell,



“Redcross becomes not simply Everyman but a people who become faithless, suffer despair, face death, and are finally saved by God’s grace. We move from the microcosm of the individual to the macrocosm of a Christian society” (67). Like Virgil before him, Spenser frames his contemporary political context into a heroic narrative, infusing it with theological resonance. Redcrosse’s education – and therefore the reader’s too – is one of socialization as well as spiritual growth as he develops from alienated individualism into a responsible citizen. For the Protestant living in Renaissance England, that sense of communal participation, of the individual citizen actively taking part in his or her community for the betterment of all, is to live in a manner that is in accord with divine will.

In Spenser’s epic, heaven is understood as being structured in the same manner as a peaceful nation. In Pauline terms, the earthly nation is a typographic representation of New Jerusalem, explicitly outlined by Contemplation when he interprets *Hierusalem* as a city “that God has built / For those to dwell in, that are chosen his” (I.x.57). Entrance into God’s heavenly city is earned by the faithful through participation in the earthly one in which he or she lives. Focused on achieving eventual citizenship in New Jerusalem, English Reformers participated in what they believed to be the earthly manifestations of it – the communities that they lived and worked in. As Wall says, establishing a harmonious Christian community that readies the citizen for eternal communion with God is “the goal of all actions in Spenser’s poem” (145). The fully realized Protestant self is one that is invested in the community. “The Legend of Holinesse” provides a template

for the fully autonomous Christian to achieve nationhood, emphasizing the importance of loyalty to the queen and rejection of foreign ideologies and rule. The nation that Spenser proposes is built by common English citizens as much as government. The poet himself acts in accord with his own proposals, taking part in the betterment of his community through the writing of his epic. *The Faerie Queene* is an act of civic responsibility, intended to contribute to the building of the earthly Jerusalem. That does, however, lead to one potentially compromising problem – what brand of Protestant Christianity is best suited for this effort?

There is almost an overwhelming amount of speculation concerning Spenser's own Protestantism; questions about what specific denomination the poet adhered to, or what he advocates in *The Faerie Queene*. Padelford devotes a generous amount of his *Political and Ecclesiastical Allegory of The First Book of The Faerie Queene* trying to sift through all the evidence to come up with a definitive answer. He begins his inquiry, reasonably enough, with Spenser's upbringing, assuring that the poet "came from a family of pronounced Protestant, as opposed to Roman Catholic, sympathies" (4). The one definite statement anyone could make about Spenser's denomination with absolute confidence is that he was not Roman Catholic. Padelford does, however, offer a compelling rationale for the poet's vehemence in the matter, explaining that Spenser was a boy during the reign of Mary Tudor. As a man, he most likely would have remembered the brutal persecution of Protestants, which began in 1555 and continued to Mary's death in 1558, claiming nearly three hundred victims.

Padelford proposes that “The sensitive mind of the child must have been deeply impressed with these horrors” (4). Living through such a dark time would affect anyone, especially a child, and does explain the unsettling, nightmarish quality of characters like Archimago and Duessa, who seem almost irrationally demonized. Roman Catholicism, with its long history and dominance in early modern Europe, is the faith structure that Reform Protestantism is naturally measured against, and Roman ideology is a convenient standard through which to compare Spenser’s understanding of Christianity. The poet’s clear rejection of Roman Catholicism and authority aside, some critics have noted Catholic tendencies in the type of Christianity advocated in *The Faerie Queene*. Lake Prescott notes that by the end of Book I, after dismantling Roman ideology, “Spenser is happier with certain Catholic remnants” (196) such as baptism. Puritanism is another form of Reform Christianity that is frequently attributed to Spenser, but as Whitaker points out, “Nowhere ... does he present doctrines peculiar to Calvinism” (“Structure” 154). Padelford incorporates these two polarities and situates Spenser somewhere in between them, asserting that in composing *The Faerie Queene*, the poet “chose the golden mean between the self-righteous and barren Puritan and the sensuous Roman Catholic” (*Allegory* 10). He goes on to characterize Spenser’s sympathies as “both spiritual and sensuous; both medieval, and humanistic and Italian; both Catholic and Protestant; both Hellenic and Hebraic” (10-1). Although an astute summation of the religious sensibility throughout *The Faerie Queene*, such

statements do not describe any single denomination, nor are they helpful in determining Spenser's thoughts on the matter. Which is probably the point.

Spenser, it can be unequivocally stated, is an impressively accomplished author who is at home with every manner of literary production, as is evident all through *The Faerie Queene*. The poet's vast literary scope is not limited to creative writing – such as poetry, chivalric romance, or biblical allegory – but also includes forms used for political communication, such as rhetoric, sermon discourse, and political theory. Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, for instance, is a political treatise in which extreme violence is proposed as the most effective method for colonizing Ireland. Although discomfiting in many, many ways, the work is astonishing for the concise manner in which the arguments are presented and developed. Spenser is fully capable of expressing himself with clarity, and had he wanted to promote one form of Protestantism over another, he would have done so in such a way as to make his preference clear. If there is ambivalence regarding denomination in his epic – and there certainly is – it must be deliberate.

The Christianity that Spenser advocates in *The Faerie Queene* can be generally described as an indigenous faith structure that is socially oriented. Beyond that, Spenser stays away from any discussion about denomination, and in doing so makes his epic all-inclusive, available to any Protestant Christian in Renaissance England. In choosing to leave questions of denomination open to interpretation, Spenser allows room for all of them, inviting the reader to move

beyond the controversies regarding what England's official denomination should be. The poet moves away from divisions that are potentially harmful to the concept of a unified nation, choosing instead to present a generalized form of Reform Christianity that leaves the narrative entirely accessible. The reader does not stumble over minute theological nit-picking, but can enjoy the story. As Weiner says, "Spenser is not taking sides in a theological controversy, but is rather writing for the profit and delight of all English protestants, to whatever faction they belonged" (53). Concerns over denomination lead to larger questions about theology, and Spenser is not especially clear in that area either.

When it comes to theology, it is safe to say that Spenser values function over form, to the point where the form itself is obscured. Spenser's theological ideas, like his Protestantism, are left ambivalent. The poet's theology and issues that relate to it are explored in more depth below, in the chapter about Una. For now, Spenserian theology is discussed as to how it relates to the citizenry. Theology in *The Faerie Queene* generates as much discussion as attempts at identifying denomination, and Knapp best summarizes the work in this area in his "Spenser the Priest," stating: "Resisting the old urge to enlist Spenser in one sectarian camp or another, critics as various as Jerome Dees, Darryl Gless, Linda Gregerson, Carol Kaske, John King, Richard Malette, and Harold Weatherby have tended to characterize Spenser's theology as essentially 'eclectic'" ("Priest" 62). Wall's research in this area is more satisfying, measuring theology in "The Legend of Holinesse" against official Reform texts. His work is particularly

helpful in determining the ways in which a national faith structure was being developed, and how Spenser's epic should be situated in relation to the defining texts in that effort:

The various official documents issued during this period—the Great Bible, Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on the Gospels and Acts, the Book of Common Prayer, the Primers, and the various Articles and Injunctions—do not merely effect a transformation of the English Church from a Latin, medieval church into a vernacular Protestant church. In fact, they present the vision of English society Spenser invokes imaginatively in *The Faerie Queene* (150)

Similarities between official religious documents and Spenser's poem are significant, indicating how the poet perceived his work by aligning it with the texts that were defining English Protestantism. An indigenous faith that emphasized the role of civic responsibility perpetuates the idea of a unified nation. Spenser takes his place alongside the likes of Erasmus and Foxe to help build an autonomous Christian state, seeking to "educate his nation into the same virtues, the same community, the same Christian commonwealth that the English reformers sought two generations earlier in the reform program of Edward VI" (156). The primary political purpose for developing an indigenous form of Christianity is, of course, the reclamation of a national identity through the rejection of foreign rule. By the end of Book I, the Redcrosse Knight has reclaimed his sense of self and spiritual autonomy, enabling him to act selflessly for his community. Protestant Christianity is inseparable from civic responsibility, and one of the most important ways in which English Protestants could demonstrate faithfulness is their fidelity to the community. The political construct

of community is the state, and in early modern England, the state is represented by the queen.

### III. Prince Arthur

To reiterate, Spenser's heroic model for a unified nation is represented through the three major characters in "The Legend of Holinesse": the Redcrosse Knight, Una, and Prince Arthur. Each character stands in for a specific cultural institution, and together they form the foundation of Spenser's ideal society. In large, general terms, the Redcrosse Knight represents the citizenry, Una the church, and Arthur the monarchy. That is not to say each character is limited to that assigned function; for the most part, they are well rounded characters in a sophisticated narrative that has multiple layers of meaning. Arthur, as stated above, represents the English monarchy in its abstract ideal of monarchical government. He is not necessarily the person who occupies the throne, but rather the throne itself. That said, Spenser does allow his rendering of Arthur to accommodate contemporary politics. With Henry VII's claim of direct descent, the prince's association with the Tudor family is unavoidable, making Arthur another "shadow" (to use Spenser's term) of Elizabeth I. By including Arthur in his epic Spenser does participate in Tudor propaganda, but the character's significance expands beyond the queen and her family lineage. The distinction is clarified below in the discussion of the King's Two Bodies, a political doctrine that differentiates between the king's physical person, and his function as the head of state. Before proceeding with a reading of Arthur though, how he functions as a character in the poem, his cultural significance, and what political associations he would have had for Spenser's contemporaries must be established.



On a practical level, Prince Arthur is a device used to unify *The Faerie Queene*. He is a recurring character, and his ongoing quest for Gloriana is the secondary narrative threading all six books together. Arthur, along with the world of heroic chivalry he inhabits, also provides the literary context for the other knights. In his *Letter to Raleigh* Spenser sets down a very specific function for his prince, declaring “in the person of Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue, for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and conteineth in it them all” (*Faerie Queene* 716). The poet’s casual summation has directed the reading of the Prince Arthur character ever since, possibly to its detriment. A. C. Hamilton wryly notes it is ironic that the *Letter*, which Spenser included in the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, “should have become such an obstacle to understanding his poem” (“Letter” 481). Arthur as just another virtue reduces the complexity of the figure, and reading him in a manner similar to reading the other knights in the poem – who are allotted considerably more attention – is not only limiting, but unsatisfying. However, Spenser does assign magnificence to his prince, and therefore any interpretation should take into consideration that intent. In accepting Arthur as representative of the English monarchy, we can understand his magnificence as the principle characteristic of an effective, benevolent government. The idea of a single virtue encompassing all others is applicable to a reigning monarch, who is expected to (or at least hoped to) demonstrate such qualities in his/her governance. Prince Arthur is also a character in *The Faerie Queene*, and is unique in that he existed

long before Spenser began his epic. In the words of Joanne Craig, “Spenser’s Arthur is a composite figure: a hero made famous by many men’s former works and a hero of Spenser’s own making” (523).

Arthur, as an immediately recognizable personage, brings a great deal of external importance along with him. To an English audience, Arthur is what David Summers calls a *cultural icon*. Cultural icons have the “capacity to contain meaning for an audience prior to and apart from the literary texts which celebrate them,” and such figures “can become shorthand representations of rather complex collections of ideas, narratives, and values” (8-9). With icons like Arthur there is a considerable level of cultural investment, such as the expectations, empathy, and values that the reader infuses into the character. In doing so, the audience actively participates in that character’s construction by determining his or her meaning. For a cultural icon to invite and allow cultural investment, the literary character that represents the icon must conform to pre-established protocols. This is not to say that when it comes to cultural icons, the reader’s expectations are rigid or dogmatic, but rather that there is in place an agreed upon, generalized sense of who or what that character is. For example, as long as Aeneas demonstrates his defining characteristic of piety, any interpretation of him would be acceptable. In a like manner Spenser shares his Arthur with the audience, incorporating the expectations that the character should live up to. The poet conforms to, and in fact depends on, cultural investment while at the same time creating a unique interpretation of Arthur by focusing on a period of his life prior to his kingship,

usually overlooked in historic and literary texts. Spenser, in effect, borrows Arthur from English culture, employing him in such a way that the poet's interpretation of him does not infringe upon what has gone before. Spenser's prince is a self-contained literary character that is also able to invoke a wealth of cultural significance. When *The Faerie Queene* was published, though, a large part of Arthur's cultural significance was undeniably political.

Spenser claims to have chosen Arthur for the character's neutrality, assuring Raleigh that his prince is "furthest from the daunger of enuy, and suspition of present time" (*Faerie Queene* 715). As a cultural icon, Arthur belongs to the amorphous entirety of English culture, having long since exceeded his Welsh origins to appeal to the descendants of those whom the ancient king would have fought against. By the time of the English Renaissance, Arthur was no longer a specifically Welsh hero, but an English one, appealing to people of Saxon and Norman descent. Even in Book I, Arthur happily champions the Saxon Redcrosse Knight, a show of imperial generosity that would have raised the eyebrows of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Spenser must have been aware of the political implications of including Arthur in his epic, being familiar with Tudor claims of direct descendance from the ancient king, and the resurgent public interest in Arthur during the early modern period was most likely brought about through Elizabeth's association with the legend. State propaganda suggested the Welsh Tudors fulfilled the prophecy in Geoffrey's *Historia*, that "the Britons would someday return to their kingdom and resume possession of it" (Craig 522).

Tudor Arthurianism is a useful context for the character, undoubtedly, but it is also probable that Spenser, Elizabeth, and Henry VII all viewed Arthur as a necessary symbol of unity and social responsibility.

In sixteenth-century England, King Arthur's claim to historic validity was based on the nation's early chronicles. The earliest mention of the "once and future king" is found in the *Historia Brittonum*, written by the Welsh historian Nennius around the year 800. In this account Arthur is a sixth-century tribal chieftain who led the Celts in twelve victorious battles against Anglo Saxon invaders. He is next mentioned in the *Annales Cambriae*, "The Annals of Wales," from around 950, which records Arthur as having been killed at the Battle of Camlann in 537, along with Mordred, another significant personage from the Arthurian legend. William of Malmesbury mentions Arthur in his *De Regum Geist Anglorum* from 1125, accepting that there was indeed such a person as the legendary ruler, even though his tomb had yet to be found. William qualifies his acceptance of Arthur with dismissal of the more fantastical stories associated with him, especially the myth that he would one day return to deliver his people. Finding such associations demeaning, he asserts that Arthur "is a man more worthy to be extolled in true histories, as the leader who long preserved his tottering homeland and kindled an appetite for war in the shattered minds of his countrymen, than to be dreamed of in fallacious fables" (qtd. in White 22). After denouncing the "trifling stories" Britons tell about their ancient king, William goes on to relate how Arthur single-handedly attacked and defeated nine hundred

enemies “with incredible slaughter” (22). One wonders if exaggeration qualifies as “fallacious fables.” William, it should be noted, was the first historian to distinguish between two bodies of Arthurian lore, one historical and one fictional. His concession that Arthur could exist comfortably in two seemingly unrelated genres has had significant impact on the further development of the character.

In medieval and Renaissance England, the authoritative text for Arthur as a legitimate historic personage was Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae* from around 1139, and it is his account of the Britons on which histories for the following four hundred years were based (Kennedy xvii). In what Summers calls the “first fully developed written Arthurian narrative” (35), Geoffrey defines most of what will become fundamental to Arthurian lore. The legendary king’s defeat of the Roman army to free an England unified under his rule is contrasted with the betrayal of his nephew Mordred and the devastating civil war that followed. Arthur kills the usurper in battle at Cornwall, but is seriously wounded. Geoffrey ends his account with the “renowned king” being “carried away to be healed of his wounds on the isle of Avalon” (156). Geoffrey allows for a level of ambivalence in his account of the king’s passing by not definitively stating that Arthur died. Geoffrey’s *Historia* concludes with Cadwalder, the last Briton king until the return of Arthur, as foretold in the prophecies of Merlin (Levin 81).

The return of the *rex quondam rexque futurus* was a prevalent cultural belief that the Tudors absorbed into their own history through claims of direct

descendance (Evans 10-1). Renaissance England was willing to accept Elizabeth as a descendant of Arthur, which made his inclusion in Spenser's epic celebration of her reign particularly fitting. As Evans points out, the presence of Arthur in *The Faerie Queene* "enabled Spenser to pay the compliment to his great patron which Virgil and Ariosto had paid to theirs" (11).

Many later historians accepted Geoffrey's history as factual, in a general sense if not in its specific details. The assumption behind such texts as the alliterative *Morte* collected in the Thornton manuscript, or Malory's 1485 *Works* (or *Le Morte D'arthur*), was that the earlier Arthurian narratives were based on actual historic events (Summers 4). Others were more skeptical. In his *Historia rerum anglicarum* from around 1196-8, William of Newburgh rejects Geoffrey's account altogether, dismissing the earlier historian as presenting imaginative folklore "dressed up" as history through the use of Latin (qtd. in White 41). The Italian historian Polydore Vergil was cynical about Arthurian history as well. In his *Anglica Historia*, printed in 1534 but existing in manuscript form since the early 1500s, he complained that Geoffrey was not an accurate historian and the *Historia* was largely a work of fiction (Carley 186). Vergil's denouncement ignited a furious response from English scholars – even if they could not fully accept the legends associated with Arthur, that he once existed, it seems, was not to be questioned. The English believed in their ancient king, and did not appreciate skepticism in the matter. John Foxe, for example, insinuates in his *Acts and Monuments* that Vergil had either destroyed manuscripts detrimental to his

argument, or else shipped them off to Italy (Carley 193). John Leland, appointed King's Antiquary by Henry VII, was indignant as well. In his *Assertio inelytissimi Arturii regis Britanniae*, Leland dismisses Vergil's assertions as folly, citing the many surviving Arthurian relics throughout the kingdom – which he had seen personally – as proof of historic authenticity. Although Vergil was more concerned with the *Historia* itself, for Leland “an attack on Geoffrey's interpretation of British history, in which Arthur played such a pivotal role, was an attack on the foundations of English nationalism” (187). It is tempting to read the heated debate between Vergil and Leland as a microcosmic representation of larger cultural issues on the horizon: an early manifestation of the English Reformation, perhaps, or possibly an instance of English humanism distancing itself from its Italian predecessor. However, rationalizing the animosity towards Vergil as xenophobic in nature is reductive. Leland's own cultural investment in the figure and attending mythos demanded that he defend King Arthur, not only as an historic personage but as someone emblematic of the nation itself. For enthusiasts like Leland, “Defending Arthur implied an investment in poetry and myth-making as an important medium for discovering and articulating truth, particularly the truth regarding notions as elusive and unquantifiable as ... cultural identity” (Summers 117).

Historians and scholars who rejected Arthur's existence did so largely based on his absence from the closest contemporary accounts of British history. Gildas, a Romano-British historian and monk, was born around the same time as

the Battle of Badon occurred (c.490 – 517 AD), and Arthur is not mentioned at all in his *The Ruin of Britain* from c.548. The later historian Caradoc of Llancarfan explains Gildas' reticence in the *Vitae Gildae*, claiming the monk was upset about the death of his brother, a quarrelsome Scottish chieftain defeated and killed by Arthur. According to Caradoc, when Gildas learned of his brother's demise, he threw all the books he had written extolling Arthur's achievements into the sea (White 21).

Historic debate aside, whether or not Spenser himself believed in the Tudor claim is open to speculation, especially in its more spectacular implications. That Spenser accepted Elizabeth as descended from Trojan ancestry, which is traced through Brutus, Aeneas, and all the way to the goddess Venus, or that Geoffrey's *Historia* was reliable is doubtful (Nelson 126). The poet's disbelief is evident in the account of English history in Book II, Canto x, which includes what would have been obvious folklore elements and personages to Spenser's contemporaries. T. D. Kendrick proposes that Spenser may have introduced recognizably fictitious characters and events as playful nods to his friends, assuring them that "British History was in detail such nonsense that almost any liberties could be taken with it" (qtd. in Craig 524). In *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, the poet implies that English history is nonsense through his avatar Ireneus (44). It would seem that to Spenser, the accuracy of his Arthurian sources was of little importance; what mattered was how the narrative of a national hero and glorious past could structure his own contribution to



Arthurian lore. In crafting *The Faerie Queene*, “the myth of the Tudor descent from Troy, used with deliberate vagueness, provided [Spenser] with a useful parallel to Virgil’s link between Aeneas and Augustus” (Nelson 126). Although not concerned with historic accuracy, as mentioned above, Spenser is aware of the development of a Western literary canon, and situates both his work and himself into a poetic lineage. The relationship between Virgil, his epic hero Aeneas, and patron Augustus is the pattern for Spenser’s use of Arthur and appeal to Elizabeth. In writing a Virgilian epic, actual history – the potential tediousness of factuality – did not provide a large enough canvas. For the Renaissance poet, a nation’s past is “the history of the stories a people tell about themselves because those stories reflect the truth that is desired, the truth of what is valued, and that truth is what creates tribal or national identity” rather than ‘real history’ (Summers 19). The choice to write an epic and include a hero belonging to both history and romance relieved Spenser from concerns over a historically accurate rendition of Arthur. Free from the constraints of purely academic scholarship, his Prince could enter into myth.

Whether or not King Arthur truly existed was not as important as the character having a textual history, and a considerable one at that. As a literary presence, his “lineage” could be traced through innumerable sources and interpretations, moving from history to romance to folk lore. Arthur’s presence in multiple genres is imitated in the structure of *The Faerie Queene* itself, which draws upon several literary traditions. Among the many genres included in

Spenser's epic is the contemporary Arthurian literature that flourished in the sixteenth century. In his work *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Christopher Dean compiles numerous texts featuring the ancient king, including Thomas Hughes' dramatic work *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, dated 1587; Lord Berners' translation of a fourteenth century French romance, entitled *Arthur of Little Britain* and published around 1555; as well as about nine Arthurian ballads from the period (interestingly, Dean cites these and several more texts to demonstrate how *unimportant* Arthur was in Renaissance England – I am appropriating his extensive research to propose the opposite). Although Arthur existed comfortably in several strains of literature, he was not limited to any of them. Like Aeneas, Arthur lived beyond the confines of history and romance, permeating the English imagination to become the cultural icon Summers identifies him as.

The inability to situate the character into a single body of literature is essential to its propagation; as with religious denomination, discussed in the above chapter, when one genre is not specified there is room for all of them. Aside from his mythic status, Arthur's unique place in the English imagination made him a natural choice for inclusion. *The Faerie Queene* itself is situated in an Arthurian chivalric context, borrowing many, if not all, of the conventions associated with that body of literature. While it is true that Arthur's appearances in the poem are limited, his distance from the main narratives is countered by the

world its protagonists inhabit. Spenser's knights exist in a distinctly Arthurian landscape, motivated by the narrative motifs associated with him. Arthur, and the dense mythology surrounding him, is the world of *The Faerie Queene*.

That world, inhabited as it is by allegorical figures and horrendous monsters, is not possible with a strictly historic Arthur. Although there was vehement denouncement of historians who dismissed the ancient king, removing him from history created the mythopoeic space necessary for Spenser's national epic. Not restricted by specific eras or regional concerns, the Arthur removed from history and re-centered in myth provides shape and form for latent cultural impulses. I agree with Summers that, rather than undermining the character's integrity, expanding his literary context reveals "the mythic syntax and the cultural values invested in the figure of Arthur from the very beginning of the British Arthurian tradition" (4). Dehistoricification collapses the boundaries that would exclude Arthur from any treatment not authenticated through rigorous scholarship. Even without absolute historic validity a personage with so much cultural investment could not simply disappear, and mythological status allowed for a more powerful cultural presence. Cultural myths are public domain, belonging to everyone. When Arthur no longer belongs to history, he becomes emblematic of everyone invested in what he represents. Freed from English history, Arthur becomes England.

Arthur's move from history to cultural mythology, however, introduced a new problem; Arthurian texts written thereafter risked alienating or separating

him from this amorphous cultural permeation. Any Arthurian literature had the potential to “temporarily delineate Arthur and perhaps ... reduce (again temporarily) his iconic nature by imposing boundaries to his meaning” (Summers 25). Specificity tends to limit his effectiveness as a character, and risks obscuring cultural investment through over-determination. Aware, be it consciously or intuitively, that writing about Arthur too extensively could dislocate him from the wealth of associations necessary to the character’s effectiveness, Spenser minimizes Arthur’s presence throughout *The Faerie Queene*. The errant prince is more effective in quick cameos and fleeting glimpses, eluding boundaries that must be imposed on even a fictional character. Another innovation Spenser introduces is the manner in which he uses his prince; the hero of a national epic is usually the main protagonist, but in *The Faerie Queene* Arthur provides the context. He is therefore ever-present, even when away from centre stage to pursue his “royall Mayd” (I.ix.13).

As a genre, epic poetry legitimizes any liberties Spenser takes with history. The impressive literary lineage of the form itself lends credence to its subject. Homer and the Matter of Troy, followed by the Matter of Rome, became the foundation of Western literature (Abrams 29). Though understood as fictitious, or at least not conforming to literal history, the epic nevertheless imparts a high level of respectability by virtue of its poetic demands and national scope. The form is able to exceed the individuality of its protagonists, turning them into more than characters or even historic personae. Through epic, heroes

expand beyond mere familial descent to become representative of an entire people, and Arthur as the embodiment of England claims a far more prestigious lineage than what could be afforded to him by actual history. It is through epic, rather than history, that “The British line ... goes back beyond Arthur through Brute to Aeneas, and so by way of his mother, Venus, to Jove himself, with Hercules, Helen and a host of others all in the family” (Evans 11). Such descent is only possible through literature, constituting more of an intellectual heritage rather than strict blood lines. Spenser’s epic is not only one about the English as a people, but also about literary tradition. His use of this poetic form helps extend the English colonial enterprise into literature, as mentioned in the above chapter dedicated to the Redcrosse Knight. In employing the epic form, Spenser appropriates it from his Italian predecessors. As Virgil took up from Homer and Greek civilization to celebrate the triumph of the Roman Empire, Spenser does the same for his nation. Claiming the heroic epic from Italy (and, more significantly, Rome) declares England to now be the dominant world power. Spenser’s choice in using epic is a declaration.

Another way Arthur is crucial to Spenser’s project is through all the cultural associations that come along with the character. He represents a glorified past and the immediate connotations of chivalry and heroism that are inherent in the character. There are also more specific associations relevant to Spenser’s political context as well. The Arthurian legend is one of heroism, most definitely, but it is also about community. Arthur spent the early years of his reign repelling

foreign invaders and unifying England. As the story develops, the Fellowship of the Round Table and its various champions are introduced. Then comes the fall of Camelot through the treachery of Arthur's kinsman Mordred, either nephew or son, depending on the source. Mordred's actions bring civil war, leaving England prone to foreign conquest. The reign of King Arthur is the story of a golden age shattered by disunity, which Geoffrey uses to critique his own historic moment. Living in a time of hostility and invasion himself, Arthur and his reign are used by Geoffrey as a lesson "that cultural identity can be maintained only if a people are willing to place the interests of the culture as community before their own interests as individuals" (Summers 26).

Through Arthur there is an implicit critique of British society and politics present in Geoffrey's *Historia*. As the one king able to unify the Britons, Arthur represents a united nation under one monarch. Under his leadership Britain is depicted as a nation on the rise, rejecting subjugation from foreign powers to stand together and triumph over their enemies (Levin 85). Such is the essence of the Arthurian history as told by Geoffrey, and the connotative meanings that are able to exceed confines of literature. All these associations, inherent in the character of Arthur, are present in him, and would speak to Spenser's audience. In a way, the ancient king is present again through Spenser's epic. The once and future king returns through literature to remind his people that they can triumph over those who would oppress them, if they will but stand united behind their king. Or queen.

The connotative meanings of Arthur outside the poem are essential to the character's many functions within it, and Spenser relies on his prince's associative significance to expand his epic beyond a purely literary enterprise. Arthur represents a unified Britain, and the promise of his return offers hope. Prince Arthur, a younger interpretation of a familiar hero, becomes a site of interaction between the author and the audience, and one of the devices through which Spenser enters into a dialogue with his reader. As a narrative strategy, Prince Arthur accommodates the meeting between poet and reader, acting as an agent for unification that echoes his role in history and the many stories associated with him. In the poem, as in days gone by, the ancient king brings with him harmony and accord. The character is able to accomplish this relationship through the significant cultural investment he brings along with him into each new interpretation, not simply as history, nor even as a myth, but as an icon. In the words of Padelford, "In its severely political aspect the character [of Arthur] stands for the national spirit of England, which expresses itself in the great things that it achieves" (46).

For many in Renaissance England, Arthur was synonymous with English culture, embodying all the characteristics demanded of a nation beset by hostile forces. The ancient king represents loyalty to one's country and friends, Christian piety, and steadfast resistance to foreign rule. Present in the cultural icon are all the values Spenser's contemporaries would have recognized and responded to, and these meanings must be taken into account when approaching the character.

Though my own model for Prince Arthur is not quite in keeping with most prior criticism, some of what has been proposed by earlier scholars is relevant to my argument. Based on the *Letter to Raleigh*, many critics interpret Arthur as heavenly grace (which I find limiting, for reasons discussed below). Associating grace with such an immediately recognizable cultural hero has inevitable, and useful, propagandist value, and Padelford links the character's function as divine agent with English nationalism. In his reading, grace and nationalism are joined together in the prince because Spenser "believed that God was ... using England to reveal the character of true religion; and when Prince Arthur does battle with Orgoglio, Christ and Antichrist, as it were, strive for the possession of England" (47). As a newly independent Protestant nation under the rule of an unmarried queen, Renaissance England was not in the most secure of positions. With the continual threat of Rome and other hostile European nations, everyone in England would have been acutely aware of the precariousness of their country's situation. Arthur, with his immediately recognizable associations of courage and national responsibility, serves as a reminder to hold fast in the face of whatever threatened national unity. In the prince could be read the importance of autonomy sanctioned by divine favour, crucial to his significance in poem. The prince, unlike any of the other knights, is not associated with any particular court; he seeks out Gloriana as a free agent, subject to no one, giving him the license to act as the *deus ex machina* character that the fumbling virtues rely upon. Through Arthur, Spenser gestures towards an entire ideology, sparing the poet the need to formulate it into



a specific doctrine or treatise by relying on reader inscription instead. There is, however, more to Spenser's Arthur than simply a reassuring cultural icon or effective nationalist propaganda.

Anyone in Renaissance England would have been familiar with Arthur's entire story, including the more sobering details from the end of his reign. The ancient king carries with him the shadow of betrayal by those closest to him, resulting in a devastating civil war that left an entire people, once united, fractured and subject to foreign invasion. Along with storybook heroism, the loss of a unified nation and effective government are also implicit connotations in the character of Prince Arthur (an underlying anxiety that is hinted at in his obsessive quest for Gloriana). Geoffrey, faced with Anglo Saxon invasion, and then Malory, writing while imprisoned during the War of the Roses, use Arthur and his kingdom as exemplary of a unified nation and ideal community. As Summers puts it, "Almost as ancient [as Arthur as secular messiah] is the use of the events surrounding Arthur's life to illustrate the moral and political failures of the British people in order to call them to a higher sense of integrity as individuals within a community" (14). Societal harmony is a key aspect of Arthurian lore, poignantly emphasized by the loss of a peaceful, prosperous state through the self-interest of a disloyal few.

That Geoffrey and Malory wrote their respective *Arthurians* in times of great societal upheaval is a further significant association of that body of literature; in times of crisis, Arthur is brought forth to remind the English not only

of what they are capable of as a world power, but also the devastating effects of social discord. These meanings are present in the character of Arthur as well, and Spenser would have been aware of the earlier authors' usage of the figure. The poet follows Geoffrey and Malory in this implied critique, allowing Arthur to act as a cautionary warning to readers of *The Faerie Queene*. As his earlier countrymen and fellow authors did before him, Spenser situates the individual in relation to the larger community. As discussed above, each person is viewed as an important component in an entire social structure that each member is obliged to maintain for the good of all, with everyone "dependent upon and in service to larger political structures" (Summers 16). In viewing the individual holistically, Spenser situates him or her into a social structure that locates Elizabeth at its pinnacle.

The organization of early modern English society, with Elizabeth occupying the position of central influence, is reflected in the structure of *The Faerie Queene*, and Canino observes that "Each female character is given the prerogative not only to shape a man's identity and future but also to bestow an identity upon him" (114). Throughout Spenser's epic, and particularly in Book I, it is the female characters who effect change or development in the men, for good or ill. The harlot Duessa has as much influence over the Redcrosse Knight as faithful Una does. The same can be said for proud Lucifera, or Dame Celia and her three daughters in the House of Holinesse. In one way or another, all these women subjugate Redcrosse by claiming authority over him, demonstrating how

“every female in the book [is] analogous to Elizabeth who ... held the same prerogative for England” (Canino 114). As reigning monarch, Elizabeth was invested with ultimate authority over English culture and society. She was also the central power that courtiers and members of the upper class were organized around, determining their “identity” or social standing through such institutions as royal patronage and court favour (which Spenser himself campaigned for). Elizabeth’s influence in defining England’s national character was considerable as well, evident in her refusal to marry and her adherence to Protestantism in the face of pressure from foreign powers. In every significant way, Elizabeth defined Renaissance England throughout her reign, and Spenser came of age in a society largely determined by its female monarch. Her influence was a pervasive cultural fact, evident in the narrative structure of *The Faerie Queene*. The deferral to feminine influence in Spenser’s male characters should not be looked at as flattery on the poet’s part, but rather the result of astute observation and social commentary; the queen’s cultural authority was a long established fact of life for him and others of the English nobility.

In the poem, though, acceptance of female influence is always a matter of choice, and Redcrosse’s fluctuation between Una and Duessa is the underlying impetus of Book I. In Spenser’s epic, acceptance of female authority is a conscious decision, which emphasizes the role of human agency in structures of authority, while simultaneously undermining medieval conventions of monarchical power as divinely sanctioned. As Andrew King points out, “Spenser

is not agnostic or republican, but ... is increasingly aware in *The Faerie Queene* that certain narratives (such as royal genealogy) that presume to derive objective authority from God may be in fact human constructs, and as such mutable and lacking in divine authority” (61). Implicit in Spenser’s poem is a meditation on human institutions of power, along with an evolving realization that power is determined through human agency. As with *Redcrosse*, obedience to female authority is presented as a choice for the reader too, in what is possibly a further move away from Roman concepts of power structures and authority that is in keeping with Reformation ideologies. The negation of any type of mediation between the individual and the divine, though not spelled out, is the first step in recognizing that monarchical authority is more a matter of human investment than divine decree. Although “In sixteenth-century English orthodox ideology, monarchs were ordained by God” (Richards 103), the role of human determination in monarchical authority is a philosophical position that could only be arrived at through Protestant deconstruction of power structures. Recognition that Elizabeth’s reign is the result of human agency rather than divine appointment is not developed within the poem, however, nor is it meant to detract from her power. The realization of power as a humanly determined construct does not compromise Elizabeth in any way, but rather calls into question what responsibilities all those invested in her government have in maintaining her sovereignty. In keeping with Geoffrey’s critique, a successful English monarchy is understood as dependent on absolute loyalty for the good of everyone who

participates in it. This expanded view of monarchy includes all the social strata supporting it; as a human institution, it was up to humans to uphold it for the benefit of all. Needless to say, any exterior claims on the authority of the monarch will compromise the integrity of the whole.

Fundamental to the English Reformation is the rejection of Roman authority, specifically the Church's claim over large tracts of native land (over a third of the island) and its insistence on absolute jurisdiction. In Elizabeth's England, "the creation of civil society was premised on the destruction of forms of lordship which cut into the sovereignty of a state which more and more sought to guarantee the rights of absolute property of its subjects" (Voekel 147). The English Reformation instituted the king as the final authority over the people. In this model of native monarchical government, the person of Elizabeth is not as important as her role of queen. Her office was not separated from her subjects or society, but acted as the central organizational impetus for them and it. As queen, Elizabeth became the supporting axis for the entire culture. Arthur's function in the epic has been discussed above in similar terms – he defines the landscape of the poem and acts as the physical embodiment of the social structure Spenser constructs for *The Faerie Queene*. Viewed in this way Prince Arthur – like Gloriana, Belephoebe, or the several other representations of Elizabeth throughout the poem – is revealed to be another representative of the queen; or, more specifically, the errant prince is Elizabeth's office and her familial line, beginning with her grandfather.

Henry VII was a direct descendant of Owen Tudor, who entered into the service of Henry V early in the fifteenth century. Owen married Henry's widow Queen Katherine sometime in the 1420s, which would allow his grandson to claim the throne (Rees 45-6). Owen Tudor came from Welsh nobility, and traced his family line back to Cadwalder. Cadwalder was descended from Constantine, the son of Cador, duke of Cornwall. Constantine was a kinsman of King Arthur, and appointed by him as his rightful successor. According to Geoffrey, Arthur is descended from Brutus, legendary founder of England and kinsman of Aeneas (137).

Cadwalder, descendant of Tudor patriarch Constantine, was the last Welsh king before England was taken by the Saxons. According to Geoffrey, Cadwalder was told by an angel that the Britons had lost favour with God, would lose England to Saxon and Norman invaders, and would not rule again until the *Mab Darogan* ("Son of Prophecy") comes. The *Mab Darogan* was understood by Welsh bards and poets to be a national hero from the past, such as Arthur, or even Cadwalder. The advent of his return would result in the final triumph of the Welsh, and the dawning of a new golden age (Rees 98).

In the "heroic" Tudor genealogy Arthur himself is an Aeneas figure, a dynastic patriarch reminiscent of Augustus' claim to the legendary Trojan king. As Efterpi Mitsi puts it, "In the same way that Aeneas is the founder of a Roman dynasty culminating with Augustus, Arthur is seen as the forefather of the Tudors, the dynasty which (in the view of Elizabethans) fulfills the ancient prophecy for

British greatness in the person of Elizabeth” (132). Incorporating the prophetic elements of the Arthurian legend was, of course, pertinent to Henry’s own claim to the throne, but it also had the effect of expanding the return mythos to include his descendants, fashioning his line into an early modern continuation of Arthur’s rule. Elizabeth’s defiance towards Rome and Spain, for instance, or the civil peace and prosperity that characterized her government, were viewed in terms of Arthurian prophecy. For Craig, the cycle of divination and later fulfillment is literalized through Arthur’s ongoing quest for Gloriana, and in this romantic motif, “promise finds fulfillment and ancestor finds descendant and lover finds bride all in the same contemporary person” (523). Craig views Gloriana (Elizabeth) as the conclusion of the return narrative so integral to the Arthurian legend. She is its terminus, the ancient prophecy fulfilled. Although a compelling reading in many ways, this interpretation does not mesh with my model for the figure of Arthur in Spenser’s poem, for reasons discussed below. Determining to what degree people in Renaissance England actually believed that Elizabeth’s reign was anticipated in prophecies is, of course, impossible, but the idea of her presence in ancient texts does lend a fascinating literary context to her reign. Though Spenser specifies that there are many “mirrours” of the queen within his poem, in many ways *The Faerie Queene* mirrors its historic moment as well, and “articulates the period in which he lived” (Millican 167).

Mentioned above is Arthur’s importance as a “secular messiah,” an idea with obvious biblical resonance. Old Testament typology was popular in early

modern England, and a large part of English Reformation rhetoric and Tudor ideology is founded on a comparison to the history of Israel as told in the bible. The analogy suggests Protestant England to be a modern nation chosen by God, and as such the new seat of earthly authority in things divine. Andrew King notes how early modern English royal genealogies resonate with Old Testament allusions, asserting that “behind the Tudor descent from the British kings is the providential maintenance of a chosen people” (64). Such an outlook, with its overtones of a collective, divinely appointed responsibility, expands English dynastic concerns and state denomination beyond a limited regional focus to include a world, or even universal, view. The continuing project of the English Reformation was the ongoing effort to redefine the shape of Christianity itself, an urgent concern during Elizabeth’s reign. The legitimacy of the Tudor claim to power, in a world view situating England as a new Israel, is no longer a local concern – removed from a comparatively limited regional frame of reference, Tudor rule was positioned against an international discourse rather than a regional one, with the added urgency of religious imperative. The Tudor monarch acted as an English Moses for a nation state chosen to lead the world in a return to the original church (how English Protestantism was configured as a type of Christianity that prefigures the Roman Church is discussed at length in the following chapter). A significant aspect of viewing England as a modern Israel is the inclusiveness of the idea; as a divinely appointed nation standing against the tyranny of a corrupt world everyone, from noble to commoner, it is able to



participate in a national heroic narrative. The English were lauded as the people chosen by God to usher in a new form of Christianity. Under Tudor rule, of course.

The Tudor claim of being descended from Arthur was important to Elizabeth in two ways, beyond the cultural investment discussed above. Primarily, it legitimized her reign both within England and abroad. As a female ruler, Elizabeth's authenticity had to be continually reinforced, especially in the early years of her monarchy. The Tudor connection to Cadwalder and Arthur gave the family an ancient lineage, one that linked it to the founding of England itself (Summers 89). The Arthurian connection was also important in how it supported and confirmed English Reformation narratives. A descendant of Arthur leading a modern day Israel through the birthing of a new spiritual ideology is a powerful political idea, which Henry VII incorporated into his claim. To create a legitimate monarchy for himself and his line, "Henry VII appealed to the messianic and kingly roles provided by the British Arthur" (85). Bards and poets from Wales supported Henry's claim to the throne on the basis of his lineage, and saluted him "as a British king in the true line of Brutus and therefore worthy of all possible Welsh support" (Rees 37). To the Welsh, the dynastic struggles of the War of the Roses were not as important as which contender would best represent their interests. In what must have seemed like the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, Henry returned from exile in France and landed in Wales near Milford Haven. He promptly gathered an army under a banner bearing the Red Dragon of Wales, and

marched off to face Richard III at Bosworth Field (Summers 85). The *Mab Darogan* had returned. Tudor descent from Arthur, England's Aeneas, through to Henry VII, is a heroic narrative worthy of Geoffrey. In this tale, folk belief and prophecy lead directly to Elizabeth's monarchy in a story book triumph. The big concern soon became what happens after that.

Elizabeth took the throne when Spenser was a boy, amidst concerns over her gender, external pressure from Rome, and aggressive marital campaigns from suitors not entirely sympathetic towards English Protestantism or the nation's autonomy. By the closing of the sixteenth century, when Spenser laboured over his epic, "the concern had shifted from [Elizabeth's] gender to her virginity" (Canino 112). Anxiety over the lack of a successor pervaded late Elizabethan England; there was no direct heir, and the queen herself was not forthcoming in appointing one. This created terrible uncertainty regarding England's future, for although Elizabeth's reign was prosperous, the tumultuous years prior to her coronation remained prominent in the memory of her subjects. As an active participant in the politics of his time, Spenser "would not have escaped his contemporaries' anxiety over the question of the succession; it was ... a political concern throughout his adult life" (Buckman 111). Everyone in early modern England had a considerable investment in Elizabeth's successor, particularly how he or she would shape their collective future as a people and a nation. In Canino's terse summary, "Elizabeth ... held the power of the future over every Englishman" (113).

Many critics read Prince Arthur's quest for Gloriana against this context, interpreting the narrative thread running through *The Faerie Queene* as a vehicle for Spenser to voice his own succession anxiety. Ty Buckman's reading seems typical, claiming that the unresolved courtship "stands in place of the celebration of an endless Tudor dynasty" (118). He flatly asserts that "*Arthur's search for Gloriana becomes the succession dilemma in narrative form*" (italics in original 118). All things considered, Buckman's is not an unreasonable interpretation, especially when read against the uncertainty the prince demonstrates in Book III, when Arthur's mounting desperation disrupts his sleep and pushes him beyond human endurance (iv.61). In *The Legend of Holiness* though, Arthur's plight seems more in keeping with romance convention. The errant prince tells Una of his "secret wound," inflicted upon him when, as a youth, he was visited in his sleep by a "royall Mayd" (I.ix.13). After describing a happy encounter, the prince awoke to find "nought but pressed gras where she had lyen" (I.ix.15.2). In the *Letter* Spenser identifies Gloriana as a representative of Elizabeth, inspiring critics like Buckman to read Arthur's unending search for her in overly literal terms. Again, such a reading is not entirely unfounded, especially considering the virgin queen's behavior towards her many frustrated suitors (Philip II of Spain, for instance, or King Charles IX of France). Elizabeth must have seemed as frustratingly elusive as her literary counterpart. However, as with anything related to *The Faerie Queene* or Spenser, adhering too closely to one reading risks limiting the poem.

I am not comfortable with a literal, topical interpretation of Arthur's quest, for the simple reason that it pushes decorum beyond what should have been acceptable parameters. In Arthur's encounter, Gloriana makes "Most goodly glee and lovely blandishment" (I.ix.14) to the prince. Even without the erotic overtones Spenser's language invites, allowing a representative of the queen to behave in such a manner towards any man – even the greatest of England's kings – seems, well, unseemly. In discussing the delicacy of the queen's status, Louis Montrose asserts that "Although Queen Elizabeth might sometimes seek the council of her Privy Councilors and favorites, she would not tolerate unsolicited advice even from them, particularly on such sensitive issues as her marriage and the succession" (913). And yet, the encounter demands the reader's attention; like the prince, we are intrigued by the impression left on the grass, evidence that he was not just dreaming. It is a marker of the Faerie Queene's absence, and on one level emblematic of the English monarchy leading up to Elizabeth's ascendancy. Above the vacant imprint hovers true monarchical power/authority, represented by Arthur, negotiating the civil turmoil of the War of the Roses. To develop this reading further, we are able to see in it the Tudor reign immediately leading up to Elizabeth, hinting at her absence from the throne while her half sister Mary occupied it. If we read Arthur as a representative of the House of Tudor, as I suggest he is, his mysterious encounter with the Faerie Queene reflects succession anxiety in a more subtle manner than suggested by most critics. In it, we see the royal line confronted by the absence of a proper heir. The impression on the grass

represents an emptiness, a barrenness signaling the termination of the Tudor line. It is no wonder the prince becomes increasingly anxious, for the vacant impression not only signals his own family's demise, but possibly the end of an autonomous Protestant England as well.

In the model I propose, though, Arthur is another representative of Elizabeth, as well as the embodiment of the Tudor monarchy. At first glance, this proposal seems to contradict the entire discussion outlined above – how can Gloriana, representing Elizabeth, come to Arthur if he too is Elizabeth? Presented together, the two should not be able to function as representations of the same person. They can, though, when a contemporaneous legal doctrine is considered. Gloriana's romantic liaison with Prince Arthur literalizes a political theory instituted early in Elizabeth's reign.

In the *Letter* Spenser explains his use of assorted characters as different representations of Elizabeth, asserting that the queen “beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Emperesse, the other of a most vertuous and beautiful Lady” (*Faerie Queene* 716). As William Nelson points out, Spenser here demonstrates a familiarity with the philosophy of the King's Two Bodies, a doctrine agreed upon by all the crown lawyers in Elizabeth's fourth year of office. On behalf of the courts, jurist Edmund Plowden declared “the King has in him two Bodies ... a Body natural and a Body politic” (qtd. in Nelson 124). Plowden goes on to explain the Body natural to be the mortal self, subject to infirmities, accidents, or any other defect that can affect a human body. The Body politic, on

the other hand, “cannot be seen or handled,” is made up of policy and government, and is unaffected by limitations imposed on the natural body. A king, as explained by Plowden, exceeds the confines of his or her own body to become the embodiment of government itself. In his discussion of Elizabethan political culture, A.N. McLaren suggests this theory “advanced a symbolic reading of kingship, itself, allowing for the definition of ‘king’ as a function of ‘people’” (101). This inclusive concept of kingship, as something the people who are governed participate in, is relevant to the earlier chapter dedicated to the Redcrosse Knight, and is explored at length there. Although the doctrine defends Elizabeth’s monarchy, it must be noted here that Plowden’s language is distinctly male-centric, perhaps implying – without stating outright – that gender is a disability of the Body natural that does not affect the Body politic. One is left wondering how much of this philosophic proposition was the result of a patriarchal system trying to reconcile itself to a female ruler. Elizabeth herself seems to have been aware of the implicit gender critique underlying the Two Bodies proposal, directly engaging with it in her *Tilbury Address*: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too” (96). According to the accepted political ideology of Elizabethan England, and advocated by the queen herself, Elizabeth was assigned both male and female genders. Elizabeth, the woman, is limited to her Body natural; Elizabeth the queen (or, in Plowden’s terms, “king”), however, is masculinized through the concept of the Body politic. In applying the doctrine

of the King's Two Bodies to *The Faerie Queene*, we see how Arthur can comfortably represent Elizabeth. Through that doctrine, we can recognize Gloriana and her prince as representative of the natural and political bodies assigned to the queen. In the words of King, "Elizabeth is not so much Arthur's descendant as his double" (67). Arthur's quest for Gloriana can be read as representative of the years prior to Elizabeth's ascendancy, the Body politic in search of a worthy Body natural.

exemplifies the queen as the personification of the English church and Protestant faith” (115). Interpreting Una as the queen is not unreasonable, and Una’s wanderings are suggestive of Elizabeth’s own before she ascended the throne, when persecutions of Protestants began and the young princess had to hide from Marian supporters. All these interpretations are valid, of course, and many are quite compelling, but my own reading and argument removes Una away from any one specific historic personage. In the model I propose, Una’s significance is in keeping with the fundamental understanding of the character as representative of English Protestant truth, and its institutions. As a character, Una is a critical narrative and didactic device in “The Legend of Holinesse,” providing the stability that Redcrosse – and the text itself – moves towards. In the words of Åke Bergvall, “Redcrosse, and the narrative with him, is jostled along slipping signifiers, a postlapsarian (even poststructuralist) world where nothing is what it seems (a favorite Spenserian expression)” (“Signs” 32). Spenser “book-ends” “The Legend of Holinesse” with Una, and although Redcrosse’s misguided wanderings lead him away from his princess, she and her knight are eventually reunited through the efforts of Prince Arthur. A generous amount of Book I, however, is devoted to the knight’s estrangement from Una, from Truth, in what Bergvall refers to as the postlapsarian world – human existence after the Fall.

The Fall is the central theological assumption of any Judeo-Christian ideology, determining how Christians view and negotiate material existence. According to the Book of Genesis, the first man and woman were banished from



the Garden of Eden for disobeying God and eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 3). The Expulsion is understood as the moment when humanity lost direct experience of God through pride, and humankind has been negotiating the effects ever since. As MacCaffrey says, “The Fall of Man was both a fall into time and a fall from lucid to imperfect vision, from univocal to equivocal language, from a world of light to a cloudy grove” (35). Mortality is one consequence of the Expulsion, but more traumatic for Christians is alienation from God, which leaves humanity adrift in a world where the clarity of direct divine discourse and absolute certitude is lost. Divorced from certitude, human nature is fallible and susceptible to uncertainty, doubt, and sin. Estrangement from God impacts everything in postlapsarian existence, particularly how we communicate with one another.

Language, through which meaning is distilled into a system of culturally predetermined qualifiers, often obscures signification and only furthers alienation. The compromise between language and meaning has generated a considerable amount of postmodern criticism, what Ferdinand de Saussure famously formulated as “signifier + signified = sign” (Nealson and Searls Giroux 24). In Saussure’s equation the signifier, or word, along with the signified, everything that is associated with the word, forms the sign, the complete meaning. The gap between signifier and sign that modern linguists agonize over is, in Christian theology, the result of our fallen state. Saint Augustine of Hippo, fifth-century father of the Roman church, noticed this discrepancy in language centuries ago. In

Augustinian linguistics, language, though adversely impacted by the Fall, is also the means through which humanity can overcome its postlapsarian state and attain divine union. In his exploration of Augustinian linguistics, Bergvall states that “although the mutability of human language had originated as a consequence of the Fall, salvation could be achieved only through language” (“Logocentrism” 254). For those who adhere to Augustine’s theory of linguistics, “language as we know it is a divine concession to our fallen nature” (“Signs” 27). I will return to Augustine below, and how his theories impact Spenserian metaphor.

Christianity is, in essence, a philosophic structure used by its adherents to negotiate temporal existence. It provides the means through which an individual can overcome the Fall and work towards unmediated divine discourse. In Augustinian linguistics, language is used to navigate the dim, qualified world of misplaced signifiers, providing the way through postlapsarian indeterminacy and alienation if – and it is a really big “if” – it can be utilized to circumvent the gap between sign and signifier. This is the implicit movement of Spenser’s “Legend of Holiness” as well, and “The defining structure of Book I, the history of the Redcross knight’s fall and restoration, is taken from Scripture” (Hamilton “Myth” 336). Underlying Book I is the progression from the Fall through to the Incarnation, when the Word was made flesh. Though the abuse of linguistics is largely responsible for Redcrosse’s debasement, faith is demonstrated as attainable through language, which for Spenser is specifically manifested in poetry. In the words of Evans, “*The Faerie Queene* turns upon an axis of which

faith and poetry are the two poles, the vision which God sends to man and the vision which man attains of God” (19). In Book I faith, the implicit belief and trust in God, is the final terminus of a trajectory initiated by poetry, just as poetry is, for Spenser, the means through which faith is refined and disseminated.

For Spenser and many of his contemporaries, poetry is a vital cultural medium for examining the social and political issues shaping history. As such, it can afford those who create it a degree of influence not readily available to anyone outside of court, and early modern poets used poetry as a vehicle to participate in matters of state. Spenser himself viewed his work as having national importance, and in his *Self-Crowned Laureates* Helgerson discusses the poet’s career as that of a ‘laureate,’ a public poet in the tradition of Virgil and Horace. Acting as poet laureate was not such an unreasonable ambition for Spenser – in early modern England poets took up their pens with a sense of civic responsibility, and in the words of MacCaffrey, “The loftiest role in which [sixteenth-century poets] have cast themselves has been that of the seer or visionary” (23) in the tradition of the evangelist John, and the Book of Revelations.

Implicit in constructing the poet’s role as that of visionary is the belief that poetry, or its impetus, is external to the author, and a conceit frequently appearing in the “poesie” of the day is the idea of it as something received through divine intercession. The tradition of the divinely inspired poet extends back to Homer, who established the epic convention of appealing to the muses for inspiration. In

Canto x, Spenser associates Parnassus, the home of the classical muses, with the Mount of Olives, mentioned in Matthew's gospel, thereby, according to Hamilton, "linking Christ with the muses, and through them with poetry" (I.x.54.note). In the Christian tradition, "The poet who 'meditates the muse' is implicitly connected with Moses, whose meditation preceded his teaching of the chosen people, and with Christ, whose meditation accompanied the teaching of the new law" (O'Connell 44). Poetry is characterized as heavenly in origin and therefore a purer use of language, a suitable vehicle for mediating divine discourse in postlapsarian existence. That also makes it ideal for pedagogical purposes, and according to the theory of the day poetry "possesses the illuminating power of revelation, which it achieves through the image of virtues and vices delivered by the right poet" (Hamilton "Reader" 622). As recipient of divine poetry, the poet's purpose then becomes one of dissemination. Composing a work to impart spiritual enlightenment to the listener – or more accurately in Spenser's case, the reader – signals the educational impetus underlying the role of the Christian poet. Wall references Sir Philip Sidney to explain that "Didactic poetry always seeks to impinge on the world of its readers, to move them through literary means to 'take that goodness in hand which without delight they would fly as from a stranger'" (157). Instructing and encouraging an audience in Christian morality is more commonly referred to as preaching.

Preaching, the interpretation and dissemination of the Bible, was considered an effective method of promoting Protestantism in early modern

England, beneficial in the continuing efforts to establish a national church independent of Roman authority. As Mallette puts it, “Because preaching weds rhetoric and theology, the Reformation finds it the ideal medium for the Word to save and regenerate” (37). Preaching discourse had a great impact on the production of English Protestant texts, whose authors recognized it as a persuasive instrument for advancing Reformation ideologies. In Renaissance England, “The emotional might of ‘the word preached’ preoccupies Reformation writing and is professed, especially by English Reformers, as the means of illuminating the darkened mind, softening the hardened heart, quelling doubt, and saving souls” (Mallette 20). Preaching has much in common with Renaissance ideals of poetry, and both function as postlapsarian vehicles for Christian truth. Like the poet, the Protestant preacher mediates Christian truth for the benefit of the audience, and in early modern England the two professions were closely related. Although conceived of in similar terms as poetry, Knapp asserts that “Spenser regarded an ecclesiastical career as a limitation on the sort of ministry he valued” (“Priest” 63). Knapp’s comment posits an exciting way to view Spenser’s literary career by configuring authorship as a type of ministry, one that has the potential, through print, to reach a far greater audience than afforded by either oral preaching or its textual equivalent. Christian doctrine communicated in accessible terms for a wide audience is perfectly in keeping with Reformation ideology, and Knapp points out that “Spenser in the *View* intimates that the planting of religion by nonprofessionals can be simultaneously secular and

sacramental, the delivery of an outward or ‘general profession’ of faith that, with the grace of God, can ‘work Salvation’ as well as clergymen do” (“Priest” 70). To any committed Reformer, the Word and its interpretation is not the exclusive providence of professional clergy, but available to any who would serve it.

Spenser does so through the means he knows best.

For early modern authors like Spenser, poetry, like preaching, is meant to effect change in the audience. In our postlapsarian world it is not enough to simply instruct an audience, as language divorced from absolute meaning cannot facilitate such intentions by itself. The poet must inspire an emotional response in the reader to circumvent fallen nature. In the words of Weiner, paraphrasing Sidney, “If man possessed perfect virtue, he could simply be taught by the poet; because he does not, he must be moved” (33). Human intellect, developed and bound by language, is here implied to be the greatest casualty of postlapsarian existence. Conversely language – and its ability to communicate Christian truth – is also the means through which humanity can attain redemption. Language in the service of truth becomes the concern of the poet, where “A poem must create belief if it is to achieve its proper moral or cathartic effect” (Evans 4). In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser negotiates the potential obstacle of human intellect by rigorously engaging it, and as Hamilton says, “reading the poem involves the reader intellectually and emotionally: it engages him on a wide range of conscious and subconscious levels, and it awakens his most profound hopes and most primitive fears” (“Reader” 622). Spenser employs language in ways that exhaust

the reader's preconceived ideas, demanding that he or she engage with the text until it leads him/her through and beyond the ambiguity between what we now call signifier and sign, to the ultimate meaning that cannot be adequately expressed through postlapsarian forms of communication. For the poet who would facilitate truth, language is simply a means to an end, and "the words on the page are for Spenser ultimately unimportant in comparison with the eternal verities to which the words are meant to point" (Bergvall "Logocentrism" 252). The ambiguity of language creates for Spenser the problem of effectively differentiating morally responsible actions from those that are detrimental to both the individual and the community – essentially, how to make an informed choice between good and evil.

In "The Legend of Holinesse" Spenser explores both avenues and their consequences, often simultaneously. As Evans says, "To read *The Faerie Queene* is to be in the continuous presence of paradox and to be faced with a dilemma throughout the greater part of the poem" (60). He goes on to say that "Good and evil are unmistakably there and the need to choose between them is inescapable" (60). Moral polarization relates to the biblical archetypes of New Jerusalem and Babylon, cities that represent good and evil. Association with either denotes a subject's moral state, and in the medieval period the papacy was increasingly identified with Babylon. Reformers "completed the equation by identifying the Protestant church with the heavenly city" (Bergvall "Signs" 23). Redcrosse's adventures and misfortunes are determined by the choices he makes,

incorporating Renaissance ideals of heroism that are relevant to Spenser's heroic model. According to Evans, one of the classical myths *The Faerie Queene* is built upon is the choice of Hercules, an episode in which the legendary hero comes to a fork in the path he has been following, and must choose between two ladies who represent Pleasure and Virtue (43). Evans proposes that the a hero's choice between self-indulgence and moral responsibility is the basis of all heroic epics, but in a fallen world Pleasure and Virtue are not easily identified, and distinctions between them often depend on how they are defined. Differentiating between pleasure and virtue is not always reliable in our postlapsarian world, where falsehood can be made to seem like truth (Archimago is such an effective villain because he can "file his tongue as smooth as glas" [I.i.35]). In "The Legend of Holinesse," the surest way to identify truth is to understand its opposite, falsehood. We must know Duessa to recognize Una.

Throughout Book I the reader learns what something is through experience of its opposite. Contrast and comparison is a pedagogical strategy used in *The Faerie Queene*, where "The opposition between truth and its deceptive counterfeit – Una and Duessa, the true and false Florimel – underlies the epistemological structure of the entire poem" (Steadman 546). In what Knapp refers to as definition by negative ("Errour" 820), the anti-type is usually identified or introduced before the type. The reader visits the House of Pride before later entering the House of Holinesse, is frustrated by the simpleton Ignario before meeting the hermit Contemplation. Spenser conditions the reader to



recognize what is being posited as the morally responsible choice through examination of what contradicts it, what is, essentially, detrimental. Ambiguity, with its attendant uncertainty, is thus polarized into two opposing binaries to facilitate comparison, much like the two paths Hercules must decide between. In the Legend, however, the reader is allowed to follow both ladies to better understand where each one leads.

Una is Protestant Christianity, whereas Duessa is Roman Catholicism, and as Canino asserts, “Duessa is the direct antithesis to Una” (118). The different theologies are examined through the romantic relationships the knight enters into to better understand what effect each has on the hero/individual. By the end of Book I, the reader understands the impact Una and Duessa have on Redcrosse’s – and by extension the reader’s – state of being. To further his comparison, Spenser employs negative definition through imagery of light and darkness, which dominate the Legend. However, as Weiner points out, “For the first eleven cantos ... the scales are heavily tipped in favor of darkness, so that the effect of reading the poem is somewhat akin to watching a thunderstorm on a dark night” (49). Darkness, of course, is symptomatic of Duessa and Catholicism, embodying Reform critiques that view Roman ideology as obscuring Christian truth. What Steadman calls Spenser’s use of “chiaroscuro,” an art historical term for the gradations of light and dark in a painting, “involves a similar opposition between the indefinite, the indistinct, the indeterminate, and an ideal clarity” (551). The chiaroscuro and darkness the reader has been following Redcrosse through is not

noticeable until it dissipates in Canto viii, when Prince Arthur enters the poem in a blaze of light. The atmosphere of gloom through most of “The Legend of Holinesse” causes the reader to “develop an emotional—almost a physical—desire for more and more light as we gradually recognize the relief from doubt and despair that it brings” (Weiner 49). By the end of Book I the Redcrosse Knight, along with the reader, is able to recognize the clarity and illumination that accompanies Una. Recognizing Una or Christian truth requires clarity, which Redcrosse acquires in the House of Holinesse.

In the House of Holinesse, Redcrosse’s concerns and the reader’s are conflated into that of literacy, or the ability to distinguish between false signifiers to comprehend the sign. Protestantism is heavily invested in its texts, where Christian truth is made accessible to the discerning reader (Perry 381). Language mediates the relationship between the reader and text, made necessary by our fallen state where everything is subject to mutability. As Bergvall says, “Like time and space, history or the physical body, language too is tainted with becoming and should therefore be transcended and discarded” (“Logocentrism” 259). He goes on to assert that “It is the form that counts, the hidden meaning that leads to the haven of being” (“Logocentrism” 259). Bergvall’s formulation posits language as an intermediating construct necessary in understanding Christian truth, and attention to what he calls the form will lead the reader to understanding. For poets, the most effective form to enlist in the effort to communicate meaning is metaphor.

Metaphor is defined by Spenser's contemporary George Puttenham as "a kinde of wresting of a single word from his owne right signification, to another not so naturall, but yet of some affinitie" (178). It is a deliberate play on a given word's usual denotation, announcing the metaphor's relationship to meaning as more suggestive than concrete. As such, the word or signifier is not directly related to the sign, calling attention to the postlapsarian failure of language in communicating meaning: "In literalizing the metaphorical implications of language, [the use of metaphor] exposes and disinfects its natural fallen duplicity" (MacCaffrey 53). Metaphors compensate for the inherent limitations of signifiers by making them accommodate larger significance, and when used in such a way, a word's application is more relevant than its immediate connotation. Allegories are extended metaphors in which "we do speake in sence translatiue and wrested from the owne signification, neuerthesse applied to another not altogether contrary, but hauing much conueniencie with it" (Puttenham 186-7). To put it in more current terms, "Allegory is a *continued* metaphor, and its continuousness offers us, as readers, our chief means of access to the unstated meanings it makes visible" (MacCaffrey 46).

*The Faerie Queene* has long been recognized as, among other things, an allegorical narrative of the English Reformation, the individual's progression from moral uncertainty to faith, and an exploration of Protestant theology. Hankins identifies these aspects as conforming to the three levels of classical allegorical interpretation, namely, the historical, the physical, and the ethical (19).

As Evans says, in Spenser's poem "All levels of meaning are simultaneous and parallel" (91). Metaphor and allegory provide the means through which Spenser expands his text into an entirely self-contained pedagogical system. When a signifier is recognizable as deliberately symbolic, it indicates the larger significance that exists beyond the text, and with *The Faerie Queene* "we look through the transparency of the language and the actions to the reality of the experience behind them" (Evans 68). A knight functions as an indicator for the English citizenry, for example, or the individual self. Darkness is the willful abandonment of virtue. These and all the other metaphoric representations throughout *The Faerie Queene* constitute an interlocking system of communication unique to Spenser's text. Each metaphoric relationship supports the larger allegory, providing "a concentrated form of shorthand which harnesses the force of the whole poem to every individual statement" (85). Extended metaphors can avoid the potential ambiguity found in non-poetic forms of communication by drawing attention to their artifice, including "both the idea of separateness between word and referent and the notion of the referent's inaccessibility without the word" (MacCaffrey 31). Spenser uses allegory to create within the reader emblems that elicit progressive levels of intellectual engagement, providing metaphoric shape to abstract truths. As Aristotle says, "The soul never thinks without an image" (qtd. in MacCaffrey 31). As poetic devices, metaphors and allegory are directly related to Augustinian linguistic theory.

Renaissance linguistic theory is based on the theology of Augustine, whose work remained influential in early modern England. Augustinian linguistics is influential to Spenser's epic, particularly in Book I where "The structure and plot of *The Legend of Holiness* is saturated with *The City of God*, the most popular Augustinian work throughout the Renaissance" (Bergvall "Signs" 21-2). Bergvall has studied Augustine's influence on Spenser extensively, and is quite helpful in understanding how linguistics relates to theology. He explains that "To Augustine, linguistics is theology; and theology, linguistics" (Bergvall "Signs" 26), and "At the center of both stands the transcendental Sign that gives validity to all conventional signs" ("Signs" 26). According to Augustine, after the Fall, *res* was irreparably fractured from *verba*. To put it in more current terms, the sign is invariably removed from the signifier. Augustine's theories anticipate postmodern deconstructionism by centuries, with one major exception – in Augustinian linguistics, *res* is God, the "transcendental Sign that gives validity to all human language" ("Logocentrism" 253).

The Fall and Expulsion from Eden are ever present in human language. Words are divorced from meaning in postlapsarian existence, as is evident when Una warns Redcrosse against Despaire by telling the knight "Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly heart" (ix.53). Human signifiers, or *verbum*, are unable to reach absolute *res*, what Bergvall refers to as "the Unspeakable" ("Signs" 29) (Redcrosse's estrangement from Una can also be thought of as *verbum* searching for *res*). *Verbum* was unable to attain *res*, that is, until the Incarnation, when the

Word was made flesh in Christ. The Incarnation is the other major philosophic assumption of Christian theology, in which to redeem humanity after the Fall, God entered into material existence, thus becoming the transcendental signifier. As Bergvall so dramatically expresses it, “Since human words could not reach the Unspeakable, the Unspeakable reached down and spoke with human voice” (“Signs” 29).

In Christian theology the Incarnation not only redeems humanity but language as well, and Christ is the *verbum* through which humanity may once again attain *res*, the unified Sign. As explained by Wall, “Christian rhetoric ... breaks out of the self-enclosed world of classical rhetoric through its constant reference to God’s Word as a lived reality encountered in the corporate worship of God’s people” (159). Situating *res* as the divine truth beyond *verbum* clarifies Spenser’s efforts, in which metaphoric signifiers direct the reader to the eternal sign residing beyond the poem. His Augustinian approach to authorship suggests an interesting way of viewing the English Reformation as well – when theology is understood as essentially linguistic, denomination becomes subject to the same critique as language. Any human theological structure is potentially fallible. Catholicism, and more importantly Roman claims to divine authority, are thus configured as a signifier, a mere vehicle for achieving divine *res*. The rejection of Roman authority, however, left the problem of what signifier is a more appropriate vehicle for the divine Sign.

English Reformers insisted that Christianity was established in England long before the Roman Church, through what they called the primitive church. Protestants such as John Foxe argue that the original church was established in England in the first century AD, when either Joseph of Arimathea or other disciples came to the island. At the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory I sent Saint Augustine of Canterbury to England, who introduced the Roman influence to the primitive British church. A century later, Rome began to usurp authority in England, so for Protestant Reformers, “The freeing of the church from domination by Rome thus represents not innovation but a restoration of the primitive British church as it existed in its earliest centuries” (O’Connell 45-6). Internally, the English Reformation was not viewed as a radical movement, but rather a return to the original English form of Christianity as instituted by Christ’s direct disciples. Theirs was a faith structure that recognized the sovereignty of the king, and “Elizabeth’s title of supreme governor of the church is actually the restoration of imperial ecclesiastical authority to the state that existed in the early British church before the usurpation of primacy by Rome” (46).

The idea of an original indigenous church was a necessary argument for persuading the commonwealth to reject centuries of Roman authority, which had reasserted itself in Mary’s reign. An indigenous form of Christianity is the theological position used to encourage the English commonwealth to participate in the state’s effort to “renounce centuries of tradition and institute a new religion” (Mallette 47). In Cantos x and xi, for instance, Redcrosse battles the

dragon that has subjugated Una's kingdom, an easily recognizable trope borrowed from chivalric romance. The Book of Revelations associates the dragon with Satan (13:2), and in a typological reading of the episode, Redcrosse's battle literalizes Reformation propaganda by casting the Roman Church as the Antichrist. Along with Christian Truth, Una also represents the primitive church in England, present but usurped by Roman authority (Duessa). Redcrosse's infatuation with Duessa illustrates the Protestant conviction that "Christians had been drawn from God's Word by Catholic glitter and idolatry" (Prescott 189). As ideologies, the influence of either Una or Duessa – Protestantism or Catholicism – has a direct impact on the individual, demonstrated through Redcrosse's two romantic relationships. Each companion determines the choices made by the knight and how he conducts himself. Through Una's relationship with Redcrosse, Spenser examines how Christian truth relates to individual selfhood.

Ideologies play a considerable role in determining the individual's sense of self. In Renaissance England, choosing to adapt a new (or rediscovered) form of Christianity demanded a different apparatus for viewing the world, and one's place in it. After the Reformation, people were no longer interpolated into a single, unquestioning model of consciousness. In pre-Reformation Renaissance, access to divine authority was an expression of absolute hegemonic power. For Reformers, the Roman church's claim as exclusive mediator between God and humanity – as having sole providence over the divine Sign – is considered demeaning to the individual and to God. For the Christian who decides to adapt



Protestantism, engaging with such long established cultural assumptions necessitated a drastic shift in perspective and approach to knowledge, or knowing. As Camille Wells Slight says, “the Protestant conscience emerged as a new and powerfully destabilizing force in European culture” (233).

Protestant Christianity emphasizes the individual’s personal engagement with constructs of truth, morality, and personal responsibility in the larger context of society. The individual is always understood as a single component of a larger collective, and in Renaissance England “the individual and the collective intersect in the conscience” (232). The Protestant self is viewed in relation to the whole, and its value is determined by a person’s contribution to society, the Protestant emphasis on good works evidencing a person’s standing as one of the elect. Individual agency becomes an effect of its immediate social context, and for English Protestants in the early modern period, the self is not only determined through personal ideology, but also through the dominant institutions of church and state. Self and state are complementary constructs. To know the whole, however, one has to know the self, an enterprise facilitated by *Una*.

Self-knowledge is an important aspect of Protestant Christianity, forming the basis of the responsible Christian citizen. Such Reformist thinking is demonstrated in *Redcrosse’s* visit to the House of Holinesse. Study of *Fidelia’s* “celestiall discipline” (I.x.18) leads the knight to the mount of Contemplation, where he learns his true identity as “Saint George of mery England” (I.x.61). The hermit reminds *Redcrosse* of his civic responsibility, telling the knight he must

not “Forgo that royal maides bequeathed care” (I.x.63). Through Redcrosse’s education, Spenser reinforces the connection between faith and civic responsibility, demonstrating the English Reform understanding of the “Christian life [as] such that the two worlds of religious and day-to-day living coincide” (Wall 154). A productive religious life means a more fulfilling and constructive role in society. Also important, however, is the individual’s obligation to develop faith. When a person knows him or herself, he or she will come to understand what areas need attention, and European Reform theologian Martin Luther “recommends self-knowledge on the assumption that once a Christian gains ‘knowledge of himself, then he becomes truly repentant” (Slights 235).

The Reform emphasis on self-knowledge supports Protestant ideals of personal agency, where the individual is no longer reliant on Roman ideology to determine what transgressive behaviour is. In claiming responsibility for one’s relationship with God, the individual also accepts a role in furthering it. A person must understand why a sin is transgressive to truly repent of it and in so doing move closer to being fully realized Christian and active member of the community. The importance of self-examination is present in most strains of Reform ideologies, and “English Protestants across the religious spectrum, despite radical disagreements about doctrine, liturgy, and church government, conceived of the conscience as a verbally constructed self and regularly examined their consciences as a religious duty” (Slights 236). Slights’ comment is worth

exploring further, touching as it does on a fundamental understanding of Protestant selfhood.

Language gives one the means of understanding the self, because the self is a verbal construct, a set of linguistic systems and relationships. The self is, essentially, a signifier. Thought of in this manner, selfhood is only a vehicle for attaining the divine Sign, which resides beyond the material-bound *verbum* of the individual. Through Una, Christian truth or the transcendent *res*, the individual can move beyond the *verbum* of the self to reach God. That is the central concern of Augustinian linguistics, which attempts to resolve “how signs can have epistemological validity” (Bergvall “Signs” 27). How words can achieve true meaning is explained by Augustine through his theory of divine illumination, in which “God’s ‘inner word’ provides the human mind with the epistemological foundation for making judgments about propositions and sense impressions” (27). Examination and knowledge of the self will enable the individual to “listen” to divine *res*, to hear Una’s council, thereby reaching the meaning beyond language to understand the Word.

Nandra Perry’s discussion concerning the Protestant translation of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas Rogers is helpful in understanding the mechanics of the process. Rogers’s interpretation is a practical manual for the Christian to develop spiritual autonomy, what Perry characterizes as a secularized model of subjectivity “in which religious discourse figures as the primary language of self-representation and self-analysis” (366-7). The early modern,

English *Imitation of Christ* leaves overt Catholic doctrines behind, and the institution of the Church as sole agency for the Word is ignored. In Rogers's Protestant interpretation, "the sacred text is the only dependable mediator between fallen human nature and divine presence" (378). Sacred texts are the mediating agent between the reader and the Word, and Christian truth can be attained through language. Language is the means through which the adherent is able to internalize the Word, allowing Christian truth to take up residence in the individual and overcome postlapsarian indeterminacy. At the end of the Legend, Redcrosse enters into union with Una, Christian truth. Having internalized the Word, Redcrosse is ready to see "The blazing brightnesse of her beauties ... / And glorious light of her sunshiny face" (I.xii.23), the externalization of his own selfhood. It is an accomplishment that the reader is encouraged to pursue as well.

Spenser is very clear about his objectives in offering *The Faerie Queene* to the general populace. His epic is meant to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (*Faerie Queene* 714). Instilling virtue is usually the providence of religion, and as Whitaker puts it, "For all but the incorrigibly irreligious ... moral problems inevitably involved theological problems" (151-2). The strong relation between morality and theology is especially true in the early modern period, where matters of faith and religion are so integral to secular life. Spenserian morality is inseparable from social obligation, and virtue in the individual is qualified by how it benefits the whole. Throughout "The Legend of Holinesse," immoral behaviour is characterized as selfish and proud,

consequential actions of an inflated sense of self-worth, as opposed to a fully realized autonomy. Sin occurs when the individual is divorced from divine *res*, becoming an empty signifier who flees Christian truth and is deaf to its council.

Through *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser instructs the reader in negotiating postlapsarian existence where, according to Judeo-Christian doctrine, we have claimed knowledge of good and evil but not the ability to differentiate between the two. Through the various adventures of the Redcrosse Knight, sin is something freely chosen, and he must learn to make better choices. According to Evans, “The prime object of the poem, indeed, is to educate and train the hero and through him, the reader, to recognize all the infinitely subtle ramifications of Original Sin and to circumvent or to survive their challenge” (27). Redcrosse’s journey is the reader’s as well, as he or she sorts through conflicting signifiers and *verbum* on the way to true meaning, the unified, divine Sign. In Bergvall’s eloquent summation, “If the readers are implicated in Redcrosse’s linguistic alienation, they are also urged to follow him in his pursuit of wholeness, or holiness” (“Sign” 37). Spenser encourages this pursuit in both direct and indirect ways. He appeals to the individual in a straightforward manner through direct address, such as in Canto iv where the narrator tells the reader directly to “Beware fraud, beware of ficklenesse” (iv.1), but also by redefining the individual’s cultural context. According to Slights, “individuality is always already a reproduction of a dominant ideology” (239). Spenser constructs his heroic model of a unified English nation by refashioning the beliefs that condition the subject.

Spenser affects change in the reader's ideological context by constructing a series of intellectual proposals that demand intellectual engagement. He orchestrates the reader's experience through his understanding of the mechanics involved, and in the words of Gless, "reading is a process governed by anticipations, guesses about the meanings and nature of the whole utterance we are encountering" (3). For example, familiarity with the romance genre assures the reader that Redcrosse will somehow survive his various trials, triumph against his enemies, and wed the princess. Through the use of cultural icons and accessible narrative motifs Spenser appeals to the reader on an intimate level, communicating in a manner that exceeds the *verbum* of poetic form to illuminate the *res* beyond. The poem's meaning is expressed through story book images that stay with the reader, becoming a set of tools through which he or she can develop Christian selfhood. Evans identifies Spenser's basic instrument as "the familiar, the striking, or the monstrous image which springs to consciousness and illuminates our daily experience by providing a touchstone of moral values" (80). After reading the epic, "the reader will carry round with him for ever a set of archetypes offering guidance in every moral or intellectual dilemma" (80). The use of cultural icons allows the reader to participate in the process, which in turn aids him or her in internalizing the lessons. Spenser establishes a reciprocal relationship between text and reader, in which static images continue to evolve through intellectual engagement that continues long after their comparatively insignificant signifiers have been read/utilized. It is a slow, intricate progression

that “initially imitates ordinary discursive understanding but eventually departs from it in the intensity and completeness of illumination that is achieved”

(MacCaffrey 41).

Illumination is, of course, the ultimate purpose of *The Faerie Queene* and “The Legend of Holinesse.” Knowledge and faith are inseparable in Reform ideologies, and for the Protestant adherent, intellectual engagement is necessary in developing a stronger Christian identity. That process is imitated in *The Faerie Queene*, where “reading the poem brings progressive revelation until, ideally, one brings an understanding of the whole poem to bear upon understanding any part of it” (Hamilton “Reader” 627). Every character and episode furthers the reader’s understanding, just as each individual lesson is inter-related, creating a dialogue that aids the individual’s grasp of the whole until he or she is able to bring that understanding to the work in general. As Hamilton says, “Understanding frees us to participate more personally in any episode” (“Reader” 628). This educational process is designed to assist the individual reader in attaining a fully autonomous, Christian selfhood. Spenser employs Augustinian linguistic theory to bring a fuller understanding of Christian truth to the reader, which will in turn make him or her a better member of the community. Following the Augustine model, the rigorous quest for selfhood

leads to recognition of realities and standards of truth common to all. In struggling to understand what we are – in becoming fully present to ourselves – we discover the permanent, universal ordering principle of our being which is within us and also beyond

us: the movement inward becomes a movement upward toward God. (Sights 234)

The reader learn to recognize the *verbum* to attain the *res*, the signifier pointing towards the sign, recognizing selfhood as a metaphoric echo of divine nature able to overcome the Fall through the Word.

Much like Redcrosse, this discussion has led farther and farther away from Una but, as in the Legend, it has been a necessary journey that has been leading back to her (hopefully, with better understanding). In “The Legend of Holinesse” the Word is presented as a “Forsaken, wofull, solitarie mayd” (iii.3). Una’s nature as Christian Truth is hinted at throughout the Legend, though in a manner that is not immediately apparent. At first glance she seems like a stock character, a typically helpless princess dependent on others to intervene on her behalf. What the reader initially interprets as the maid’s helplessness often seems to negate literary character development, leaving her a simple romantic trope that happens to accommodate Spenser’s allegory. Una seems that way until her interaction with other dramatis personae is considered. The careful reader notices that Una does not speak to many of the characters she encounters, or that the few times she does, the narrator mediates her conversation. Una’s reticence is hugely significant when one remembers that she represents the Word.

In the first canto Una speaks to Redcrosse directly, though he discards her advice about entering into Errour’s den (I.i.14). After being separated from Redcrosse, Una calls to Abessa in canto iii, who is deaf to her pleas (iii.11). The



girl's deafness signals the reader that the allegory is once again operating on multiple levels. Abessa, representing the Catholic adherent who removes herself from the secular world, is incapable of hearing Christian truth. Una does not even try to speak with Abessa's mother Corceca, or the thief Kirkapine. Later in the woods Una finds herself among "The wyld woodgods" (vi.9), inhabitants of the classical, pre-Christian world. With the forest creatures, Una initially has "Ne word to speake" (vi.11), but eventually relents. The narrator relates how the maid tries to explain her nature to them, imparting "Trew sacred lore, which from her sweet lips did rebound" (vi.30). Despite their adoration of Una, the woodland inhabitants are unable to understand the Word.

Finally, in Canto viii Una meets Prince Arthur, and is able to converse freely with him, supporting English Reform propaganda that proclaims the monarchy as the protector of Christian truth. From this point on, Una is more active in the narrative – or at least chattier – freely speaking with Arthur and Redcrosse. During these exchanges, Una's conversation (which is no longer mediated by the narrator) is unrestrained, now that she is among those who will listen. Her manner of speech is exemplified in the encounter with "that cursed man" Despaire (ix.35). Redcrosse's conversation with the monster continues through fourteen stanzas, culminating in stanza 42 where the knight's voice is indistinguishable from Despaire's. Una is silent throughout the confrontation, until Redcrosse "At last resolu'd to worke his finall smart" (ix.51) with an upraised dagger. The maid "snatcht the cursed knife" (ix.52), and in remarkably

concise terms upbraids her knight: “In heavenly mercies hast thou not a part? / Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen art? / Where iustice growes, there grows eke greter grace” (ix.53). Instead of again letting Redcrosse determine his own actions (as in the confrontation with Error), Una prevents the knight from harming himself. Her rhetoric, as befitting the Word, is simple and direct, reminding Redcrosse of the Protestant tenet of predetermination, and his status as one of the elect. She also recalls a founding Christian assumption, reassuring Redcrosse that the New Covenant (“greter grace”) has taken the place of the Old one (“iustice”). Una refers to the Old and New Testaments – in Christian ideology, the Old Testament is understood as documenting God’s inviolable law, whereas the New Testament tempers the Old with divine mercy.

Interestingly, the other character that can get Una talking is Archimago, an allegorical representation of the pope. He always does so under false pretenses, as in Canto iii where he disguises himself as Redcrosse. The enchanter enjoys Una’s conversation until his fraud is discovered, and when Archimago is revealed Una immediately falls silent, “Amased stands, her selfe so mockt to see” (iii.40). The enchanter’s deception is offensive because in pretending to bear the Pauline armour of the true Christian, he assumes an intimacy with Una that is reserved only for Redcrosse or, to step away from the allegory, the pope usurps the privilege of hearing the Word which is properly meant for everyone. Archimago converses with Una again in Canto vi as a false pilgrim, then tries one last time in Canto xii, appearing as a messenger. By this time, however, Una will not speak

directly to him, and exposes the enchanter's duplicity. Nor will she speak to Duessa – when they finally meet in Canto viii, Una refuses to engage with her rival, only commanding Arthur and Redcrosse to “spoil her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly” (viii.45). The reader notices that in these passages Una always carries herself with absolute authority. Una's character is not so much developed as it is revealed through a slow process that takes place all the way through Book I. Her slow unveiling – which finally happens at the end of Canto xii – mimics Spenser's concept of Christian truth as being ever present and faithful to the adherent, but not immediately appreciated.

Although Una is always willing to speak to Redcrosse, for most of the Legend he is unable to truly hear her. Redcrosse's postlapsarian intellect is unable to discern truth, and left to his own devices he continually confuses signifiers, much to his own detriment. As Waters points out, “There can be no doubt that despair in the narrative results from Red Crosse's turning from the virgin Una to the strumpet Duessa” (100). In choosing Duessa over Una, or Catholicism over Protestantism, Redcrosse is alienated from Christian truth. In his alienated state he is unable to function in a socially responsible manner, which will ultimately lead to the destruction of his selfhood. The erosion of Redcrosse's selfhood is a continual process, but Spenser is precise about the moment it finally collapses; it happens in the second stanza of Canto vii, where “To reste him selfe” the wayward knight removes the “yron-coted Plate” Una gave him (I.vii.2). Through Book I, the armour has defined Redcrosse's identity in both a literal and a figural

sense, as a knight, but more significantly as a Christian. Finding Redcrosse so disarmed horrifies the reader as the Pauline armour Una equipped her champion with is rendered into an empty signifier, easily cast aside by the misguided knight, who at this point cannot fully appreciate its meaning.

Redcrosse needs Una's council and guidance to properly function in the material world, as she is the Word as manifest in the individual, made possible through the Incarnation. In the words of Evans, "Una is Spenser's symbol of right-reason, the channel of grace, the spark of divinity remaining in Everyman even after the Fall" (92). She is the internalized mediator between the individual and God, the unified Sign, necessary for the Christian to navigate postlapsarian existence and develop a fully autonomous selfhood. As Bergvall says, "All through the poem Spenser has warned the reader that in a fallen world many signs are not what they *seem*. The divine Word, however, exposes false significations and establishes interpretative bearings" ("Signs" 36). As Christian truth, Una directs Redcrosse's interaction with the world, exposing false signifiers like Duessa and Archimago and leading him to Christian selfhood. The relationship between knight and maiden is also imitative of the reader's with the poem: the text of *The Faerie Queene* acts as Una to the reader's Redcrosse, revealed once we have gone through the same pedagogic processes.

## V. Conclusion

After Redcrosse is rescued by Prince Arthur, he goes on to slay the dragon and free the kingdom ruled by Una's parents. As in any respectable chivalric romance, after fulfilling his civic duty the knight is betrothed to the princess, which according to Padelford poetically expresses "the union of England and true religion" (57). He goes on to declare that "England has achieved her divine mission of discovering the truth and is henceforth to be its defender" (Padelford 57). In *The Faerie Queene*, the national attainment of Christian Truth is allegorically presented as a stirring victory for Protestant Reformers, which could only be accomplished through the relationship between Redcrosse, Arthur, and Una, representing people, state, and church. In the words of MacCaffrey, "Art not only embodies our dreams, it directs our dreaming" (3). Spenser crafts his chivalric literary emblem to further the vision of a unified England, offering the reader an entire politically-oriented ideology contained within a single image, thereby framing the nationalist dreams of early modern England in an immediately accessible literary language. Spenser's emblem includes within it the promise of its continuity, along with the excitement of accomplishing a quest generations in the making. As Wall has pointed out, "Spenser's fictional world is thus never an end in itself, but always a means to a larger end" (161). The grand purpose of *The Faerie Queene* for the poet's contemporary readers is a unified, autonomous nation in which the commonwealth and the monarchy are bound through Protestant Christian Truth. It is a huge enterprise, and Spenser's epic-

scaled endeavour begins intimately, with each reader. Spenser's concept of a unified nation is born in the individual.

The English Protestant model of selfhood is the foundation of Spenser's nationalist model, and is dependent on Christian Truth for validity. As discussed above, Una, as Truth, "holds the sign together, vouching for its epistemological validity" (Bergvall "Signs" 31). Without Una, or Christian Truth, the individual's sense of self is an empty metaphor, meaningless *verbum* divorced from divine *res*. Fractured from Christian truth, the individual is left prone to alienation, subjugation from hostile forces, and helplessly trapped in a dungeon of self-centered pride. Through following along with the Redcrosse Knight on his quest to attain Christian selfhood, the reader comes to realize that holiness "is not a mere yearning for other-worldly perfection but a commitment to what is most ennobling in human history" (O'Connell 41). Protestant morality is grounded in the everyday, directed towards the greater community now and on earth. As Slights points out, "The individual conscience is formed in strenuous negotiation with its social context and in turn governs social action" (244). That is especially true in Spenser's model, where individual selfhood is inseparable from the culture that forms it, just as the individual is called upon to be an active agent in helping to define the society he or she exists in. The Christianity presented in Spenser's epic obliges its adherents to invest themselves in their society in ways that are beneficial to the whole, and as such "*The Faerie Queene* is not a static depiction

of a fictional world, but a didactic poem intended to move its readers toward active participation in that process of transformation” (Wall 162).

The chivalric trappings of Spenser’s poem, at first, deceive the reader, creating a “cloudy grove” in which the poem seems far away from the reality of the world. By the end of “The Legend of Holinesse,” having achieved clarity along with Redcrosse, the reader realizes that the journey has led from cloudy, fictitious ideologies and immature self-absorption to a concept of the self centered in Christian truth. What initially seems like an elevated spirituality removed from everyday life is revealed to be intrinsic to it, and “Holiness in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* is not a virtue but a state of being” (Weiner 50). For Spenser, civic responsibility is an extension of holiness, formed through the rigorous pursuit of Christian truth that will, in turn, create the foundation for lasting social peace.

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