

Spenser's Lacanian Assault on the Classical Hero

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Abstract:

In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser states that the thesis of *The Faerie Queene* was to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.” As Stephen Greenblatt observes, the fashioning of the self was not unique to the Renaissance, but the practice had undergone a significant reduction in its autonomy. The firmly entrenched institutions of church, family, and crown now played a more significant role in self-fashioning than they were able to do so in the past. However, Greenblatt invokes the Newtonian principle, “for each and every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” The assault on the autonomy of self-fashioning during the Renaissance is the observable effect of the newfound importance of autonomous self-fashioning.

The focus of my research is on the role of the Renaissance hero in self-fashioning. As Greenblatt notes, “self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile.” The classical hero represents autonomous self-fashioning entirely apart from the influences of church, crown, and family in favor of the hero's divine origin. For that reason, I argue that it is not those social forces but the classical hero who is continuously under assault in the work of Spenser. As Greenblatt claims, “When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place.” In the vanquishing of the classical hero, there is the birth of the Renaissance hero. In Spenser's epic, the vanquishing of the classical hero and the birth of the Renaissance hero is best demonstrated by Redcrosse Knight's Lacanian mirror stage. The events in Book I present Redcrosse Knight with gestalt images of his virtue, faith (as well as its opposite), that are “more constituent than constituted.” In response to those appearances, Redcrosse Knight fashions a Lacanian *imago* that shows the world the gentle deeds by which his gentle mind is known.

Key Words:

Spenser, Renaissance, Heroism, Lacan, and Mirror-Stage.

In a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser states that the thesis of *The Faerie Queene* is to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.”ⁱ Stephen Greenblatt rightly observes that the fashioning of the self was not a new idea during the period of the Renaissance. However, the fashioning of the self during the Renaissance commands the attention of literary scholars for a number of significant reasons. One important reason Greenblatt articulates is that the notion of self-fashioning was a less autonomous one during the Renaissance.ⁱⁱ To fashion oneself was not a process borne exclusively out of one’s own volition. According to Greenblatt, the firmly entrenched institutions of church, family, and crown played a more significant role in self-fashioning than they were able to do so in the past.

I find it remarkable that Spenser would declare the thesis of his epic, the guiding principle of what was perhaps the defining epic of his era, to be something that lacks the autonomy of an earlier time. Is Spenser’s most ambitious work a failure? Does *The Faerie Queene* fail to argue its own thesis? When commenting on the work, should critics begin with “Spenser did not succeed in fashioning a gentlemen in virtuous and gentle discipline, but . . .”?

Spenser may not really be in such dire straits. In fact, Spenser ought to be proud of his contribution to self-fashioning because it is really the case that during Renaissance, self-fashioning receives a newfound importance. Greenblatt invokes the Newtonian principle: for each and every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, “If we say that there is a new stress on the executive power of the will, we must say that there is the most sustained and relentless assault upon the will; if we say there is a new social mobility, we must say that there is a new assertion of power by both family and state to determine all movement within the society.”ⁱⁱⁱ I contend that Spenser’s work in *The Faerie Queene* is no failure at all; rather, it exists as a forceful retaliation against the seemingly overwhelming assault on the autonomy of self-fashioning.

The assault on the autonomy of self-fashioning may very well be a holdover from the Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages. For example, Augustine proclaims, “Try to build up yourself, and you build a ruin.”^{iv} William Manchester contextualizes this quote. He claims that before his conversion, Augustine explored “the outer limits of carnal depravity,” but his mature, Christian position was that this original exploration of carnal instincts—Adam’s indulgence of Eve’s temptations—was the *original sin*, and that all of humanity necessarily shares in Adam’s guilt.^v The “building up yourself,” carnal or otherwise, implies an imitation of *original sin*. Manchester even escalates the issue when he says the portrait of the Middle Ages would include “an almost impenetrable mindlessness.”^{vi} This “impenetrable mindlessness” may very well represent a rejection of autonomous self-fashioning. It rejects that the fashioning of the self is anything independent and “manipulable.” If the autonomy of self-fashioning of the Renaissance was under assault, then the autonomy of self-fashioning during the Middle Ages might as well be considered a casualty. If the Renaissance is indeed a revival or a rediscovery of anything, then it is a rediscovery of autonomous self-fashioning as much as it is a rediscovery or revival of the classical tradition.

Greenblatt might not make this point specifically, but he does note that “the verb *fashion*. . . does not occur at all in Chaucer’s poetry.”^{vii} The verb, *fashion*, first receives its newfound significance as a forming of the self in the Sixteenth Century.^{viii} Greenblatt might not go to the extreme and claim the new form of self-fashioning found in Renaissance works, such as those of Spenser, is a retaliation against the Christian philosophy and “impenetrable mindlessness” of the Middle Ages, but perhaps there are two opposing forces at work in the Renaissance: those of tradition that find expression in church, crown, and family and those of self-fashioning that find their best expression in poetry.

I want to be clear that my argument is not limited to attitudes toward sensate pleasure. Attitudes toward pleasures of the body do receive significant attention in the work of Spenser, and by extension, in the work of Greenblatt. I recognize the importance of this subject in assessing the Renaissance conception of self-fashioning, and it is not my intention to ignore it. Rather, it is my intention to build on this work by analyzing another virtue at the heart of Renaissance self-fashioning: the faith or *true Holinesse* of Redcrosse Knight.

The focus of my research is on the Renaissance hero. As Greenblatt notes, “self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile.”^{ix} Traditional pillars of Renaissance culture—church, family, and crown—immediately present themselves as alien, strange, or hostile to self-fashioning. However, the forces of tradition allegedly attacking autonomous self-fashioning during the Renaissance are not strange or alien at all to Renaissance authors.

Renaissance authors, including Spenser, state that their work very much so aligns with the interests of church, crown, and family. The dedication of *The Faerie Queene* in particular stands out as a way of honoring the crown. This phenomenon is not unique to Spenser. Why else would Milton aim to “justify the ways of God to men”?^x As Spenser honors the crown, Milton honors the church. If anything, Renaissance authors arguably have more interest in supporting the forces of church, crown, and family than opposing them. What Renaissance authors aim to show, and Spenser in particular, is that embracing the virtues of church, crown, and family can be done independently of the pressures applied by those institutions.

The proper “alien, strange, or hostile” force to Renaissance authors is really the classical hero. The classical hero represents autonomous self-fashioning entirely apart from the influences of church, crown, and family. For this reason, I argue that the classical hero is continuously under assault in the Renaissance, especially in the work of Spenser. Spenser’s relationship to the classical tradition harbors a sense of appreciation as much as it does a sense of anxiety.^{xi} Spenser appreciates the aesthetic of the classical tradition, like many Renaissance poets, he recognizes that elements of the classical

tradition constitute the alphabet and letters of epic poetry as notes and rhythms form the foundation of Western music. Spenser arguably recoils not only from how his teachers exerted the authority of the classical tradition in his day-to-day existence as student but also from a perceived poetic tyranny that demanded references to the classical tradition be done in a standardized way.

Greenblatt claims, “When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place.”^{xii} In the vanquishing of the classical hero, there is the birth of the Renaissance hero. No Renaissance author developed heroes more unique to the period, and, by extension, more in conflict with the values of the classical heroes than Spenser. It is for this reason that my research focuses on his work rather than that of other authors.

How do Spenser’s heroes take a different shape from those heroes of antiquity? Michael West argues that while Spenser sees himself drafting an epic in the tradition of Homer and Virgil, Spenser’s epic does not begin with a “quarrel” between heroes. Spenser’s epic begins with “a Gentle Knight. . .pricking on the plaine.”^{xiii} According to West, Spenser’s use of the word, *gentle*, is ambiguous (1014).^{xiv} Spenser’s use of the word *gentle* can refer to either the “well-born,” those who possess an aristocratic ancestry, or to the “gentle deed” that is most revealing of noble lineage. In other words, Spenser’s idea of the gentle crosses the boundaries between body and soul or lineage and merit. This is worth mentioning because it is usually through divine lineage that a classical poet identifies a classical hero. One does not have to search long to discover the relationships between Achilles and Thetis, Odysseus and Anticlea, Aeneas and Venus. Classical heroes are heroes by virtue of divine origin. For Spenser even to introduce the idea that a hero’s identity is at least partially constructed by a hero’s deeds sets his heroes apart from those of the classical tradition. A more radical reading of Spenser states that it is the gentle deed through which that gentle lineage is known. Spenser claims that:

The gentle minde by gentle deeds is knowne:
For a man by nothing is so well bewrayd,
As by his manners, in which plaine is showne
Of what degree and what race he is growne^{xv}

Much that can be said about how the quoted passage from Book VI weighs on Spenser’s answer to the Great Renaissance Question of the value of action versus contemplation. Note that Spenser claims that the “gentle minde” is known by performing the work of “gentle deeds.” I will not take the time here to discuss a question of ontological priority of the gentle minde versus the gentle deed. What is worth mentioning is how this question of ontological priority relates to Spenser’s anxieties concerning error. If the message of the first canto of Book I is indeed to beware of error, then the epistemological priority of *knowing* the gentle mind by way of the gentle deed is likely far more important to Spenser than the ontological priority of *being* a gentle mind capable of performing gentle deeds. Knowledge exists as a bulwark against error. However, this introductory argument on courtesy blasts the origin of the classical hero into oblivion. Spenser will not accept that any hero can be *known* to be a hero without having *performed* the *work* of heroic deeds. This line of thought that finds verbal expression in Book VI is at work in even the earliest chapters of Book I. Redcrosse Knight is revealed in Book I as a knight of a humble origin. He is:

cladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloody field;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield^{xvi}

A knight of such humble origins would most certainly be surprised to learn from the wise Contemplation that he is “*Saint George* of mery England, the signe of victoree.”^{xvii} In fact, that same knight of humble origins directly questions Contemplation about his lineage.^{xviii} Contemplation knows far more than Redcrosse Knight initially suspects, and he enlightens Redcrosse Knight concerning the origins of his Saxon royalty, those who have earned their glory with both the sword and the plow.^{xix} At every point in the dialogue between Redcrosse Knight and Contemplation, the message is most certainly two-fold, Redcrosse Knight has a humble appearance and gentle lineage, but a gentle lineage is something achieved through battle and hard work, even if that hard work reaches back to previous generations. Once again, I repeat, Spenser blasts the origins of the classical hero into oblivion. He respects the aesthetics of the classical tradition without accepting the morality of the classical tradition. To merely be “born-well” is not to be “born-well.” It is through gentle deeds that one’s noble lineage is discovered.

It is Achilles’s destiny to choose between *kleos* and *nostos*, as the son of Thetis, he is always in possession of the fury to achieve such glory. It is Aeneas’s destiny to found Rome, and his lineage to Venus necessitates that his successors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty become the world’s leaders. However, while it might be Redcrosse’s Knight’s mission to slay the dragon, it is not a given that he will succeed. After reuniting with Una, Redcrosse Knight’s weakness is perceived by the fair lady.

But she now weighing the decayed plight,
 And shrunken synewes of her chosen knight,
 Would not a while her forward course pursew,
 Ne bring him forth in face of dreadfull fight,
 Till he recouered had his former hew:
 For him to be yet weake and wearie well she knew^{xx}

Achilles does not have to train to fight Hector after forgoing combat for some time. Odysseus does not spend time healing after his journey home before he slays the suitors. The heroes of antiquity take no time to rest or train. They are always capable of answering the call of destiny. However, Una's remarks imply that if Redcrosse Knight were to immediately face the dragon, he would fail. He cannot completely achieve his destiny without resting at the House of Holinesse. At the level of narrative, Renaissance heroes cannot simply assume their destiny. Renaissance heroes must work to achieve their destiny.^{xxi} While on the one hand this is read as a simple statement on the value of doing good deeds, there is also a subtle point to be made about learning. Just as deeds take time to be performed, to reference Aristotle, "For one swallow does not make a summer."^{xxii} The fashioning of one's identity takes place over some time through a number of learning experiences.

The House of Holinesse is the *last* place Redcrosse Knight can experience the revelation of who he is. However, learning his true identity was just one piece of knowledge to be gained there. At the House of Holiness, Redcrosse Knight learns "celestiall discipline"^{xxiii} through bitter Penance's iron whip, sharp Remorse's pricking of his heart, and sad Repentance's salty bath. These ordeals heal his corrupted soul.^{xxiv} These lessons are critical to Redcrosse Knight's ability to overcome the dragon, but the more important training for his mission of slaying the dragon occurs all throughout Book I. Redcrosse Knight's journey to the House of Holinesse is an extended one, and that adventure was not just a wild-goose chase.^{xxv} Understanding the events of Book I through the georgic lenses of training, working, and earning one's keep is the key not only to understanding Book I, but also Spenser's concept of autonomous self-fashioning.

As Lacan notes in his essay, "we have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image."^{xxvi} For Redcrosse Knight, the events of Book I are an extended mirror stage. Redcrosse Knight assumes an image. In Book I, Redcrosse Knight perceives a gestalt image of faith. However, Redcrosse Knight does not perceive this in a mirror image of himself, he first perceives this in Una.^{xxvii} Una possesses the gestalt of faith that for Redcrosse Knight, Lacan might call "more constituent than constituted."^{xxviii} Redcrosse Knight cannot immediately perceive this and know what it is. This poses no problem for Lacanian psychoanalysis. The infant who perceives her own image in the mirror does not necessarily know what she perceives at that moment. If Redcrosse knight cannot immediately perceive Una's faithful love for him, then that does not necessarily prohibit his perception of her virtue from serving as an eventual *a-ha Erlebnis*.

Redcrosse Knight is Spenser's Knight of Faith, but he is not *always* the best representative of the virtue, nor should he be. While it may be true that Redcrosse Knight has figured out his faith in God, he "fails" the first true test of his faith in others. He doubts Una's chastity and parts ways with her.

Her doubtfull words made that redoubted knight
 Suspect her truth: yet since no'vntruth he knew,
 Her fawning love with foule disdaineful spight^{xxix}

Given that "no'vntruth he knew," Spenser may very well be articulating the message that faith is not something that one has by nature. Faith is something that Redcrosse Knight must develop throughout his adventure in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. To confirm this point, Spenser makes a curious point in the form of foreshadowing: "But he the knight, whose semblaunt he did beare,/The true *Saint George* was wandred far away."^{xxx} In the previous stanza, Spenser notes that it is now the perfect time for Archimago to don the disguise "of that good knight, his late beguiled guest."^{xxxi} Knowing that Redcrosse Knight's true identity is Saint George, and if Redcrosse Knight's departure from Una is a move away from perfect faith, then it might be argued that Spenser is trying to show his audience that Redcrosse Knight's departure from Una is a departure from his faithful self who has now wandered far away. Archimago might leave the battlefield of the Monster Error bearing resemblance to the true Saint George, but Lacanian psychoanalytic theory argues that Spenser also means to say that Redcrosse Knight's true self, the Knight of Faith, leaves the battlefield of the Monster Error as well when he parts ways with Una. Now that he is separated from Una, Redcrosse Knight's learning experience has begun. He is now separated from truth, and he is about to learn "vntruth."^{xxxii}

While he is parted from Una, Redcrosse Knight is accompanied by what is alien to him, the faithless. The faithless are represented in part by the false Duessa, Fidessa, and by Redcrosse Knight's next enemy, "a faithlesse Sarazin," *Sans foy*. Fidessa joins Redcrosse Knight as result of this conflict. This is a moment in which Redcrosse Knight undergoes a significant form of Lacanian self-fashioning. He vanquishes something alien, strange, and hostile, "a faithlesse Sarazin." The result of that vanquishing is a two-fold expression of ideal faith. The destruction of what contradicts faith is obvious, but the positive act of faith Redcrosse Knight offers Fidessa is less obvious.

Lacan claims that a gestalt can have formative effects on the I regardless of whether or not it coheres with or contradictory to the identity of the Ideal-I.^{xxxiii} This is the point of his pigeon example. According to Lacan's biological experiments, the gonad in a female pigeon matures if it sees another member of its species, and Lacan claims that perceiving either sex is sufficient for this maturation.^{xxxiv} In the case of Redcrosse Knight, his vanquishing of the "faithlesse Sarazin" functions as a constituting perception of the opposite. The vanquishing of the "faithlesse Sarazin" is that a physical change that exerts a formative effect on the psyche of Redcrosse Knight. Perhaps this is why Redcrosse Knight is not suspicious of the false Duessa as he was earlier of Una. He takes the "seeming simple maid" on his quest and assures her of safety.^{xxxv} By doing this gentle deed, Redcrosse Knight makes his gentle minde known to the audience. Yes, it is a tough pill to swallow that the first action of faithfulness Redcrosse Knight performs in Spenser's epic for another is to take the false Duessa, Fidessa as a travelling companion. One could even imagine such a sensitive poet as Spenser tearing up as he writes such a verse. However, more importantly, Redcrosse Knight could not have done this, performed this act of faithfulness, without first vanquishing the appearance of faithlessness embodied in the faithless Sarazin. After all, it is gentle deeds by which the gentle mind is known.

Redcrosse Knight seemingly battles to demonstrate this virtue of faithfulness throughout Book I. The adventure with the false Duessa, Fidessa, very well shows Redcrosse Knight's ability to have faith in others. In Book I's seventh canto, Spenser sings of a "gentle knight . . . lying downe vpon the sandie graile."^{xxxvi} Of course, this is the moment that Redcrosse Knight and his current lady, the false Duessa, Fidessa, "Poured out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd."^{xxxvii} Some might want to call this out as a breach of chastity, but under the virtue of faithfulness, Redcrosse Knight is being faithful to his faithless traveling companion. He is trying to be the best knight he can possibility be to the False Duessa, Fidessa. If Spenser has any point to make here it is that it is not Redcrosse Knight who is in the wrong here. It is the false Duessa, Fidessa, who pulls rank and becomes Orgolio's new *Leman*, the Geaunt's new mistress. As recited by Spenser:

So willingly she (the false Duessa, Fidessa) came into his armes,
Who her as willing to grace did take,
And was possessed of his new found make.^{xxxviii}

I find it fascinating, that Spenser, a poet so sensitive and expressive of the thoughts and feelings of his characters, does not at this moment deliver the thoughts and feelings of Redcrosse Knight to his audience. Imagine the immense and assault of faithlessness on faith that must be taking place in the mind of Redcrosse Knight. In this moment, Redcrosse Knight realizes the truth of his Lacanian misrecognition. He has spurned his true companion, Una, in favor of the false Duessa, Fidessa. To repay Redcrosse Knight's faithfulness, Duessa offers him the exact opposite. At the first moment of adversity (though it was likely planned all along), the false Duessa, Fidessa, abandons Redcrosse Knight for another. Maybe she was bargaining for his life. However, was it the life of Redcrosse Knight that was important to her, or was it the gold and purple robe and the triple crown that she was really after?^{xxxix} If faithfulness is something done in the service of others, and if faithlessness is to further one's own self-interest, then the answer is clear. The false Duessa, Fidessa, was more interested in delivering a prisoner to the Geaunt, Orgoglio, to secure the mere appearance of royalty.

Even after revealing the false Duessa's prize for selling-out to Orgoglio, Spenser still does not make the thoughts of Redcrosse Knight known to his audience. He attempts to advance the plot by sending the dwarf to Una to recapitulate the story of Redcrosse Knight's captivity.^{xl xli} I mention this, because at the conclusion of the report, Spenser so naturally discloses to us the thoughts and feelings of Una. Upon hearing the tale, the faire lady, Una, "strove to maister sorrowfull assay. . ./she did love the knight of the Redcrosse; For whose deare sake so many troubles her did tosse."^{xlii}

If Spenser can so easily reveal the thoughts and feelings of Una, if Spenser can so easily show the audience how dearly Una loves Redcrosse Knight, then why does he choose not to disclose to the audience Redcrosse Knight's feelings for Fidessa as she betrays him? The brief speculation I can offer is that doing so would have done violence to fashioning the virtue of faith. Spenser wants Redcrosse Knight and Una to love each other. If he reveals to us how deeply Redcrosse Knight fell for Fidessa, how much he maligns her betrayal, then he very well may have thwarted the audience's confidence in the necessity of Redcrosse Knight and Una being joined together through their common virtue, faith.^{xliii xliiv} If there is any logical message here, then it is that faith and faith deserve to be together, not faith and faithlessness. The relationship between faith and faithlessness, Redcrosse Knight and Fidessa, was doomed to fail.^{xlv}

I dwell on Redcrosse Knight's relationship with Fidessa because it stands out as that moment of learning that provides Redcrosse Knight with that which he needed to learn. Recall from the first canto, "no'vntruth he knew." The betrayal by Fidessa is that "vntruth" Redcrosse Knight must learn before he can grow. It is the worldly experience he must acquire before he can become his true, faithful self. The Redcrosse Knight Spenser introduces, the Gentle Knight "pricking on the plaine," is stuck in the first Lacanian developmental phase. There is only faith to Redcrosse Knight at that point. He is not yet capable of making the distinction between faith and faithlessness. At the moment, I do not yet want to say whether it is the departure from Una or the betrayal by Fidessa that completes Redcrosse Knight's move into the next Lacanian developmental stage, the mirror stage (they may each represent a kind of movement within Lacan's second stage), but clearly, it is Redcrosse Knight's encounter with Contemplation that pushes him to the final stage, *le*

grande Autre. It is only after that conversation that Redcrosse Knight can articulate the relationship of faith to other virtues and virtue's standing in the world.

The last Lacanian item worth discussing is Redcrosse Knight's relationship to the ideal-I and the *imago*. These are hangover items relevant to the mirror stage as formative of the I function. They also have some bearing on Spenser's idea that it is through gentle deeds by which the gentle minde is known. Much of this paper has been about how Redcrosse Knight needed a learning experience to mature and grow and about how that should not besmirch his representation of faith. While his faithfulness is not 'perfect,' meaning consistently demonstrated in each and every action, his faithfulness is perfect in its developing maturity and gradual self-fashioning. To a certain extent, Redcrosse Knight is "born well" meaning he is born faithful. I say this because he is always prepared to hand Prince Arthur that "worke of wondrous grace, and hable soules to saue."^{xlvi} He always possesses faith in its abstract form, a kind of ideal-I. What he had to learn was how to demonstrate faith in service to others. To show a face to others, to don a Lacanian *imago*, is a developed behavior. It is something that can only be done with success after an individual can articulate concepts and desires constitutive of one's own identity and its opposite.

While the focus of this essay has undoubtedly been on Redcrosse Knight's battle with faithlessness as a constituent of his literary mirror stage in the act of self-fashioning, there is plenty left to say about Una's impact on Redcrosse Knight. While the false Duessa, Fidessa and the faithlesse Sarazin stand out of faithlessness incarnate, Una stands out as faith incarnate. One could argue that without Una, Redcrosse Knight could not withstand his upcoming encounter with Despayre. While that moment is equally deserving of a self-fashioning analysis it would be better placed in an essay that focuses on Una's representation of faith and her contributions to the romance. I have already alluded to the importance of the transparency in which Spenser treats Una's thoughts, and the complexity of that literary phenomenon cannot be fully developed here.

Not all of Spenser's heroes are homogenous; some may very well exhibit a greater debt to the heroes of the classical tradition than Redcrosse Knight. However, from the arguments made in this essay, it is easy to see both Spenser's appreciation for and rage against the heroes of the classical tradition. Spenser may say that there is something attractive about the conception of gentle lineage developed by the authors of Antiquity as divine origin, but he is not at all comfortable with the idea of our 'fates' or our 'selves' as destined and determined by blood rather than by deeds. This also weighs on Spenser's Protestantism/Calvinism. *The Faerie Queene* fashions core values of that faith, but not slavishly. Spenser is a poet whose ideas, both aesthetic and allegorical, are as sensitive and meticulous as his poetry. For every question that this essay has attempted to answer regarding Spenser's relationship to the heroes of the Antiquity and the classical tradition, it has prompted even more questions about Spenser's relationship to both the classical and his own time. How are critics to weigh Spenser's fierce independence against his dynastic appreciation?

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ⁱ Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (New York: Routledge, 2013), 713.

ⁱⁱ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* 2.

^{iv} Augustine, "Sermon 169," quoted in Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 30.

^v William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999), 9.

^{vi} *Ibid.* 3.

^{vii} Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2.

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} *Ibid.* 9.

^x John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Matthew Stallard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), I. 26.

^{xi} I make this comment because of the extra-aesthetic features of classical tradition. Spenser's school, following the classical tradition, ordered a "grueling timetable...and even specified where they should pee." Colin Burrow, "Spenser and classical traditions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). 217-236.

^{xii} Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9.

^{xiii} Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (New York: Routledge, 2013), I.i.1.

^{xiv} Michael West, "Spenser and the Renaissance Ideal of Christian Heroism." *PMLA* 88, no. 5 (1973): 1014.

^{xv} Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, VI.iii.1.

^{xvi} *Ibid.* I.i.1.

^{xvii} *Ibid.* I.x.61.

^{xviii} *Ibid.* I.x.64.

^{xix} *Ibid.* I.x.65-66.

^{xx} *Ibid.* I.ix.20.

^{xxi} This point can also be made about a variety of Georgic heroes in Renaissance literature. As Low argues, Milton's Satan, representing the classical hero, aims to win his glory. However, Milton's Messiah aims to earn his glory, valuing "consistency, perseverance, and hard work over a period of time (Anthony Low, "Milton, *Paradise Regained*, and Georgic." *PMLA* 98, no. 2 (1983): 161-162)." By training and healing at the House of Holiness, one might argue that Redcrosse Knight is working to earn his glory.

^{xxii} Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library Classics), 1098a.

^{xxiii} Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.x.18.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.* I.x.25-27.

^{xxv} Note that Redcrosse Knight and Una are separated at the end of first canto. Spenser does not reunite the couple again until the eighth canto. While faerie land may not be the physical world of space and time that is planet Earth, Spenser does not indicate that these

events are all happening in a matter of hours. Travelling by horse and fighting a number of wandering sarazins does not seem to be expedient business.

^{xxvi} Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 2.

^{xxvii} Lacan's mirror stage need not be understood as a literal viewing of oneself in a mirror. Nor does the gestalt have to be exactly what one sees in oneself. Lacan claims that the gestalt of the mirror stage "symbolizes" the persistence of the I and "at the same time as it prefigures its alien destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 2.)."

^{xxviii} *Ibid.* 2.

^{xxix} Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.i.53.

^{xxx} *Ibid.* I.ii.12.

^{xxxi} *Ibid.* I.ii.11.

^{xxxii} Spenser's work is surprisingly favorable to structuralist binaries. To open the next canto, Spenser informs his audience that his sensitive eyes weep for Una. It grieves him to imagine that one "though true as touch, though daughter of a king . . . is from her knight divorced in despair (Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.2)." I will forego the opportunity to analyze Una's opposite, Redcrosse's Knight's current travelling companion, the false Duessa. Her name alone speaks volumes on this point.

^{xxxiii} Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 3.

^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxxv} *Ibid.* I.ii.27.

^{xxxvi} *Ibid.* I.vii.6.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.* I.vii.7.

^{xxxviii} *Ibid.* I.vii.15.

^{xxxix} *Ibid.* I.vii.16.

^{xl} *Ibid.* I.vii.26

^{xli} Perhaps it is tangential to the topic, but it is worth pointing out that this kind of effort to move the plot is a way of stating that there are no accidents in Faerie Land. Una and Arthur just could not stumble upon Redcrosse Knight. To perform the gentle deed of his rescue, they would have to intended to do so. I mention this because it again sets Spenser against antiquity, he will not allow fate to fashion a hero.

^{xlii} *Ibid.* I.vii.27

^{xliii} Applying a good bit of Aristotelianism to Spenser's work is never a bad idea. The love/friendship/*philia* between Una and Redcrosse Knight is most certainly driven by a likeness in character or virtue. It is not mere *eros* or sexual attraction that brings them together.

^{xliv} There is also a textual-historico argument to be made here. The canto is littered with storm allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Spenser may also be sending a message that just as it is Lavinia, not Dido, who is proper match for Aeneas, it is Una, not Fidessa, who is the proper match for Redcrosse Knight.

^{xlv} Maybe a good bit of Calvinism could explain this. Is the relationship between Redcrosse Knight and Fidessa only held over the fiery pit of hell by the hand of God for so long before it must be cast into the fire?

^{xlvi} *Ibid.* I.ix.19.

Biography:

Vincent Mennella's earliest research interests in philosophy and humanities focused on the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant and the pragmatism of Richard Rorty. Upon completing his first course of graduate study at the University of Chicago in 2012 (MA, Philosophy and Humanities), he fully embraced Rorty's claim that philosophy is a *transitional* genre. To begin this transition, he began studies in English and literature at Sam Houston State University in 2015. His current research interests focus on the concept of self-fashioning in epic literature. Vincent Mennella is currently a professor of philosophy and humanities at Lone Star College and a professor of English at San Jacinto College.