

ABSTRACT

COLLE, RACHEL. Re-Presenting “The Legende of Holinesse”: An Explication of *The Faerie Queene* I.12. (Under the direction of M. Thomas Hester.)

Book I, Canto XII of the *Faerie Queene* may be read as a microcosm of Redcrosse knight’s entire journey. Spenser’s idea that mankind is too weak to do good, ready to err, and will only escape the grasps of Satan through Grace has been the major theme of the action of the previous cantos; the lesson is reinforced by a re-presentation as the conclusion of the poem. Canto XII comprises four thematic sections defined by events that recall the stages of Redcrosse’s journey of error. In the first, Redcrosse proves to still be infected by pride as he allows his errors to remain hidden from King Adam. Redcrosse is accused of these errors in the second section and acknowledges them in the third division. In the concluding section Una’s love frees Redcrosse of the consequences of these errors. Each section corresponds to the progression of Redcrosse’s adventures in the previous eleven cantos, the four divisions therein repeating the central theme of Spenser’s pedagogical portrait: man has need of a lesson in “Holinesse” because of his natural proclivity to error.

The king of Eden is the audience for Spenser’s re-presentation because, as the progenitor of the human race, Adam needs to read the tale of Redcrosse and see that the nature of man is to err again and again. Not only does the king watch Redcrosse repeat his error, the king himself errs. Even after the destruction of the dragon, Redcrosse cannot conquer his own willful flaws and even in (earthly) Eden, the king cannot discern the deceptions of Archimago and Duessa. Only Una’s plain speech and sincere love can undo these deceptions and bring forgiveness to Redcrosse, preventing him from receiving the just consequences of his errors. Thus Spenser concludes his Legende of Holiness with a potent microcosmic picture of man: doomed to perpetual error, a saint is a man who errs but

receives favor because he is greatly loved by another, in spite of his failure. I argue that Spenser's poem invokes the Biblical narrative of redemption and that Spenser writes (and re-writes) Redcrosse's error so that the lesson of holiness may be learned, and, perhaps by Grace, even remembered.

**Re-Presenting “The Legende of Holinesse”:
An Explication of *The Faerie Queene* I.12**

By
RACHEL COLLE

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Brian Blackley

Dr. Thomas Lisk

Dr. M. Thomas Hester
Chair of Advisory Committee

DEDICATION

To my mom, Fran Colle. This thesis is really your fault.
And to my dad, Brent Colle, who took me all over the world.

BIOGRAPHY

Rachel Colle is more or less from the Midwest, but prefers to avoid questions of origin. She double majored in English and History at Oklahoma Baptist University and arrived at North Carolina State University because of something that can only be called Providence.

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Introduction

The final canto of Book I of the *Faerie Queene* provides a microcosmic thematic repetition of Redcrosse's error-ridden adventures in the previous eleven cantos. Having defeated the "apocalyptic" dragon on which his future renown as Saint George, exemplar of English Protestant "Holinesse," will rest, the triumphant knight would seem to have fulfilled his *legendary* status. However, in both narrative and formal elements of language and structure the surprising misadventures of Canto XII are framed to show that man will perpetually err and cannot avoid being deceived by evil. Rather than a Sabbath for the worthy knight and a marital union with his beloved (or his loving) Una, the "joy" of his victory and his learning are turned into "annoy"—and ultimately into another separation of Spenser's chivalric Everyman from what would seem to be his well-deserved "rest."

Spenser's idea that mankind is too weak to do good, ready to err, and will only escape the grasp of Satan through Grace has been the major theme of the action of the previous cantos (with the exemplary exception, of course, of the magnanimous Prince Arthur); the poem concludes with a re-presentation of this idea to reinforce the poem's lesson. Canto XII comprises four thematic sections defined by events that recall the stages of Redcrosse's journey of error and need of Grace. In the first, Redcrosse proves again to be infected by pride as he allows his errors to remain hidden from "King" Adam. Redcrosse is accused of these errors in the second section and acknowledges them in the third division. In the concluding section Una frees Redcrosse of the consequences of his errors through the reiteration of her love. Each section corresponds to the peregrination of Redcrosse in the previous eleven cantos, the four divisions therein repeating the central theme of Spenser's

pedagogical portrait: man needs a lesson in “Holinesse” because of his natural proclivity (Milton would say “inclination”) to error, which makes him ready to be deceived by evil.

Significantly, in a poem that returns the hero to his origins while unfolding his future, the king of Eden is the audience for Spenser’s final reiteration of the adventures that form the bases of the “legend” of Redcrosse. Old Adam, progenitor of the human race, is the one who needs to read the tale of Redcrosse and see that the nature of man is to err again and again. Not only does the king watch Redcrosse repeat his well-practiced cycle of error, the king himself errs, showing how crucial it is for him to understand Redcrosse’s tale. Old king Adam does learn (or learns again) that he can err, both by his own experience and by observing Redcrosse. Spenser’s narrative, language, and structure confirm Redcrosse as a deeply flawed man. Even after the destruction of the dragon that menaced the kingdom of Una’s parents, Redcrosse cannot conquer his own willful flaws, and even in (earthly) Eden the king cannot discern the deceptions of Archimago and Duessa. Only Una’s plain speech and sincere love can undo these deceptions and bring forgiveness to Redcrosse, preventing him from receiving the just consequences of his errors (a human exemplar of the divine Love that alone can redeem a fallen fool to be a holy knight). Thus Spenser concludes his *Legende of Holiness* with a revealing microcosmic picture of man: doomed to perpetual error, a saint is a man who errs but receives favor because he is greatly loved by another, in spite of his failure. Spenser writes (and re-writes) Redcrosse’s error so that the lesson of holiness may be learned, and, perhaps by Grace, even remembered.

Redcrosse's Dis-Course

The death of the dragon is not quite the end of the lesson of holiness, as Spenser signals at the beginning of Canto XII with “behold I see the haven nigh at hand... and *seemeth* safe from stormes” (1.1,5; italics mine)¹. While the story is “nigh” its end, it is not there yet, for Spenser shows the seeds of continued error present even in victory. The conclusion of Canto XI – “Then God she prayd, and thankt her faithfull knight / That had atchieved so great a conquest by his might” (11.55.5-6) – is an ambiguous construction that allows the modifier of “his might” to refer to either God or Redcrosse. Confusion about the source of Redcrosse’s dragon-slaying prowess greets the knight as he enters the kingdom of Eden:

Unto that doughtie Conquerour they came,
And him before themselves prostrating low,
Their Lord and Patrone loud did him proclame,
And at his feet their laurel boughs did throw. (12.6.1-4)

While Una “prayed” God and “thankt” her knight, the citizens of Eden are not so precise. They see in Redcrosse a “doughtie Conquerour,” confusing Redcrosse’s *imitatio Christi* with Christ himself. Although analogies to Christ do exist to describe Redcrosse in his apocalyptic encounter with the dragon, Redcrosse is at best only George (*geos*), a man of “earth,” as his apt name signifies (Voragine 232). With Una’s statement of praise to God and simple thanks to Redcrosse (11.55.5), Spenser indicates a shift away from apocalyptic parallels and back to Redcrosse’s earthly status. Yet Redcrosse is treated by Eden’s citizens as if he were a god, honored not with polite bows, but by the crowd’s “prostrating low,”

¹ All quotations are from Book I, Canto 12, unless otherwise indicated.

giving credit for the victory to Redcrosse's own "doughtie" effort. As the procession moves toward the city, the celebrants "with their garments strowes the paved street" (13.4), recalling the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

Redcrosse is as ready to accept this extreme praise as his admirers are to give it, still acting in accordance with the pride that characterized him throughout Canto I. He initially presented a heroic image with his horse, armor, and cocky attitude, to be "Upon a great adventure... / ...To winne him worship" (1.3.1,4). When Redcrosse finally arrives in Eden, it appears that he has finished that "great adventure," for, indeed, his destruction of the dragon has served to "winne him worship" from both king and court. They call him a "renowmed guest" (15.6) and "champion stout" (12.3), and he receives from the king "princely gifts of yvoire and gold, / and thousand thanks...for all his paine" (12.6-7). He has the admiration and full attention of the king as "with utt'rance grave, and count'nance sad, / From point to point, as is before exprest, / Discourst his voyage long, according his [the king's] request" (15.7-9). At the end of this account, Adam remains unaware of Redcrosse's errors and the knight continues to accept the king's good opinion, essentially a deceitful act that both qualifies him to be the "falsest man alive," as he later confesses, and re-presents the pride that characterized him in Canto I when he was incapable of distinguishing appearances from reality, the profane from the sacred.

Spenser presented a sequence of cause and effect in which Redcrosse brought his troubles on himself through faithlessness and error, but Adam hears a pagan epic, causing him to "lament [Redcrosse's] lucklesse state, / And often blame the too importune fate / That heaped on him so many wrathfull wreakes" (16.4-6). Not only does the king assume the innocence of this "gentle knight," he is convinced that Redcrosse's "pittifull adventures" are

caused by the capricious pagan “wreakes” of “fortunes cruell freakes” (16.3,7-9). Redcrosse thus appears more like the heroes of classical mythology than like Saint George, and the king’s “regard” (16.3) continues to put him on a heroic pedestal, now steeped in pagan imagery rather than the earlier Christological terms.

This sympathetic response to Redcrosse’s tale reveals that, at best, the king is a poor listener who cannot recognize the sequence of “pittifull adventures” as Redcrosse’s mistakes. (16.3) At worst, Redcrosse has entirely left out his own agency in his so-called “lucklesse state” (16.4) and intentionally hidden his inglorious errors from the king. While the statement that Redcrosse “discourst his voyage long” certainly uses “discoursed” in the sense of “to speak at length” (OED), the word appropriately recalls that Redcrosse dis-coursed on his adventure. Early on, he abandoned his original “course,” to hunt Una’s dragon, and did not return to his proper “voyage” until Arthur rescued him from another cave of error, Orgoglio’s dungeon.

Spenser’s pun on “discourst” reflects a part of Redcrosse’s history that is unknown to the king. Adam apparently does not realize that Redcrosse wandered into error, for he laments “never gentle knight, as he of late, / So tossed was in fortunes cruell freakes” (16.7-8). Mistaken about the cause of Redcrosse’s troubles, Adam expresses amazement at the number of misadventures “fortune” brought on the knight. However, had Redcrosse been in truth a “gentle knight,” he would not have been “so tossed” (16.8). Thus, the king unknowingly speaks the truth that a “gentle knight” would “never” have the adventures of this faithless hero. Redcrosse has not at all been a “gentle knight” and, as a result, experienced a particularly treacherous journey, beset by the personifications of his ugliest errors.

Although Adam's conclusion that "fate" was the knight's worst enemy may be entirely his own misinterpretation, Spenser leaves it plausible that Redcrosse has misrepresented some of the details. Redcrosse recounts his journey "from point to point, as is before expressed," leading to the assumption that his report contained all the events from the preceding eleven cantos, yet Spenser's tentative phrasing, "as...before expressed," allows that Redcrosse's story, while much like the real version, does not, perhaps, have exact fidelity to Spenser's original. Furthermore, the brevity with which Redcrosse is able to explain the entire "voyage long," a mere two lines, may indicate that Redcrosse was less complete than he ought to have been. If his glosses were intentional, then skewing the actual cause of his "perils sad" is yet another "dis-course." Even if Redcrosse did not deliberately misinform Adam, neither does he correct the king, a silent acceptance of underserved praise that argues for both his deceit and pride. Confirming these errors, Redcrosse articulates with dangerous confidence, "for by the faith, which I to armes have plight, / I bounded am streight after this emprise" (18.3-4), an ironic pledge given his inability to maintain a straight path even now. Thus as the knight relates his adventure to Adam, Spenser reviews Redcrosse's former errors with a reminder that Redcrosse is fallen.

Redcrosse is not the only erring mortal in the king's Eden. His future claim to the mantle of Saint George is warranted precisely because Adam is a similar example of fallen humanity. Spenser accentuates Adam's preoccupation with courtly luxury, fleshly appetite, and premature rest by juxtaposing lavishness with paradoxical declarations of humility and moderation:

Whence mounting up, they find purveyance meet
Of all, that royall Princes court became,

And all the floore was underneath their feet
Bespred with costly scarlot of great name,
On which they lowly sit, and fitting purpose frame. (13.5-9)

The premise of the passage is that the court was supplied with everything “that royall Princes court became” (13.6). This includes “costly scarlot” on the floor; but Spenser is quick to add, tongue in cheek, “on which they lowly sit” (13.8-9). Spenser’s ironic tone serves as an introduction to Adam’s obsession with creaturely comforts:

What needs me tell their feast and goodly guize,
In which was nothing riotous nor vaine?
What needs of daintie dishes to devize,
Of comely services, or courtly trayne?
My narrow leaves cannot in them containe
The large discourse of royall Princes state.
Yet was their manner then but bare and plaine:
For the’ antique world excesse and pride did hate;
Such proud luxurious pompe is swollen up but late. (14.1-9)

The demurring narrator pretends to have nothing to say with the rhetorical question: “what needs me tell their feast and goodly guize” (14.1). In Adam’s supposedly “lowly” court, his “feast” seems a picture of moderation with “nothing riotous” (14.2), yet “daintie dishes” strikes a frivolous note against the measured rhythm of “comely services, or courtly trayne” (14.1-4). The feast swells in dimension as the narrator explains that he cannot describe the feast in detail because there would be more to relate than he has space for in his “narrow” stanza (14.5). This grandeur is contradicted by “yet was their manner then but bare and

plaine” (14.7) – but it is too late. The imagination has already been inspired to furnish the “royall Princes state” in absence of the poet’s own description, even encouraged by the hints at “dainty dishes” and “courtly trayne” and the emphatic declaration that it would be a “large discourse.” Spenser’s critical sarcasm colors the narrator’s comment that “the antique world excesse and pride did hate”(14.7-8). Finally, Spenser aims an accusation at Adam’s court with “Such proud luxurious pompe is swollen up” (14.9), the afterthought “but late” too light to diminish the criticism. The critique of Adam’s court is only sharpened by Spenser’s rhyme. The declaration that the poet “cannot ... containe” the court’s splendor is sarcastically rhymed with “bare and plaine” (14.5,7). The alternating lines do the same, scathingly contrasting “large discourse of royall Princes state” with the false humility of “excesse and pride did hate” (14.6,8). Spenser further informs that they had “meates and drinckes of every kinde” (15.1), lest there remain any doubt that Adam loves luxury.

A plentiful variety of “meates and drinckes” are required to satiate the king’s “fervent appetites” (15.1-2), a measure of fleshly indulgence that even characterizes his call for Redcrosse’s tale. When “their fervent appetites they quenched had, / That auncient Lord gan fit occasion finde” to hear “of straunge adventures, and of perils sad, / Which in his travel him befallen had” (15.2-5). For Adam, indulgence of his appetite is also the “fit occasion” for a story and so with the conclusion of his meal he not only “demaunds” a narrative, but prescribes a recipe for it. Adam has an “appetite” for “*straunge* adventures” (italics mine), events that are “rare,” “singular,” and “exceptionally great,” sharing an essential quality with the recently consumed “daintie” dishes, foods that are both “rare” and “pleasing to the palate” (OED). Thus Adam’s exquisite dinner is matched by a feast for his ears; he seeks

sensual stimulation in both food and entertainment and even his response to Redcrosse's tale is associated with the seasoning of a meal, as "salt teares bedewd the hearers cheeks" (16.9).

This fleshly indulgence continues as Adam's response to the knight's narrative reveals how much Adam is motivated by pleasure; his emotional reactions are as "fervent" as his appetite for "daintie dishes." Spenser's account of Adam's response begins "Great pleasure mixt with pittifull regard, / That godly King and Queene did passionate, / Whiles they his pittifull adventures heard" (16.1-3). Placing "great pleasure" as the first word of the stanza, Spenser guides the interpretation of the king's entire listening experience. His pleasure will be expressed enthusiastically, for "passionate" is here used as a verb, "to express or perform with passion" (OED). Adam's subsequent behavior conveys the gratification he finds even in "pittifull adventures" since "great pleasure...they did passionate / while they his pittifull adventures heard." Adam obtains pleasure through a variety of emotions, even those which are not typically considered positive. The story's arousal of intense feeling seems to be his greatest satisfaction and he plunges into sorrow with zeal as "oft they did lament his lucklesse state" (16.4). Anger too is an exciting stimulation as the king and queen "often blame the too importune fate" (16.5) That they "oft lament" and "often blame," reveals their tendency to invest a great deal of energy into expressing their "pitiful regard." Actually, Adam's "salt teares" have more to do with the pleasure of emotional stimulation than with any genuine sadness at Redcrosse's "pittifull" state.

The adventure as Adam interprets it is pure diversion, satisfying his emotional appetite, but containing no real significance (more phantastique than eikastike, Sidney² would aver). Although Spenser suggests the king's surprise that "never gentle knight, as he of late, / So tossed was in fortunes cruell freakes" (16.7-8) should have led him to discern an explanation for Redcrosse's frequent mishaps, when one remembers that passion, for Spenser, is a sign of a lack of reason, it is more understandable that Adam does not discern the pattern of error. A fool with a fool's explanation, Adam supposes that the "perils sad" are simply a "luckless state" and "fortunes cruell freakes." A story that is driven by "importune fate" is essentially nonsense, lacking any rational dynamic for actions and consequences. However, in such a story there is no need to seek a lesson because there can be no explanations; all is illogical and follows no pattern. Adam's "great pleasure" shows that he heard the story he wanted to hear, a story with no logic or significance, only sensations.

If Redcrosse told his tale accurately, then Adam is culpable for preferring an irrational to a rational interpretation, thus avoiding any learning he might have gained. But even if Redcrosse, as Spenser seems to leave plausible, glossed over the errors himself, Adam is not blameless because Redcrosse's narrative is "according his request," showing that nonsense was what Adam preferred out of a story. In the *Faerie Queen*, evil is shown to lack both reason and substance; Adam's history of mindless fleshliness shows that he wanted more of the same out of Redcrosse's tale, an empty foolishness that almost ensures he will be deceived by evil, and as much an error as a deliberate misreading. In this, Adam is much like Redcrosse, whose fleshly inclinations were easily swayed by Duessa.

² See Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* for Spenser's theoretical framework. Sidney argued that the Right Poet does not create "castles in the air" but has a purpose behind his imaginative creation, so that what he writes works "substantially," that is, to instruct the reader (Sidney 65).

Consistent with his having opted for fleshly indulgence and empty passions, Adam craves rest. “Everlasting rest” conventionally refers to heaven, but Adam loves his earthly Eden and it is *there* that he wants his rest. Purporting to congratulate Redcrosse, Adam declares, “since now safe ye siesed have the shore, / And well arrived are... / Let us devize of ease and everlasting rest” (17.7-9). Adam speaks in terms of finished work: they are “now safe,” “have the shore,” and “well arrived are”; he attempts to convince Redcrosse that his work is both complete and deserving of reward. However, Adam’s major argument, posed as a benefit to Redcrosse – “since...ye siesed have the shore” – is actually meant to legitimize Adam’s own craving for ease and rest. Determining that the purpose of Redcrosse’s arrival is for his own pleasure, Adam’s desire for rest appears as an element of his excessive appetite with Spenser’s use of “devize,” the same word he employed to described the creation of “daintie dishes.”

Adam’s commits a named sin when, in regards to the marriage of Redcrosse and Una, Adam says “for my part I covet to performe” (20.1). His reasons are self-serving, indicated by “for my part,” and unsurprisingly associated with his habitual carnality, since “covet” is “to desire...with fleshly appetite” (OED). He so strongly desires the marriage because he thinks it will usher him more fully into “ease,” since it enables him to bequeath his kingdom to Redcrosse. Not yet understanding the significance of Redcrosse and Una’s betrothal, he reads it as his chance to abdicate, proclaiming Redcrosse “of my kingdome heire apparaunt” (19.6) and continuing “bothe daughter and eke kingdome, lo I yield to thee” (20.9). Though in “yield” he may sound as if he humbly gives up his right, his urgent “lo I yield” is actually an attempt to escape his responsibility. Adam seems to feel the weight of ruling his kingdom to be too heavy and primarily wants Redcrosse to stay in Eden in order to remove his burden,

freeing him to enjoy “ease” and “rest.” The strength of Adam’s misplaced desire is exposed when Redcrosse’s determination to go back to serve the Faerie Queen prompts Adam to complain about “that hard necessitie... / The troubler of my happie peace, / And vowed foe of my felicitie” (19.1-3). The doubled “my” shows that he selfishly sees Redcrosse there to suit his pleasure. Tellingly, the “hard necessitie” Adam speaks of is not any further trials Redcrosse must face but the postponement of Adam’s peace and felicity, thwarted by Redcrosse’s commitment to serve Gloriana.

His impatience, particularly in his attempt to inaugurate “eternal rest,” is one final indication of Adam’s self-indulgence and foolishness. The dragon is dead but a few minutes and Adam has barely “looked forth” from the castle before he “Uprose with hastie joy...and out of hond / Proclaymed joy and peace through all his state” (3.3,7-8). He knows quite little about Redcrosse and yet tries to make him the new ruler of Eden, a haste for which Duessa soon condemns him. To even tell Redcrosse that “now safe ye seised have the shore” proves premature in light of Duessa’s upcoming arrival. Urgently “coveting” to hand over the reigns of his kingdom “soone as the terme of those six yeares shall cease” (19.7) king Adam is ill-prepared to wait patiently for the proper end of Redcrosse’s term of service and nowhere more impatient than in his redundant command to “hither backe returne again” (19.8).

Spenser shows that error is a cycle against which Redcrosse ought to be ever vigilant, for though the dragon is slain, he has not fully escaped from his own errors. Furthermore, Spenser demonstrates that Adam is much like Redcrosse, steeped in pride and fleshly desires that prevent him from comprehending the meaning of Redcrosse’s adventure and warranting a repeated manifestation of the legend of holiness.

The Letter

Just when the king of Eden has hastily bequeathed his kingdom to Redcrosse and is presenting Una to the knight as his “due desert of chivalree” (20.8), a messenger arrives to condemn Redcrosse with different implications for the knight’s “due desert.” A legal accusation is leveled at Redcrosse in a letter that serves to repeat the accusations of Despair in Canto IX, who charged “to this Ladie milde / Thou falsed hast thy faith with perjurie, / And sold thy self to serve Duessa vilde” (9.46.6-8). Duessa writes with the same point in Canto XII: “False erraunt knight, infamous, and forswore...mine he is” (27.4, 28.1). Furthermore, the charade played by the “messenger” and “Fidessa” reveals that Old Adam himself is as vulnerable to their deceptions as Redcrosse ever was, recalling the knight’s earlier capitulations to Archimago’s humble disguise and to the bewitching “Fidessa.” Archimago and Duessa repeat their craft of deception in Canto XII and Adam believes their disguises, a parallel to Redcrosse by which Spenser warns again of mankind’s susceptibility to evil.

Adam’s preoccupation with fleshly pleasures makes him ill prepared to discern the dubiousness of the messenger. Duessa then accuses Redcrosse of faithlessness with the “letter of the law” and Spenser reiterates that accusation in language that emphasizes the similarities between Redcrosse and Duessa. The “seeming” hasty messenger arrives as the king, “with great wisdom, and grave eloquence / Thus gan to say” (24.5-6), but the pronouncement never materializes. Instead, a full stop in place of his quotation emphasizes the “suddenness” (25.2) of the messenger’s entrance. Though the narrator says that the king was going to speak with “great wisdom, and grave eloquence,” judging from the preceding narrative it could not have been particularly wise because Adam tends to indulge

in passion rather than use reason. Whatever he might have pronounced, “eare he thus had said / With flying speede, and seeming great pretence, / Came running in, much like a man dismayd, / A Messenger with letters, which his message said” (24.7-9).

For a moment the “flying speede, and seeming great pretence” appear to refer to Adam, to whom the qualities could be appropriately applied, given that he currently rules Eden with impatience and empty luxuries; but as Spenser continues there “came running in...a messenger” and it becomes clear that the “speed” and “pretence” belong to this interrupting courier. The messenger does not say a word, but instead uses the simplicity of his appearance to deceive and ensure that the king treats his letter seriously. Archimago knows how to ingratiate, and without knowing anything about him, the king accepts the messenger’s legitimacy. Although Archimago brings a fair accusation, the king does not know whether he is trustworthy. All he has by which to “read” the messenger is his appearance; and just as Archimago’s appearance deceived Redcrosse, so it does the king, for the wily Archimago well knows that the king, like Redcrosse before him, has “weaker sight” (32.5). A master of convincing disguise, he manipulates the desires of his audience.

Humility and haste “seem” to be the key character qualities the messenger shows to the king as “falling flat, great humblesse he did make” (25.6). He also “kist the ground, whereon his foot was pight” (25.7), a mere gesture of honoring the monarch, of course. The messenger appears not only humble, but quick. He “came running” (24.8) with such “flying speed” (24.7) that

All in the open hall amazed stood,
At suddeinnesse of that unwarie sight,
And wondred at his breathlesse hastie mood.

But he for nought would stay his passage right,
Till fast before the king he did alight... (25.1-5)

With “suddenness” and in a “breathlesse hastie mood,” he would not delay to go “fast before the king.” “Fast” is both a further emphasis on the speed of the messenger, and an argument that he has “fixity of attention, effort, or purpose” (OED), which adds to the appearance of devoted service. Yet even while describing the messenger’s eagerness to complete his mission, “nought would stay his passage right” (25.4) also hints at the messenger’s real identity, an evil magician who will never do right. The ever-deceptive Archimago has fashioned himself into an ideal servant for the king, who is taken in by an appeal to his own pride just as Redcrosse fell prey to his own lust – a physical pride.

Adam’s introduction to Duessa is similar to Redcrosse’s first encounter with her in Canto II, when she explained her situation as a “sad plight” (2.26.1); now, for Adam she is described in her letter as a “sad mayd” (12.27.1) who “To thee, most mighty king of Eden faire, / Her greeting sends in these sad lines addrest” (26. 1-2). She then invokes pity as “the wofull daughter, and forsaken heire / Of that great Emperour of all the West” (26. 1-4). The meaning apparent to Adam is simply that she will go on to “address” or “treat of” some matter, but “addressed” can also mean “attired” (OED). Duessa is not actually “wofull” about being “forsaken” by Redcrosse (26.3), but does appear to be sad by arraying her letter in a pitiable story, an act complete with costume that deceives Adam as it did Redcrosse. Duessa wants a certain response from the king, and shapes her verbal performance accordingly. As a “sad mayd” she appeals to the “great pleasure” he finds in emotional stimulation, moving him with her own account of “perils sad.” Just before her closing she tells the king, “Withhold...your hasty hand / From knitting league with him, I you aread”

(28.3-4). Though “aread” does mean “advise,” it can also mean “to interpret or solve,” (OED) and her performance proves her ability to figure out Adam well enough to manipulate him through his sensual pleasures, as she also did with Redcrosse.

Indeed, the letter re-presents Redcrosse as an entirely different man from the king’s view of him, drawn from his conclusions about Redcrosse’s own story. The length of Duessa’s accusation contrasts with the brevity of Redcrosse’s previous tale, visually presenting Duessa’s version as more thorough and perhaps more truthful than Redcrosse’s two lines. Redcrosse certainly had a dwarfish tale, a structural indication that his narrative lacked reason, making it unsurprising for Adam to suppose the events were propelled by irrational fate. Duessa reveals the details that Redcrosse left out, such as “he already plighted his right hand / Unto another love, and to another land” (26.8-9). As Duessa describes Redcrosse’s errors, her letter also functions as an accusation against the king for his impatience to hand “both daughter and eke kindome” to Redcrosse. To Adam she says, “be advised for the best, / Ere thou thy daughter linck in holy band / Of wedlocke to that new unknowen guest” (26.5-7). Duessa presents marriage as a trap instead of a loving union. She invokes chains with her use of “linck,” which in the sixteenth century was commonly used in plural form as a synonym for “fetters” (OED). “Band” and “wedlock” further emphasize marriage as restricting, even prison-like. The planned wedding may be a snare, Duessa suggests, rather than Adam’s entrance to coveted rest.

Her letter continues:

To me sad mayd, or rather widow sad,
He was affiaunced long time before,
And sacred pledges he both gave, and had,

False erraunt knight, infamous, and forswore:
Witnesse the burning Altars, which he swore,
And guiltie heavens of his bold perjury,
Which though he has polluted oft of yore,
Yet I to them for judgement just do fly,
And them conjure t'avenge this shamefull injury. (12.27.1-9)

Before Duessa's letter, the king viewed Redcrosse as "renowned" (15. 6), that is, "celebrated or famous" (OED), an emphasis on his exciting adventures and victory over the dragon. Duessa's letter, however, overturns Redcrosse's image by reminding the king that Redcrosse is a "new unknown guest" (26.7), drawing the king's attention away from the slain dragon to point out instead his recent arrival and the king's limited knowledge of Redcrosse's past, based only on Redcrosse's own brief account of himself. After casting doubt on the king's current reading of Redcrosse, Duessa claims that, far from being a man of "renown" and fame, the knight is "infamous" (27.4), a "false erraunt knight" (27.4), faithless and erring instead of defending the innocent like a proper knight errant. Duessa further advises the king to separate his daughter from the "forswore" knight, a double condemnation since not only has Redcrosse broken a pledge to Una, he is also fore-sworn, or previously pledged to another, a duplicity that links him to Duessa.

Duessa offers two descriptions of herself, a double identity as both "mayd" and "widow" (27.1) She creates confusion about who she is *really* and whether she has or has not been married. Calling herself a "mayd" draws parallels between herself and Una, while the designation "widow" separates her from the king's daughter and changes the nature of her claim on Redcrosse. As a maid like Una it seems that she is also a virgin, but as a widow

her claim is stronger, not merely one of betrothal but of consummated marriage. By recasting her identity Duessa suggests that Redcrosse is not simply morally bound to her, but legally as well and she subsequently retains “widowed” as her position (28.6). Since marriage is a legal tie, Duessa’s “widowed” shows that her accusation represents the “letter of the law.”

In a twisted story, Duessa claims the wrong has been done “to me sad mayd” (27.1), while in reality Redcrosse promised himself to Una first. These accusations would be correct for Una to make, yet Una (as her own narrative will show), in her true love for Redcrosse, forgives him of his error and accepts him as her knight even though she knows about his unfaithfulness. In a false claim to victimization, Duessa appeals to “the burning Altars” and “guiltie heavens” as witnesses of Redcrosse's commitment to her. She intends to convince the king with this forceful accusation, and her choice of words reveals more about Redcrosse. The “burning altars” suggest the lust which caused Redcrosse to abandon Una and attach himself to scarlet-clad Duessa. Duessa rests her argument on vows of previous affection. It is therefore true that Redcrosse was faithless, but Una was the original victim of his error and Duessa the second lover, as even her name points out. Duessa is right, however, that “sacred pledges he both gave, and had” (27.3). Continuing to advocate her claim as a widow, she implies that, in reciprocal affection, Redcrosse pledged himself to her and received her pledge in return. At the same time, “sacred pledges he both gave” reinforces her argument that the “foreswore” knight pledged himself to both women at once.

Besides the direct accusation, Redcrosse’s duplicity is emphasized structurally by “unto another love, and to another land” (26.9). Standing out as the conclusion of a stanza, his error is described by these two nearly identical phrases of equal rhythmic stress and

similar wording. Spenser's lines continue to imitate Redcrosse's duplicitous character in the letter's next stanza:

Therefore since mine he is, or free or bond,

Or false or trew, or living or else dead...

So bids thee well to fare, Thy neither friend, nor foe, Fidessa. (28.1-1, 9)

By opening with three pairs of opposites, Spenser reinforces the doubleness revealed in the previous stanza. The confusion represented in these pairings, as to who Redcrosse really is, is echoed by Duessa's paradoxical closing. Her deceitful disguise is nicely summarized by "thy neither friend, nor foe, Fidessa." While they perplex the king, these constructions convict Redcrosse of being just like Duessa.

Duessa's declaration "therefore since mine he is" (28.1) is not the claim of love, but the claim of the law over a criminal. The accusation itself was delivered "with letters," suggesting the unbending condemnation of Old Testament law (24.9). The "judgement just" (27.8) that Duessa seeks is legalistic. Though it ought to be Una's prerogative to press the legitimate claim, Duessa does not ultimately care to whom Redcrosse pledged love, but simply insists that Redcrosse should suffer the consequences of his error and forfeit the reward of marriage to the king's daughter. The sinister nature of Duessa's legalism appears in her declaration that she will take Redcrosse "or living or else dead" (28.2). As with Old Testament law, this "letter killeth." Duessa wants Redcrosse punished as she spits out "conjure t'avenge this shamefull injury" (27.9). "Conjure" is an apt recollection that Duessa is a sorceress and that the original scheme of "subtill Archimago" was to see Redcrosse and Una "divided into double parts" by "his divelish arts" (2.9.1-3). In her call for a judgment

that will separate the guilty Redcrosse from Una, Duessa fulfills Archimago's original diabolical goal.

Duessa's letter convicts not only Redcrosse but Adam as well when he recognizes his overhasty verdict on the knight. The letter is, after all, directed to the king, a reader representative of humanity who is supposed to learn from Redcrosse's "legende." Not only is Duessa's story longer than Redcrosse's, another indication that the king receives additional information from her is his "abashed" and "astonished" reaction (29.2-3). For the king, Duessa's news is "tydings straunge," in the sense of "strange" as "unfamiliar or not known," in contrast to "rare" or "exceptionally great" as the king expected out of Redcrosse's own account of his "straunge adventure" (OED). Duessa's "straunge" narrative has created a conflicting portrait of the knight and brought into question what the king thought he knew about Redcrosse. And while previously the knight appeared to be a hero, Adam now changes his designation from "renowned" (15.6) to "redoubted" (29.7), a more ambiguous term conveying new speculations about Redcrosse. Because the knight did slay the dragon, the king still maintains that Redcrosse is "redoubted" in the sense of "respected, noted, or distinguished," but the word also means "feared or dreaded" (OED), which could allow that, if Redcrosse is as false as Duessa claims, he is a dangerous man. Spenser reinforces Adam's uncertainty by placing "redoubted knight" directly below a description of the king's "doubtfull eyes fast fixed on his guest" (29.6-7), visually connecting "doubtfull" with "redoubted." Both respect and fear are present as Adam scrutinizes his "redoubted" and "new unknowen guest" (26.7) with "doubtfull eyes." Thus, through Duessa's letter, the king begins to sense that he has been incautious in bestowing on Redcrosse his most valuable charges, his kingdom and daughter.

Strength to Ill

In Spenser's microcosmic conclusion of Book I, Redcrosse remembers what he learned about his error-ridden nature in his previous encounter with Despair and finally provides Adam the correct interpretation of his adventure. The accusations of both Despair and Duessa draw a confession from Redcrosse. In Canto IX, "Well knowing true all, that [Redcrosse] did rehearse, / And to his fresh remembrance did reverse / The ugly view of his deformed crimes" (9.48.4-6). Redcrosse again "rehearses" his "crimes" before Adam in Canto XII. His confession draws parallels between himself and Duessa, just as Duessa's letter revealed similarities between herself and Redcrosse in support of his guilty conviction. Redcrosse's confession serves as a model for hasty, comfort-loving Adam, who, as the final scene of Redcrosse's adventure unfolds, has himself experienced error and conviction.

With new caution the king requests to hear Redcrosse's story a second time. He does not "demaund" entertainment as previously, but seeks more complete knowledge that will allow him to penetrate Redcrosse's actual character and resolve the conflict between his reading of Redcrosse's adventure and Duessa's revelation of his error. He no longer accepts his own interpretation and wants Redcrosse to be explicit about how he ought to understand the adventure, requesting "Let nought be hid from me, that ought to be exprest" (29.9). It was clear enough that Adam "did lament his lucklesse state, and often blame the too importunate fate," yet his reading went uncorrected until Redcrosse's silence was amended by Duessa; but while she initiates a correct interpretation of Redcrosse's "perils sad," hers is only one part of the story and does not contain the full significance of the tale Spenser "before expressed." She knows that Redcrosse succumbed to error, not fate; however, Adam does not only need to know about the consequences of error, but Spenser must also show

Redcrosse modeling confession. Thus Redcrosse proceeds to re-tell his experience, this time in two stanzas rather than two lines, formally indicating that what was previously absent is now “exprest.”

No longer welcoming the acclaim of an epic hero, Redcrosse accepts full responsibility for his errors. When Redcrosse begins “it was in my mishaps,” he sounds as if he is blaming Fate, but he quickly adds “as hitherward I lately traveild ... unwares I strayd / Out of my way, through perils straunge and hard, / That day should faile me, ere I had them all declard” (31.6-7). This a humble acknowledgement that he brought “perils straunge and hard” on himself through his unwariness, and that his “perils” result from his own “mis”-action, not “hap,” a clarification of his previous discourse, which demonstrates a correct self-knowledge.

Redcrosse confesses that he has been “unwares” or off guard in a most un-heroic, un-knightly, and embarrassing fashion. Although he mentions that Duessa used “wicked arts,” he actually blames himself, not her deceit, for his error. “Unwares” occurs both at the beginning and the end of Redcrosse’s second narrative. He confesses that “unwares I strayed” before he tells of Duessa’s entrance into the narrative. Then at the end, as he comes to the moment of deception, he says “Unwares me wrought unto her wicked will.” In both cases, by prefacing her actions with his pre-existing state of unwariness, he makes it clear that Duessa is not responsible for his error and insists on his own guilt with “unwares I” and “Unwares me,” himself the agent of his deception. Furthermore, in the same penitential mode, he stresses that the ground of his error is that “I strayd / Out of my way.” Of his own volition, he departed from his quest of hunting Una’s dragon. Ironically, when he abandoned Una he was not so much straying out of his way as *into* his own way. His own faithlessness

drew him away from Una while his desire led him towards Duessa. The chronology Redcrosse employs in re-telling his adventure shows that he has gained self-knowledge and come to realize that even before Duessa began to mislead him, he strayed of his own accord, due to his insufficient caution and limited devotion to truth.

In his encounter with Duessa Redcrosse forsook caution and recognizes that he bears the guilt of being deceived by her. Speaking of his diverted path the knight reports, “There did I find, or rather I was found / Of this false woman” (32.1-2). First Redcrosse says *he* found *her*, establishing himself as the active subject, and the following qualification, “or rather I was found / Of this false woman,” does not remove his agency, but rather confirms his guilt. Noting an important distinction, Redcrosse says he was found “*of* her,” rather than “*by* her.” The preposition “of” is significant, meaning “place or source” (OED), for in actuality Redcrosse found that he was “Of this false woman,” thus that he had his source in falseness. By saying that he discovered his origins in her, Redcrosse shows that in the encounter with Duessa he found *himself* to be false. He is so much like her that he says he is “of” her.

He continues his confession with “Of this false woman, that Fidessa hight, / Fidessa hight the falsest Dame on ground, / Most false Duessa, royall richly dight” (32.2-4). Redcrosse calls Duessa “false” three times. First, she is a “false woman,” then the “falsest Dame,” and finally “Most false Duessa” – a sort of parody of the Trinity, perfect only in her falseness. Of course, if he is “of” her then his description also applies to himself. It is essentially his ultimate confession and would seem to intimate that he deserves the title Una gives to Archimago, “the falsest man alive.” The triad of falseness is the center of Redcrosse’s confession. Not only is it emphasized by repetition, but Spenser places the three

lines containing these repetitions in the central position of Redcrosse's narrative. Excluding his prefatory formalities with which he approaches the king, the narrative proper begins with "It was in my mishap" and ends with "when least I feared ill" so that "False woman," "falsest Dame," and "Most false Duessa" occur in the center three lines of the story. Finally, this confession of falseness leads to his recognition of the condition of humanity as fundamentally weak, for Duessa's "wicked arts, and wylie skill" overcome his "weaker sight," and are "too false and strong for earthly skill or might" (32.7).

He closes by repeating his understanding of his natural (Adamic) inclination to error with which he opened his story. His final clause, "when least I feared ill," not only refers to his having been unwary, but also suggests that he proudly thought he could withstand Error. Redcrosse finally remembers the lesson of the House of Holiness that "if any strength we have, it is to ill" (10.1.8). Although he was unwilling before to enlighten the king about the true cause of his "pitiful adventures," he now openly acknowledges that he does not have the strength or skill to withstand evil, and that as a consequence it was *his* error that resulted in his entanglement in Duessa's "wicked arts."

Una

Although Redcrosse escapes Duessa's "wicked arts," the pardon of his faithless error is not secured with his confession but with the grace granted by Una in love. Just as Redcrosse's recognition of his falseness and weakness after the accusations by Despair were followed immediately by Una's leading him to restoration in the House of holiness, Redcrosse's confession in Canto XII initiates a process of restoration that results in Una's speaking on his behalf. Like Duessa and Redcrosse, Una addresses herself to Adam in a narrative that re-presents her essential role in the legend, that of enduring, pursuing love. Una's love substitutes grace for error, unity for isolation, love for enmity, and joy for mourning.

Prior to the arrival of Duessa's letter, Una appears before the king for her betrothal. Although the king is not yet aware of Redcrosse's faithlessness, Una does know the blot on his character but nevertheless presents herself in her true form, "all lilly white, whithoutten spot," (22.7) an image of unmerited favor granted in return for Redcrosse's self-driven fall into error. Spenser then explicitly expresses the terms on which Una accepts her faithless knight with "So fairely dight, ...[she] added grace unto her excellence" (24.1,4). Grace, as "favour or goodwill, in contradistinction to right or obligation" (OED), characterizes Una's behavior in the final canto, for she responds with love and acceptance in direct opposition to what the erring knight deserves, just as she has done throughout the adventure.

In spite of Spenser's commentary that Una "added grace," his omniscient narration does not reflect a consciousness on Adam's part that Redcrosse is, at this point, receiving unmerited favor. Whether entirely the king's own misinterpretation or through some omission by Redcrosse, Adam did not recognize error in the "mishaps" of Redcrosse's first

tale. In the absence of error, grace is not required, thus Adam does not comprehend that Una bestows unmerited favor on Redcrosse when she prepares for betrothal. Redcrosse's previous narrative, as Adam understood it, did not teach him that Redcrosse had received grace, so it follows that he should be suspicious at the disclosure of Duessa's letter and prepared to withdraw from Redcrosse his promises of kingdom and daughter. Una's intervention is therefore critical, reinterpreting Redcrosse's adventure for Adam so as to reflect the reality that Redcrosse is both forgiven and restored to favor.

Going beyond mere narrative commentary, Una's instant action following Redcrosse's confession finally demonstrates to Adam that she has "added grace." Spenser does not allow Redcrosse's conclusion "when least I feared ill" to linger guiltily for even a moment before "Then stepped forth the goodly royall Mayd," (32.9; 33.1) with a quick and confident affirmation of grace. Una "stepped forth" not to console Redcrosse but to speak to the king, indicating that Spenser intends Una's role here to be the instruction of Adam rather than of Redcrosse. Saying in regards to Duessa "She onely she it is, that earst did throw / This gentle knight into so great distresse" (33.7-8), Una shows Adam that she holds Redcrosse blameless, ignoring the proven guilt of Redcrosse and behaving as if there is no obstacle to her acceptance of him.

Spenser gives a further indication that Redcrosse resides in a state of grace with the contrasting descriptions used by Una and Duessa. While Duessa called Redcrosse "false" "infamous" and "forsooke" (27.4), the only adjective Una applies to him is "gentle" (33.7), the same appellation Spenser used earlier to convey Adam's admiration of the supposedly undeserved trials endured by the "gentle knight" (16.7). While the first use of "gentle knight" indicates Adam was misreading the knight's erratic path and Duessa's ugly words

reflect the dark reality of Redcrosse's failures, Una's return to "gentle knight" expresses her grace offered in spite of his faithlessness.

Una's final speech repeats the role she played in Redcrosse's encounter with Despair, but this time in Adam's presence, a repetition crucial to Adam's comprehension of the significance of the knight's adventure. In language almost identical to Duessa's "guiltie heavens of his bold perjury" (26.6), Despair accused "Thou falsed hast thy faith with perjurie" (46.6-7). At that time, Una counseled "Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart, ...where justice growes, there grows eke greater grace, / The which doth quench the brond of hellish smart, / And that accurst hand-writing doth deface" (9.53.2,6-8). Referring to "ever burning wrath...by righteous sentence of th'Almighties law," (9.50.4) this "accurst hand-writing" returns when the "letter of the law" is represented in Duessa's message. Una's declaration that Duessa "suborned hath / This craftie messenger with letters vaine" (34.1-2) echoes her exhortation "ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart," thus grace again dispels lawful condemnation to "deface" the "accurst hand-writing." In both instances, accusation is "vaine" or "of no effect, force, or power" (OED). Though they are true, the "hellish smart" of both Despair's and Duessa's words has lost its potency and the words are ultimately ineffective because Redcrosse is protected by grace.

Una not only must, for Adam's sake, demonstrate grace; she must also interpret for him the "hellish" significance of Duessa's letter. Although Duessa says "be advized for the best," she does not actually intervene for either Adam or Una's benefit. While a legitimate allegation is her tool, Una reveals that harm, not justice, is Duessa's intent. Una exposes "the secret treasons...wrought by that false sorceresse" (33.5-6), reporting that Duessa "did throw / This gentle knight into so great distresse, / that death him did awaite in dayly wretchednesse"

(33.7-9). With uncharacteristically violent vocabulary, Una argues that Duessa is not an impartial prosecutor, but now as always, seeks to harm Redcrosse and for that purpose “suborned hath / This craftie messenger” (34.1-2), where “suborned” not only means “to procure (a person) by unlawful means,” but has the additional sense that such procurement is “with a sinister motive” (OED). In Una’s re-reading, the letter is designed not to advise the king, but “to worke new woe and improvided scath” (34.3).

Una repeats for Adam another role she played in Redcrosse’s adventure, that of exposing “Fidessa” as a façade. Redcrosse first observed Duessa’s ugly reality at Una’s behest, when “as she bad, that witch they disaraid” (8.46.1), followed by her explication of the event, that “such is the face of falsehood, such the sight / Of fowle Duessa, when her borrowed light / Is laid away, and counterfesaunce knowne” (8.49.4-6). Now in a double layer of deception, “Fidessa” sends her letter with Archimago in the guise of a messenger. Although “Fidessa” does not return in person but instead “used hath the practicke paine / Of this false footman, clokt with simplenesse” (34.5-6), her letter is nevertheless effective and Una’s role is the same – to strip away this new masquerade. Just as she did for Redcrosse, she now shows Adam that “Fidessa” is a “false sorceresse” and also identifies the messenger as Archimago, “the falsest man alive” (33.6; 34.9).

Una opposes isolation with unity, understanding that the aim of Duessa’s letter is to separate Una from her beloved. She counteracts the letter by speaking of “the band betwixt us” in the present tense, a benevolent intent so strong that they are already bound, though there has as yet been no formal betrothal. Una has persistently sought this union with Redcrosse throughout the poem, following him through many trials and bringing Arthur to rescue him, while Duessa has always drawn Redcrosse away from Una. Again Una’s final

narrative provides a succinct picture of previous events; Duessa delays the betrothal by confusion and suspicion while Una, in grace, replaces a justly argued separation with her affirmation of unity, calling Duessa's "breaking of the band betwixt us twain" (34.4) a "woe" and "improvided scath" (34.3). The result of Una's pronouncement is that the king "gan renew the late forbidden banes, / And to the knight his daughter deare he tyde" (36.8-9) and "the holy knots did knit, / That none but death for ever can devide" (37.1-2). The betrothal ceremony promises the ultimate union, a marriage in which two "become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

Marital union is the state of love that is most intimate and enduring. Spenser intends the betrothal as the sign of this type of love, remarking "Suffice it heare by signes to understand / The usual joyes at knitting of loves band" (40.4-5). As a formal ceremony, the "knitting of loves band" presents Una's love for Redcrosse not as a feeling, but as a permanent condition. Redcrosse belongs to Una, for he is "possessed of his Ladies hart and hand" (40.2). "Of" in this case means "by" because it precedes an active subject (OED), "his Ladies hart" that has faithfully loved Redcrosse. Spenser's construction makes "possessed" passive, and thus Redcrosse does not possess, but is possessed *by* his "ladies hart and hand." Certainly it is her love, not his, that has secured the resumption of their betrothal. Since the beginning of the adventure, "she her weary limbes would never rest, / But every hill and dale...Did search, sore grieved in her gentle brest" because "he so ungently left her, whom she loved best" (2.8.7-9). Thus in speaking on Redcrosse's behalf in Canto XII she acts with enduring love, as always.

Love is the foundation of all Una's actions, including her last statement to Adam. The theme of this statement is her opposition to Duessa, but it is love that motivates, causing

her to offer mercy in place of punishment, restoration instead of harm, and unity where there was isolation. She supplies the final element in Spenser's representation of Redcrosse's adventure, the key without which the whole story would make little sense. Without Una, Redcrosse would have journeyed to no purpose, never sought to return to his lady, and perished in Orgoglio's dungeon. Left to himself, condemnation, separation, and ultimately death would have concluded his erratic adventure, to the triumph of Duessa's diabolical intentions. However, due entirely to Una's love, Redcrosse escaped not only the dungeon, but also a despairing suicide and the condemnation of Duessa's letter. Una alone prevents all this "wretchedness" from coming true and carries the redemptive thread that holds the story together until she can finally secure union with her beloved. Love is therefore both Una's means and her end, her speech to Adam necessary not merely as the microcosmic representation of her role throughout the tale but also required as a finale in its own right, the securing of the sign of betrothal that seals Redcrosse in her love.

Una's love not only opposes all that is injurious to Redcrosse but also results in the replacement of "wretchedness" with joy, which Spenser emphasizes almost to excess. First, Redcrosse has "the usual joyes at knitting of loves band" (40.5). Along with "the usual joyes," Spenser notes that "Thrise happy man the knight himselfe did hold" (40.6), a cheerful contrast to the triple "false" that characterized the knight while under Duessa's sway. The poet continues warmly, "And ever, when his eye did her behold, / His heart did seeme to melt in pleasures manifold." (40.8-9). Redcrosse relishes "her joyous presence and sweet company," experiences "deare delights," and finally, waxing metaphoric, is "swimming in that sea of blisfull joy" (41.1,4,5). Because such felicity has come about through the love Una has for Redcrosse rather than through any meritorious history of his own, his great joy

points back to grace. In this, Spenser reveals that grace is far more abundant than a mere escape from punishment, pouring out a wealth of unmerited blessings, the central joy of course being the union of lover and beloved.

The Legende of Holinesse

Spenser explicitly frames Book I of the *Faerie Queene* as pedagogical religious literature by his title “The Legende of the knight of the Red Crosse, or Of Holinesse.” A “legende” is “the story of the life of a saint” and more specifically “a collection of saint’s lives” such as Voragine’s thirteenth-century work *The Golden Legend* (OED). Voragine’s collection showcases the miraculous feats and incredible fortitude of saints tortured by villainous Roman emperors. Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* serves as the Protestant book of saints, volumes of which are devoted to the record of faithful Protestants withstanding the persecutions of Mary Tudor, who takes a similar role to the Roman emperors in Voragine. With four English editions published during Spenser’s lifetime³ (Haller 9), Foxe’s revision of the legend genre was familiar to Spenser and another likely model for Spenser’s own version of the saint’s life. Yet Redcrosse is neither Voragine’s George, miraculously brave and consistently virtuous, nor a martyr of the sort valued by Foxe.

A legend can be, in ecclesiastical usage, “a book of readings or ‘lessons’ for use at divine service, containing passages from Scripture and the lives of saints” (OED). As lessons, the records of both Foxe and Voragine contain models for emulation, faithful men and women held up as paragons of Christian virtue. With Redcrosse knight Spenser takes an unlikely candidate for his example, drawing attention not to the splendors of his faith, but to his errors. The “false erraunt knight” who abandons his lady and displays a chronic addiction to error is not the type of character consistently presented by Voragine’s *Legend* or Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. Although not denying that their models are transformed sinners acting virtuously by the power of God, both Voragine and Foxe present Christians whose good

³ 1563, 1570, and two in 1587

deeds prove them already perfected in faith, while Spenser presents the Christian caught in a perpetual struggle to live in holiness. By God's power Redcrosse defeated the dragon (10.55.8); nevertheless, the knight still does not correct Adam's pagan interpretation of his adventure, nor does he object to the great amount of praise offered to him, evidence that the divine detail that "all the good is God's" is not well remembered (10.1.9). In fact, the ambiguous modifier "his" in "Then God she prayd, and thank't her faithfull knight, / that had atchieved so great a conquest by his might" (11.55.8-9) indicates that Redcrosse has only imperfectly learned his lesson. Certainly King Adam assumes that "his might" applies to Redcrosse, not God, a misreading that Redcrosse takes no pains to correct.

And yet, Spenser intends to provide an instructive "legend" and, unjustifiable as it seems, calls Redcrosse a model of holiness:

For thou emongst those Saints, whom thou doest see,
 Shalt be a Saint, and thine owne nations frend
 And Patrone: thou Saint George shalt called bee,
 Saint George of mery England, the signe of victoree. (10.61.6-9)

While Canto XII forms a microcosm of Redcrosse's whole journey, it also presents a microcosm of the Christian narrative of Redemption. Redcrosse, the representative Christian saint, proceeds to err and deceive, to be accused, to confess, and to gain forgiveness. In a macrocosmic Christian reading, Redcrosse's error is mankind's sin. In his conclusion that he is "Of this false woman," Redcrosse correctly identifies himself as the source of sin. He admits that his own unwariness and willful straying brought him difficulty and Duessa was simply an occasion in which to act out of his fallen nature. Spenser gives Redcrosse language reminiscent of Biblical passages; "unwares I strayed / Out of my way,"

imaginatively demonstrates Isaiah 53:6, that “all of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” Although for Duessa, “easie was t’invegle weaker sight,” Redcrosse does not say that he was innocent, even in being deceived. Redcrosse’s insistence that the first fault lies in his own unwariness and lack of fear of sin is also an important distinction in the Biblical account of error: “but each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14). As false as Duessa is, Redcrosse’s lust for her came out of himself, and led to a series of further errors.

The letter delivered by Archimago pictures God’s commandments, frequently called the “letter of the law,” which “killeth” all men who break them (2 Cor. 3:6). Duessa’s letter argues that there is only one possible outcome to Redcrosse’s error – “mine he is” (28.1). The disjunction between Redcrosse’s actual faithlessness and Una’s seeming denial of his guilt is resolved best when the four narratives of Canto XII are recognized as a microcosm of Book I and of Redemptive History in general, in terms provided by the Bible. Una speaks a spiritual truth that is unapprehended by Duessa and Archimago, but available to Redcrosse by Grace. The Christian knight must realize that even his best efforts to be faithful to God are weak and unsuccessful in himself; thus Redcrosse’s forgiveness and restoration are ironically linked to the self-knowledge that led him to see himself “of that false woman” and as “the falsest man alive” (Duessa and Archimago).

Redcrosse’s declaration of his utter falseness paradoxically leads to forgiveness, a picture of the Biblical economy of grace which returns love in exchange for faithlessness, not giving a man what he justly deserves if he will humble himself in true self-knowledge and declare his guilt and weakness. A relevant passage in I John reads, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is

faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I Jn. 1: 8-9). Una imitates the intercessory role of Christ, speaking on Redcrosse’s behalf before the king even as Christ speaks for the Christian before God. She reverses the verdict against Redcrosse, as Christ did in human history by mitigating God’s judgment.

Spenser presents Una as an image of the divine love Christ has for the Christian, and Redcrosse’s betrothal to her as the “sign” of RE-union with Christ. During the betrothal celebration a “heavenly noise” transforms a mere earthly “band” into a figure of union with the divine. Following the “sacred rites and vows” (36.9) “there was an heavenly noise ... / Like as it had bene many an Angels voice, / Singing before th’eternall majesty” (39.1-3). Because all the guests hear the sound, the image broadens beyond Una and Redcrosse as individuals to become an experience for the Christian in general. The “heavenly noise” has a strong effect: “each one felt secretly / Himselfe thereby reft of his senses meet, / and ravished with rare impression in his sprite” (39.7-9). The “heavenly sound” that made each hearer “reft of his senses meet” is a divine ravishing. Since “ravished” points to the consummation of marriage in which “two become one flesh,” to be ravished by a “heavenly noise” implies union with God. In the Gospel of John, Christ requests from God the Father to be united to the Christian, in order to bring his beloved into union with the Father. Christ prays “that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17: 22-3). Only after the bestowal of divine love upon all the guests does Spenser write, “Suffice it heare by signes to understand / The usual joyes at knitting of loves band” (40.4-5). Thus, not only does Una love Redcrosse, but through their betrothal Spenser means to reflect the

nature of Christ's union with all Christians, a visual paraphrase of Christ's appeal to "Abide in my love...that your joy may be full" (John 15:9,11).

Such union with Christ is, according to Scripture, the only state that enables the Christian to "bear fruit," or to live a holy life. Christ urges "Abide in me, and I in you. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (John 15:4-5). For Redcrosse, living in Una's "joyous presence and sweet company" helps him to remember he has further knightly services to fulfill. As Spenser explains, "swimming in that sea of blisfull joy / he "nought forgot, / how he whilome had sworne, / Unto his Farie Queene backe to returne" (41.6-7). However, the line is prefaced by "Yet," a paradox that the motivation Una provides to resume *imitatio Christi* results in parting from her: "yet" in his joy he "nought forgot" his promise to Gloriana and "Una left to mourne" (41.5,6,9). While Una and Redcrosse remain formally united because he has her enduring love, they must postpone the further enjoyment of one another's physical presence, a reminder of the condition of the Christian who is united to a loving Christ but not yet in the presence of Christ. Just as Redcrosse has six more years of service before he may return to Una, the appointed amount of time must pass before the apocalyptic union of Christ to his church ushers in eternal rest. Redcrosse's pause in Eden is comparable to a weekly Sabbath, a brief respite in a lifelong struggle of trying, and failing, to imitate Christ. When he departs from Eden he will certainly err again, yet it is equally certain that Una will continue to love him.

Canto XII itself is a "signe to understand" Spenser's "dark conceit," an image of the meaning of Book I, that the sons and daughters of Adam are fundamentally erring, but that divine love extends grace. In four short accounts about Redcrosse knight's long adventure, the king of Eden observes error, condemnation, confession, and forgiveness, each element

crucial to the meaning of the legend. As demonstrated by the king's initial conclusion that Redcrosse's adventure was marked by "fortunes cruell freakes," the tale is senseless without recognizing it as Christian narrative of redemption. While Una does much to interpret it (she can oppose Duessa and demonstrate grace), the king must still put the pieces together himself; it is a narrative the king of Eden needs to understand, for he too is heavily tainted by error. Indeed, if he is Adam he has done all this before with his prideful error in the Garden, resulting in both the first killing curse and promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15-19). Still Adam does not, apparently, remember his own lesson, given his inability to apply it as the meaning of the first narrative he heard from Redcrosse. Even when Spenser carefully presents each theme again, Adam seems as obtuse as ever. His manner in response to Una's last words is marked by passion (a lack of reason) and impatience as he is "greatly moved" and "all with suddein indignation fraight" (35.1-2), making it doubtful that he has truly understood the legend; that he, like Redcrosse, is error-filled with only strength "to ill" and alike in need of grace - or perhaps he has already forgotten.

Thus, as a microcosm of the Legend of Redcrosse Knight, Canto XII figures humanity's constant need to hear again, and again, the legend of holiness. As this poem defines holiness, it is above all a bond with Christ the lover, redeemer of an unending series of errors, and it is the correct reading of this state of belovedness which inspires another attempt at faithfulness. Holiness, for Spenser, is an adventure of "fierce wars and faithful loves" (Prologue.1.9). *Imitatio Christi* is a bloody battle against the dragon Error, who always turns out to reside within the knight himself. In spite of this, Una never repents of her love for him. Thus the "Legende of the knight of the Red Crosse, or Of Holinesse" is Spenser's new saint's tale. Redcrosse is not the perfect Saint George of Voragine or the

unswerving martyr of Foxe. He is, rather, the Christian everyman, pursuing lamely the imitation of Christ. Sainthood for Spenser is not a matter of perfection or prowess, but of humble recognition of error and reception of grace. For Redcrosse to take his place as Saint George, exemplar of holiness, it is crucial for Old Adam to observe an adventure of error and forgiveness, although if Adam is to benefit from the legend he must first learn to read (and remember what he reads), even as Redcrosse remembers that Una loves him despite his error, a lesson that gives him the courage to set out once more to try to be Saint George.

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