11-14-2013

A Common Man Trapped inside the Queen's Body

Alexandra Sofia Palacios
apala016@fiu.edu

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

A COMMON MAN TRAPPED INSIDE THE QUEEN'S BODY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Alexandra Sofia Palacios

2013

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton
       College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Alexandra Sofia Palacios, and entitled A Common Man Trapped inside the Queen's Body, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

_____
Andrew Strycharski

_____
Kenneth Johnson

_____
James Sutton, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 14, 2013

The thesis of Alexandra Sofia Palacios is approved.

_____
Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

_____
Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2013

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my children, Jackson and Sophia, for their love and support. Jack

and Sophie never give up on your dreams and always feel free to refashion your plans for

the future if you discover new paths as life unfolds. I also dedicate this work to my

mother, the matriarch of our family, to my brothers, my sisters-in-law and to my niece

and nephew, Valeria and Andy.

Para Toda Mi Familia

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A COMMON MAN TRAPPED INSIDE THE QUEEN'S BODY

by

Alexandra Sofia Palacios

Florida International University, 2013

Miami, Florida

Professor James Sutton, Major Professor

My thesis proposes a feminist-queer reading of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* in response to Julian Wolfreys' "The 'Endlesse Worke' of Transgression".

I examine the challenges to male authority that the low-born poet, Spenser, faced when he presented his manual for the formation of new English subjects to his sovereign queen, Elizabeth I. The *Prefatory Letter to Raleigh* and passages from the 1590 version of the epic provide evidence to support the view that traditional hierarchical male/female binaries may have been destabilized by the presence of an unmarried queen. My thesis also supplements Wolfreys' essay with historical information regarding Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart in order to underscore the ethnocentric aspect of the process of "othering" that takes place in *The Faerie Queene*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In "The 'Endlesse Worke' of Transgression," author Julian Wolfreys states that *The Faerie Queene* "is phallocentric because the text locates its truth in its prosopopoeic projection of the male subject at the heart of the masculinist text form" (27). While this claim is reasonable to the extent that "epic" is a "masculinist text form," my personal reading of Spenser's text suggests that the unfinished epic locates its truth somewhere outside of a strictly hegemonic patriarchal matrix. In Chapter I, I will use Wolfreys' principal theoretical lens (viewing the *The Faerie Queene* as transgressive) and revisit those passages from Book I, Canto I which led the author of *Transgression* to the assertion that *The Faerie Queene* is "phallocentric" (27). Supported by the work of scholars such as Elizabeth Spiller, Ilona Bell, Louis A. Montrose and Judith Butler, I move towards a rereading of Book I of *The Faerie Queene* that is more "democratic" vis a vis sex/gender (Spiller 1). This is not to say that Spenser's text is not misogynistic (in keeping with our expectation of early modern male writers), but that perhaps the poet's careful dance around traditionally asymmetrical gender binaries in the originary myths of Book I, Canto I, may have a great deal to do with the fact that he had to humbly present his manual for the production of English male subjects to a powerful English Queen, a queen regnant, Elizabeth I. The preceding statement aligns well with the claims made by Montrose in his essay entitled "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." According to Montrose, "It was inevitable that the rule of a woman would generate peculiar tensions within such a 'patriarchal society'"(65). Instances in Book I, Canto I, clearly indicate that one of the poet's main concerns was the

occupation/usurpation of authorial male roles and spaces by women. Undoubtedly, the

queen is Spenser's primary source of uneasiness because for a woman to step into a

position of male authority would have seemed inconceivable for most early modern

males. Spenser's gynophobia is not particularly unique because as Montrose explains, the

Elizabethan context reveals a "stratified society in which authority is everywhere

invested in men-everywhere, that is, except at the top" (61). On the matter of early

modern Englishmen vis a vis Elizabeth I, Montrose adds:

> The woman to whom all Elizabethan men were vulnerable was Queen Elizabeth
> herself. Within legal and fiscal limits, she held the power of life and death over
> every   Englishman; the power to advance and frustrate the worldly desire of all
> her subjects. Her personality and personal symbolism helped to mold English
> culture and the consciousness of Englishmen for several generations. (75)

My aim in Chapter I is to demonstrate through a critical reading of certain passages from

Book I of *The Faerie Queene,* that although on first inspection Spenser's mock-chivalric

tale appears to be reinscribing the hierarchical male/female gender binary of a Classical

patriarchy, the poet was finding new ways of configuring Classical myths and generating

his new myths in order to overturn some of these asymmetrical gender binaries. The

arguments that will be made therein enter into the spaces which Wolfreys opens up

through his expert use of deconstruction, but I challenge or rather supplement some of his

points vis a vis the hierarchical male/female binaries operating within the text of *The*

Faerie Queene in order to suggest that Spenser's insurmountable obstacle in the

formation of his own identity as a "modern English poet" was the powerful feminine

political/social body he lived in and his diminished male position as an Elizabethan

"commoner".

In Book I, Spenser consciously or unconsciously discloses his anxieties about low-born male writers (like himself) being the nameless "other" within the Elizabethan courtly matrix he is helping to produce via his fictional text. But if as most scholars agree, the poet was hoping to earn Elizabeth's blessing for his project then he would have to find a way of sublimating his deep-rooted concerns about women in power. The poet uses mirror-like relationships (binaries) to make the necessary distinctions between "good" women and "bad" women in order to praise his queen while simultaneously warning her of the negative traits associated with other feminine monarchs. The use of light and shadow helps Spenser to avoid calumny and legal trouble while at the same time giving him the artistic room he needs in order to take a few generous stabs at images of evil queens.

 In Chapter II, I address another of Wolfreys' central points by providing a historical context for interpreting Errour, "the 'false' Una," and Duessa. According to Wolfreys:

> The clash between older, vestigial Catholic ideological traces and the more modern Protestant, humanist discourses of individualism is at the heart of what determines *The Faerie Queene* as a transgressive text, which troublesome status is repeatedly foisted onto female identities, as if the text cannot countenance its own irresolvable historical rupture within-and as the very difference of-the male identity it would make appear in an impossibly definitive form. (25)

Using the glosses provided in *The Faerie Queene* (Second Edition) text and Richard A. McCabe's article entitled "The Masks of Duessa," I interpret the monstrous female powerhouses of *The Faerie Queene,* those feminine entities which cause "disruption and threaten chaos, interruption or destruction," as carefully qualified and culturally situated signs of 'Woman' (Wolfreys 25). Particularly these abject objects of

male transgression stand in for that which is feminine /and Catholic /and foreign. I use the "and" here rather than the "or" to show that the monstrous females of Spenser's text are always already supplemented by these cultural markers of alterity. The order in which these monstrous representations appear is significant as well, and it seems as though in Spenser's epic (from Book I onwards) even evil is in the process of becoming more "real" (perhaps more "corporeal" or substantial). I found the author David Lee Miller's *The Poem's Two Bodies* most useful for explaining why historical texts are necessary when we read a cultural and political project like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. According to Miller, "If early readings of Derrida mistook the notion of difference as antihistorical, it seems clear now that it is, on the contrary profoundly historical" (16). Chapter II, entitled "Mary, Mary Spenser's Dangerous Binary", works in conjunction with Wolfreys' essay by adding a historical framework which helps the reader to understand why the poet freely "foisted" the "irresolvable issues of the text" onto the feminine. Specifically, with the aid of McCabe's insightful essay, I argue that Spenser strategically launched his allegorical attacks first on Mary I and then on Mary Queen of Scots (who was tried for treason and beheaded in 1587).[1]

The scope of my analysis is not strictly limited to the psychological effects that a feminine monarch must have had on the poets of the Elizabethan period; my research has also led me to suppose that Spenser may have wanted to break away from rigid patriarchal norms for another very important reason. Specifically, the patriarchy in England valued genealogy, noble bloodline (family ties and social class) above all other

---

[1] Presumably licensed because the 1590 *Faerie Queene* was published without revision to these allegorical representations of evil.

cultural markers for the sign "Man". To be a virtuous man in Elizabethan England was to be a nobleman. Therefore, I propose that the poet was seeking truth (for himself and for his readers) outside of this rigid hegemonic heterosexual matrix (the patriarchy).

Perhaps the poet was hoping that the same cultural shift which allowed the Protestant English nation to accept a woman as the head of their country and their church, would allow them to conceive that a lowly pastoral poet could someday become a knight in her court. In *Elizabeth I, The Voice of a Monarch* Ilona Bell asserts that:

> Elizabethan England was a tightly knit, hierarchical society...but where talented newcomers could also hope to gain admittance, receive recognition, and be rewarded for their knowledge and talent. (12)

Under the aegis of an absolute monarch one might assume that to dare to produce discourse in which one imagined oneself as something other than what one was born to be would be deemed subversive and transgressive. However, under Queen Elizabeth I this kind of "social climb" thinking was fostered. She allowed her artists to imagine that there were great rewards to be received by those men who helped build their nation's cultural capital. Writers like Spenser who were dutifully working to lift their country's cultural credibility may well have been trying to change their own lot in life (either by social promotion or moral promotion). Such men (the "organic" poets of the nascent English canon[2]) were less interested in embracing the notion of bloodline as destiny because they were rejecting ancestry as an exclusively determining factor of virtue. But to reject the name- of -one's father (one's family name) is to reject the patriarchal structure on which this whole system of thought (the patriarchy) is grounded (patricide).

---

[2] I borrow the term "organic" from Antonio Gramsci's *The Organic Intellectual*s. I use it to describe the emerging class identity of the Elizabethan poets.

As previously stated the presence of Queen Elizabeth I must have disrupted (if not collapsed) the ancient models of gender hierarchy in a number of unprecedented ways during this historical moment of the late 16th century, a moment of reimagining oneself in relation to the world of the European continent. In *The Faerie Queene,* the Lacanian model of the phallic symbolic order of language seems to be overturned by the presence of a sovereign virgin queen. For Spenser to succeed in his quest to become the founding father (the new *demiurgos* of Protestant England), the symbolic or (genealogical) father must be done away with so that the poet can write himself into the absent father's place and so that he can fuse his own nameless identity with the body of his Queen Mother.[3] In the General Introduction to *The Faerie Queene* (Second Edition), the editor explains Spenser's complex relationship with Elizabeth I in this manner; "Enshrined as the Virgin Queen, Mother, and the second Mary-unconfined, then, by patriarchy-she became the Muse who inspired her poets (4). Therefore, incest (between the poet son and his mother Muse) is not only desired but elicited by Elizabeth I and permitted when the symbolic father is unable to suppress it. As is to be expected, this newly licensed incest (licensed by the writing self, the author) is sublimated. The poet's sublimated desire to be consumed by the body of his Queen Mother is eloquently expressed in the A.C. Hamilton General Introduction to *The Faerie Queene* (edited by Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki*),* wherein he argues that ", Spenser wraps himself and his poem in the Queen's robes because he needed her protection to speak through her" (8). But the poet's dream of taking on the role of father for Elizabeth's subjects was crushed when the meddling surrogate father figure of the period, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the Queen's Lord

---

[3] The author is the new god inside of the text which Spenser is helping to create.

Treasurer, asserted his position. Most scholars agree that it was Burghley's personal expression of distaste for the lewdness of the sexualized union (between Sir Scudamour and Amoret) in Canto XII, stanzas 43 to 45 at the end of Book III (the last book of the 1590 poem) which prompted Spenser to rewrite the only "happy -ending (union)" in all of the epic. From 1590 onwards, it was clear to Spenser that in *The Faerie Queene* there was never going to be a harmonious merger between the poet and his Queen Muse. In less poetic terms, Burghley stood between Spenser and his goal-always.

A literary undertaking of the magnitude of Spenser's epic could never be fully controlled by the author, regardless of his talent. And our current notions of authorial intent suggest that the author's personal struggles can never be the principal object of our inquiry anyways because we will never know which aspects of the text are conscious and which are the product of the unconscious. That being said, the *Prefatory Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh on The Faerie Queene* provides us with a seeming, pseudo-historical statement of Spenser's aim. Although the letter to Raleigh poses as "real" by virtue of the fact that it was written as an epistle in and through what we may assume to be Spenser's own voice, it will only be referenced here as the section or part of the whole text of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* which most decisively makes the gesture of authorial "intention". Thus, rather than privileging the letter as "prior to" and "above" or "in control of" the poem proper, I prefer to set the letter in conversation with the poem, showing how the texts, taken as one, work together, and also create productive tensions. For example, in his letter to Raleigh, Spenser wrote the often quoted statement that "the generall end therefore of all the booke, is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (LR). I find the phrasing "gentleman or noble person" to be of great

interest because one would tend to think that a noble person and a gentleman would be interchangeable, equal signs. The fact that Spenser registered both terms in his letter to Raleigh (separate but equal) causes the reader to suspect that the author is making a necessary distinction between the two otherwise equal signs. On the one hand this can be read as a gesture towards an equality of the sexes because "noble person" does not include the suffix man. Perhaps the "noble person" he had in mind was Queen Elizabeth I. But the dichotomy between "gentleman" and "noble person" contained in Spenser's letter is also noteworthy because it may be read as a textual separation between the sign "nobility" and "gentility". If one reads the split in this manner, then logic indicates that in Spenser's book a "gentleman" can be, but does not have to be, a "noble". The seemingly insignificant splitting of the sign (gentleman or nobleperson) which the poet inscribes into the *Prefatory Letter to Raleigh* will prove to be the beginning of an idea which Spenser later develops more fully in the 1596 version of the epic and which gives the last two books of *The Faerie Queene* their more subversive tone in relation to the first three books (published in 1590).

CHAPTER I

Mother May I: Requesting Permission to Enter the Courtly Matrix

<u>Negotiating Ruptures</u>

The Faerie Queene begins in *medias res* which is the literary convention of commencing a narrative in the middle of the action. In Spenser's epic the use of the *medias res* device also signals the author's awareness of his own intermediary position in a liminal time between the Roman-Catholic rule over the middle ages and the emerging English Protestant Renaissance period. The preceding assertion supports Wolfreys' view of Spenser's epic as a transgressive text. In *Trangression,* Wolfreys states that *The Faerie Queene* is a "founding moment in the self-conscious and (a) mythologized historization of the English male subject" (20). Spenser produced the first six books of his unfinished epic in this historical and cultural period known as the Renaissance. The French word *renaissance* signals re-birth and so for purposes of this argument, the Redcrosse Knight's entry into the text will be understood as signifying the literal birth of a "new" man. Central to this discussion are the two-fold implications of the term *renaissance*. On the one hand, the Renaissance is traditionally known as the birth of humanism and thereby the birth of the social human "self." On the other hand, the Renaissance, as a cultural period, presented the conditions of possibility necessary for the birth of the author (a writing self). Thus, Spenser's cultural project, *The Faerie Queene,* emerges in a spatial point of intersection, between man's awareness of himself (humanism) and man's incipient awareness of the active role which writing played in the fashioning of that self (the birth of the author).

Given that Spenser was born and began his writing career during these important

historical ruptures, it is not surprising that the poet perceived himself as a mediator of

ideas, a "joiner" of the old and new. Wolfreys identifies Spenser's text as a "series of

confrontations between epistemological, ontological and ideological systems which

contest is involved in constant transgression of truths and totalities in order to generate

the (early) modern self" (31).[4] Many of the interpretations of *The Faerie Queene* that will

be made herein stem for the most part from Wolfreys' theory of transgression as the

stepping of a self through language. However, Spiller warns that contemporary scholarly

essays which describe Renaissance man's employment of "sophisticated models of self-

representation" should be recounted more carefully to avoid reinscribing phallocentric

myths (1). In *Poetic Parthenogenesis* Spiller states:

> Recent scholarship has been interested in the early modern period as an age of
> self-actualization for the writer. Even in a moment in which criticism has
> distanced itself from old humanism, Renaissance man reappears in the works of
> such critics as Stephen Greenblatt, who describes how writers demonstrate new
> forms of subjectivity and employ sophisticated models of self-representation in
> which they seem to think themselves into being. While such accounts question
> humanist belief in individual autonomy, they also risk reenacting old stories in
> new critical histories. (Spiller 1)

Her advice for scholars to interrogate current academic texts which deal with the topic of

early modern male subject formation deeply influenced the rereading of Spenser's

originary myths I advocate in chapter one.

---

[4] The notion of the self as textual presence is generally understood as a post-modern premise, but the
origin of the concept can be traced to the classical semiotic binaries of body (man) and soul (text) or the
will (man) and reason (text). Strangely this historical event (the emergence of the English humanist self)
took place under a totalizing form of government, a monarchy. According to Miller: "*The Faerie Queene*
reflects a poetics of incorporation that could have been formulated only after the Reformation in England
had hastened the long-term process through which the national state assumed the role of preeminent
corporate entity in political life and before the idea of the state had detached itself from the person of the
monarch" (17).

The body/soul versus man/text debate at the center of this argument underscores the fact that regardless of the historical efforts made towards an understanding of the "self," it (the self) always fails to make an appearance. In post-modern times the text is the central object of literary study when language is stripped of its metaphysical aura.[5] In my analysis, I put forward that the poet imagined his epic as a body of verses (a new matrix) which the reader could enter in order to re-surface as a purified Christian, aristocratic male subject. Miller supports this reading of the poem as a "body" when he states that the "The text itself is also a body, the poetic 'body natural'; its groundlessness is reappropriated as a controlled iconoclasm toward fleshly or graven images"(14).

The poem will more generally be viewed as Spenser's temporary solution to the fall of mankind, a cleansing structure, capable of generating a more desirable social/political re-birth for its readers. As a Christian author, Spenser held the belief that his readers (like the people of Faerie Land) were born unclean because they existed in a postlapsarian space outside of God's grace. The reformation/cleansing process via the text is a necessary step before mankind (in the case of Spenser's epic, the English subject) can discover a new paradise (the New World perhaps) to replace the one that was lost through the sins of Adam and Eve.

Paradoxically, Spenser's male project, the epic, represents an appropriation of feminine generative powers by an early modern male author, a reversal of anatomical sex/cultural gender categories. The occupation of a feminine space seems justifiable for

---

[5] In his article entitled "Mediation on Transgression," Peter Berbegal explains that the post-modern demystification of language opens up new possibilities for interpretation. Berbegal states that "interpretation by its very nature is a process involving language to its highest meaning. But with what Nietzsche calls the 'death of God,' the supreme object of the hermeneutical project is lost…What is left then is a hermeneutical space that self must overcome" (1).

the Christian writer who seeks to correct the damage that was done to man by Eve. Up to this point in the argument it would seem that Spenser was basing his model for the production of a new English subject on traditional Aristotelian models of parthenogenesis, the one-sex model. But as Spiller points out, the poet's strategy fails to lead the subject out of the material world. Spenser's "poetic idea" results in nothing more than the production of another/new material body to cover (overwrite) the pretextual body (Spiller 1). More specifically Spiller notes that:

> Spenser's creations do not remain Aristotelian, but instead depict perversions of that model current in the early modern period. Ultimately, Spenser's portrayal of what constitutes creation encompasses biological, ethical, and poetic acts in ways at odds with critical understandings of early modern interiority and poetic self-actualization. Spenser's evocation of the language of biological reproduction responds not so much to a breakdown in Aristotelian reproductive theory itself, but to a breakdown in the poetics implied by that theory. (Spiller)

Spenser could not be certain that his principal target, the soul (trapped inside the corrupted human body), could ever be purified by the verses because the soul was always already inaccessible. According to Spiller, "*The Faerie Queen*e retains a basic material quality that cannot be translated into abstraction". She adds that, "Spenser uses...initiatory moments to demonstrate that *The Faerie Queene* is the material realization of an idea" (1). Following Spiller's reasoning, one comes to the conclusion that the corrupted material "real" body could only be enveloped/covered in the language of poetry. Therefore, Spenser imagined *The Faerie Queene* as paper armor for his readers to wear.

Spenser's extensive knowledge of Aristotelian and Platonic models (as shown in Spiller's essay) eventually led the poet to the supposition that in order to act as a surrogate father (a *demiurgos*) to new English subjects, he must first be recognized as an authority figure by that clan. As a Christian, English, Renaissance man, Spenser must

have thought that he was as close to the ideal Elizabethan gentleman as he could possibly be. But as a non-member of the aristocracy, the author of *The Faerie Queene* was himself a failed "project of becoming" an ideal "Man" by the standards of his time. In *Gender Trouble* Butler states that: "the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes...in sum to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands at once" (199). She adds:

> The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment; it is not a transcendental subject who enables action in the midst of such a convergence. There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there. (199)

Butler's theory of gender identity is significant here because it stands against the notion that as "Man," Spenser was untroubled by his prescribed gender role and content to simply perform his given identity. Clearly, certain scenes in the epic show that the writer was attempting to act out the role of the ideal masculine poet; the aristocratic male writer like Sir Philip Sidney from whose circle he was barred by his genealogy and to some extent denied access by Elizabethan law (which failed to recognize him as a worthy subject). Spenser was an "other" at the margins of a society which prized nobility. His material and textual body were under constant threat of appropriation, censorship, repression and containment by the larger Elizabethan social body. In a manner of speaking, Elizabeth's political body (gendered female) acted as a potential blocking figure for Spenser's new male genesis project which was to lead him to immortality and fame. The text of *The Faerie Queene* shows frequent evidence of the poet's anxiety with regards to the potential censorship of his work. His holy book that was to save men from

their damned condition was in danger of vanishing without a trace if the Queen disapproved of his enterprise. He needed the Queen's permission in order to produce (or reproduce) his English "brainchildren" and this put the writer in a passive role. Moreover, the poet also may have considered his audiences' concerns about his fallen state because Spenser was mortal too and trapped in a corrupted human body. He knew that he had to gain entry into the Elizabethan cultural text and into the courtly matrix (the nobility) before he could begin producing (reproducing) "noble person (s)" by "ensample" (LR).

As Spenser had not been admitted into the knighthood by Elizabeth I (neither the Order of the Garter nor any other order), when the first three books of *The Faerie Queen*e were published in 1590, he had to find a way to write this dream moment of initiation into courtly knighthood into the margins of the epic. *The Prefatory Letter to Raleigh* performs this illusion. In the letter, Spenser stages what can be viewed as his own initiation (into knighthood); a foreshadowing of events that he hoped might eventually take place when he completed the epic. The poet narrates the imaginary initiation ceremony by mimicking the way a historiographer would tell the story. He states that if a "historiographer" were to "discourse" of the "affayres" represented in the epic, the "historiographer" would do so "in an orderly manner as they were donne" (LR). Spenser tells Raleigh "The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an historiographer, should be the twelfth booke" (LR). The preceding line from the letter is significant because Spenser uses the possessive pronoun "my" to qualify the historical moment he is about to narrate as "his-story". The poet balances his performance of two roles; the mock-historiographer's role and the poet's role as "diviner of things to come".

In this dream vision, Spenser shares with Raleigh and with the reader the moment of fulfillment (of his "true" desire-a *point de capiton* in the Spenserian image quilt).[6] The specific details of this theatrical moment of presentation in the *Letter to Raleigh* are important to this analysis because they show the poet in both active (associated with the male) and passive (associated with the female) roles during the initiation process. He both shapes the moment (by producing it in writing) and is fashioned by it through the agency of feminine actors in the scene. I refer to this moment as "Producing Spenser" thereby supplementing ideas about how the poem "Produces Elizabeth" and "Produces Una".[7]

Producing Spenser

The Prefatory Letter to Raleigh (regardless of whether it is positioned before or after the epic "proper") overwrites the opening lines of *The Faerie Queen,* wherein the "gentle knight" emerges in *medias res*. Before the knight could begin "pricking on the plain", he needed to be granted permission by Gloriana to go on the quest and then be suited up by Una in the presence of Gloriana. In this manner, *The Prefatory Letter to Raleigh* functions as a behind the scenes "look" at the protagonist of Book I and a moment in which Spenser reveals the aim of his epic project (to enter into the Queen's service). But prior to continuing to identify the intertextual connection between *The Letter to Raleigh* and Book I, Canto I, it seems best to return to the letter in order to read

---

[6] Lacan, Jacques. *Les Ecrits –point de capiton* -a term used to indicate a moment in which the subject's true desire is revealed by metaphor.

[7] Wolfreys' text contains sections entitled "Producing Elizabeth" and "Producing Una".

closely/critically the setting of the scene and the roles played by the clownish man, Una and Elizabeth I (qua Gloriana) in the poet's meta-textual moment of "initiation".[8]

Spenser sets the event during a feast day so as to make certain that his petition for a quest (in the dream scene) will not be rejected. According to gloss provided by A.C. Hamilton, the holiday could either signal Twelfth Night or May Day. Traditionally, during these feast days people of the lower classes (like the rustic-clownish man) could ask the monarch to grant them a request which they "might not refuse"(LR). The nameless man asks the queen for permission to "have the achievement of any adventure, which during that feast should happen" (LR). Afterward, he takes a seat on the floor because he is "unfitte through his rusticity for a better place" (LR). The use of the term "unfitte" establishes a link between the clownish man and Spenser because as Miller points out, the poet had already referred to himself as "uncooth" and "immerito" in his earlier pastoral poems (e.g. *The Shepherd's Calendar*).[9] Just moments after the young man takes his place on the floor, "a faire lady" enters "riding on a white asse, with a dwarf behind her" (LR). This portrait of the "faire lady" entering court mirrors the scene in which Una emerges in Stanza 5 of Canto I (mourning weedes, riding a white asse, with a dwarf behind her). It seems doubtless that the woman in the court is Una (although in the *Letter to Raleigh* she is never named as such). The narrative continues:

> She falling before the Faery Queene to assyne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person upstarting, desired that adventure: where at the Queene much wondering and the lady much gainesaying yet he, earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the lady told him, that unlesse

---

[8] The analysis of the roles played by the feminine characters in the initiation scene from *The Letter to Raleigh* is performed in order to refute the claim that the first initiatory scene in *The Faerie Queene* is phallocentric.

[9] Miller, David Lee *The Poem's Two Bodies*:(35)

16

that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, v. Ephes.), that he could not succeed in that enterprise: which being forthwith put upon him with dewe furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the lady. (LR)

Paradoxically, the "faire lady" falls before the queen, showing her humility, but when the clownish man rushes to express his desire to have the adventure, it is Una who fulfills the clownish man's request. The queen does not speak (she is silent; left "wondering" as if frozen in time). First the lady tests the young man (by having him try on the armor) and then she gives him the gift of the Christian armor when she sees that it fits him well. The lady may represent a mirror image of Elizabeth which Spenser produces in order to receive that which the Queen is denying him in the "real" world (or that which the poet perceives is being endlessly deferred, (i.e., his advancement at court). Viewed from another angle, perhaps the "faire lady" represents the material body of the sovereign projected by the monarch herself in order to fulfill the poet's desire: the Queen's word made flesh. In the scene, the "faire lady" speaks for the queen who presumably is the only entity who has the power to administer the rites of knighthood.   The traditional dubbing of the knight by the monarch is bypassed in the scene and is substituted with the test which the lady devises. Tradition and law are transgressed in Spenser's dream of entering into knighthood. However, the transgression is doubly insured by the extremely cautious author: the event takes place during a feast day and in the full presence of the tacitly consenting queen.

As the knights in Spenser's epic are named by their armor and their quests (i.e., the Knight of Holiness, the Knight of Temperance etc.), one safely infers that the clownish man traveled to court with the intention to make a name for himself by asking

17

the queen for an adventure/quest. In the court scene Gloriana represents the maternal

other who is silent during the naming process (unable to name him as an individual

because he is a part of her political body). The "faire lady" stands between the man and

the maternal other in the symbolic order (the Lacanian term is generally associated with

the order of the phallus, but in Spenser's vision the movement into language is associated

with admittance into a female order-here, the Father is absent, replaced by "the faire

lady"). She becomes the young man's surrogate mother (the one who separates the son

from his mother) at the margins of the text. Thus, Spenser shows a model of fulfillment

and incorporation in which one can be given the gift of identity and still have to endlessly

work/quest for the achievement of that identity one has been granted by the courtly

mother.[10] In the passage the poet seems to be aware of the fact that receiving a more

desirable male identity through an initiation into the new Elizabethan courtly matrix (a

feminine one-sex paradigm) is only part of the problem of subjectivity.[11]

Spenser's fictional representation of a less than perfect male subject engaged in

the process of becoming the "I"deal gentleman aligns well with Judith Butler's theory of

(gendered) identity as performance. According to Butler gender identity is not

"substantive identity"; it is "an 'act'...that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism,

and those hyperbolic exhibitions of the natural" (200). She asserts that the "authentic"

---

[10] According to Judith Butler "if identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it articulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification. In other words the enabling conditions for an assertion of "I" are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun, the practices that establish the terms of intelligibility by which that pronoun can circulate" *Gender Trouble* (196).

[11] In this scene Spenser presents a feminine one -sex paradigm for creating subjects as there is no King present. In *Poetic Parthenogenesis* Spiller states that: "Spenser portrays how the idea of parthenogenesis may be based on the anxiety that not only might one not be self-sufficient, but that, indeed, one man might not be necessary to create this ideal at all".

and the "real," "man" or "woman," are "illusions" of an "intractable depth and inner substance" (200). The armor he wears gives the impression of a univocal signified even when the man inside the suit is incomplete and only nameable through an endless "horizontal trajectory of adjectives" which always fails to call him (the Man) into being (Butler 200). This assertion with regards to the masking effect of the armor aligns well with Wolfreys' assertion that "this homogeneity of any single, supposedly undifferentiated identity is identified by Spenser as an inheritance through the battle-scarred shield" (40). In turn Wolfreys' notion of the armor as an illusion of "homogeneity" adds weight to the belief that Spenser cannot ever be read as a hegemonic male voice, comfortably performing the role of author, because he was aware of his own alterity. The act of writing the epic seems to be an attempt to remedy his own "lack" of armor ("lack" of an "intelligible" identity (Butler)) (40).

In Spenser's rather modern vision of identity formation, it appears one must first be contained within the hegemonic structure, before one can speak/write.[12] As the previous reading of *The Letter to Raleigh* indicates, the nameless youth enters the system by wearing the armor to cover his imperfect body. The armor is emblematic of a womb-an object which threatens containment, but this containment within the Elizabethan matrix is also the desired end for the low-born poet. In the Lacanian model of identity formation, the containment of the subject in language signals an entry into the system of rules represented by the order of the symbolic father; however, Spenser's matriarchal

---

[12] To limit the free play of signification by containment the armor signals the homogenous Christian/Male/Noble identity imposed on the otherwise nameless man. By putting on the suit (putting on the language of English/ Male/Christianity), the unknown "men" become members of the brotherhood of God's chosen people. Donning the armor represents the effacement of the material self in exchange for a socially preferred, institutionalized persona.

identity fantasy collapses the Lacanian/Freudian myth and introduces a queer paradigm

of incorporation (sans father and without loss of the maternal Other).[13] The Spenserian

subject recognizes that his lack is always already the maternal Other (the Queen's

political/social/cultural body) and he writes/incorporates her symbolically onto his body

in the form of the blood marked armor that he wears to mask his own male gendered

"material/imperfect" body. The subject desires the impossible union with his maternal

Other (the symbol of the English nation) but he needs the armor in order to articulate this

desire.

The provenance of the armor is worth noting in this analysis of the clownish

man's ascension to Christian knighthood. The "faire lady" brings a suit of armor which

was previously worn. But who did the armor belong to before it was brought to

Gloriana's court? Many scholars agree on the fact that the armor with the blood red cross

is a symbol of St. George (the patron Saint of England). Spenser tells Raleigh in a

parenthetical note that the armor he is referring to is the Christian armor described in St.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's
> schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,
> against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the
> spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of

---

[13] Felluga, Dino."General Introduction to Psychoanalysis." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. January 31, 2011. Purdue University. Felluga quotes from Lacan's *Les Ecrits*: "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (*Ecrits* 67). However, In Spenser's identity fantasy (written into *The Letter to Raleigh*) the subject does not experience castration (the father is absent-there is no king). The Spenserian subject is therefore trapped in a state of narcissism (the subject needs the maternal body for identity (The Queen's political/social body) but tries to separate from it (the maternal body) through his own representations of male power or "puissance"-in order to openly express sexual desire for the unattainable maternal Other. The Name-of the Queen Mother splits into two parts (Gloriana and the "faire lady") thus conferring "identity on the subject (naming and positioning it within the symbolic order)" as Lacan suggests the Name-of-the Father functions in his model of identity formation. However, in Spenser's fantasy the "oedipal prohibition" is never imposed.

God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. (Ephesians 6:10-14)

The biblical passage from St. Paul is significant for this reading of the *Letter to Raleigh* because it links the "faire lady" to the word of God. She is the bearer of the "armor of God" which seems to indicate, as many scholars have suggested, that Una (or in this case the "faire lady") represents the "One True Church". The Catholic Church had once been known as the universal church, but with the Reformation, this new image of the Protestant Church as a faire virgin clearly stood in sharp contrast with the depiction of the decaying Catholic Church as "Whore of Babylon". The statements made in the biblical passage are also noteworthy because they warn the knight that he will not be fighting against flesh and blood, but against "the rulers" and "the authorities" of the "dark world"(Ephesians 6:10-14). The knowledge that the Knight of Holiness is destined to fight against "rulers" and "authorities" will be particularly significant in the reading of the female monsters I suggest in Chapter II. Spenser's image of the lady carrying the armor she recovered from the ruins of the Catholic Church (the fallen St. George) and giving it to the new Protestant knight reveals the author's anxieties about his nation's transgression against the Roman Catholic Church (England's separation from the Catholic Church). England had to find a new mother to replace the damaged image of the old mother church. This new mother was Elizabeth I.

In a slightly different fashion from the *Letter to Raleigh*, the first metaphorical birth depicted in Book I, Canto I of the epic is the emergence of the Knight of Holiness who begins his performance of Christianity and "Englishness" when he is registered

(inscribed) into Spenser's purifying narrative. In Book I, Canto I, Stanza 1 the poet

speaker states:

> A gentle Knight was pricking on the plain,
> Yclad in mighty arms and silver shield,
> Wherein old dints of deep wounds did remain,
> The cruel marks of many a bloody field;
> Yet arms till that time did he never wield: (I.i.1)

One infers that the gentle knight has to prove that he is worthy of the armor he is

wearing. The inference that the armor is pre-inscribed comes from the line which states

that "old dints of deep wounds did remain". Wolfreys notes that the armor bears the

memory of "past battles" but the knight has never "wielded" arms (I.i.1). The blood is not

simply a literal reminder of the bloody wars of England; it is an allegorical symbol that

reminds the reader of the fact that human life was made finite by original sin. Wolfreys

further suggests that the opening lines of the poem underscore the predetermined

subjectivity of the Redcrosse Knight.

In Stanza 3 the reader learns that the knight was given his quest by Gloriana. This

passage in the epic mirrors the moment in the *Letter to Raleigh* wherein the clownish

young man traveled to court on a feast day and asked the queen for a quest. Specifically

in Stanza 3, the poet speaker states:

> Upon a great adventure he was bond,
> That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
> That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond,
> To win him worship, and her grace to have,
> Which of all earthly things he did most crave; (I.i.3)

The preceding lines support the notion that the knight entered Faerie land (i.e into the

verses of the epic) to win "worship" for himself and to have the queen's "grace" (I.i.3). I

view the Knight as Spenser's avatar because the goals of the gentleman and the aims of

the author are similar (if not identical). Although some scholars might be hesitant to draw such direct connections between the fictional character of the author and his character, the Redcrosse Knight, I stake this claim because the parallel will be useful for deconstructing the myth of Spenser's male centered process of self-fashioning (via the act of writing).[14] Regardless of whether or not the poet intended his own goals to be openly reflected in the allegorical figure of the knight, Redcrosse stands in the epic as a kind of Protestant Everyman signaling Spenser. Of course, the main difference between the Everyman of *Pilgrim's Progress* and Spenser's Redcrosse Knight is specifically the fact that the knight is a gentle-man.

There is another significant fact surrounding the Redcrosse Knight's appearance in the text. As previously discussed, the Knight emerges in the land of Faerie without a past, but in Stanza 5 of Book I Canto I the reader learns that it is Una who called the Knight forth from far off lands to avenge the destruction of her kingdom. In Stanza 5, the poet speaker claims that Una "compelled" the Redcrosse Knight into her service:

> So pure and innocent, as that same lamb,
> She was in life and every virtuous lore,
> And by descent from Royal lineage came
> Of ancient Kings and Queens, that had of yore
> Their sceptres stretched from East to Western shore,
> And all the world in their subjection held;
> Till that infernal fiend with foul uproar,
> Forwasted all their land, and them expelled:
> Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compeld. (I.i.5)

This passage is central to the notion of Una's feminine agency. The word "compel" in the preceding lines underscores her power, since it implies an order that

---

[14] Even if the idea of the poet inside the text seems like an effort to prove authorial intention (which it is not) the fact remains that for most scholars, Redcrosse signals "Everyman". Those scholars who read the Knight as "Man" would generally concede to the point that Spenser to some extent belonged to or perceived himself to be of that homogenous category of self.

must be acted upon and which the knight does not have the freedom to resist. Furthermore, Una's agency is signaled by her close associations with Elizabeth I as when she is named the "royal virgin" (I.ii.7).

Thus, Una quite forcefully and actively translates the Knight from his former state of formless anonymity into a recognizable social self. Her calling of the Knight forth into "being" dramatizes the moment that Martin Heidegger describes as the "worlding of the world" through language (Heidegger *Language*,995).[15] The knowledge that Una was the catalyst for the Knight's passage from a state of non-entity into a state of "being" (a Christian Knight) reveals her power to name. She is responsible for Redcrosse Knight's entry into the language of English selfhood. Later, in Book I, Canto I, stanza 27, Una confirms that the knight is worthy of the Christian armor when she states:

> Well worthie be you of that Armory,
> Wherein ye have great glory wonne this day,
> And proov'd your strength on a strong enimie,
> Your first adventure: many such I pray,
> And henceforth ever wish, that like succeed it may. (I.i.27)

Significantly, the Knight is born into the institution of "Englishness" via the word (Wolfreys 40). Spenser maintains his awareness of the fact that his own initiation into English society depends upon the power of Queen Elizabeth I. Wolfreys interprets Una as a signatory of the queen who causes Redcrosse to stray from the path of loyalty to Gloriana. Specifically he states that "Una comes to stand between Redcrosse and his goal" (43). However, if Una called the Knight into being and gave him the armor by which he is named (a piece of information one only knows if one has read *The Letter to*

---

[15] In his essay on *Language,* Heidegger stated that the "call" in poetic language is the moment of "bearing" and that the language speaks by "bidding the bidden, thing-world and world-thing, to come to the between of the dif-ference. What is bidden is commanded to arrive from out of the dif-ference into the dif-ference" (995).

Raleigh), she is not the obstacle to the goal, nor is she the goal itself, but rather the truest

metaphor of the goal. Read in this manner, Una might be an attempt to represent

language as an object. Language stands in for the object of desire, but language is not an

object. Wolfreys makes a statement which seems to contradict his notion of Una as

signatory when he states that she may represent the "'Truth', specifically of the Reformed

Church" (42). As such, she signals Christian truth inside of the text (i.e. Elizabethan

truth qua Elizabethan body). In the epic (like in the *Letter to Raleigh*), Spenser imagines

Una to be that part of Queen Elizabeth that cannot be hidden because she is self-evident.

The splitting of Elizabeth's greater body into lesser and still virtuous bodies had no

damaging effects on the image of her totality, just as the splitting of the blessed trinity

into its individual components does not devalue the belief in the oneness of God.

Perhaps more radical than his view of Una as the "One True Church" and more

useful for the arguments that I have presented up to this point, Wolfreys states that:

> Una is the figure, *par excellence* of the truth of fiction...Because in its being
> always already transgressive… fiction begins in spite of everything to displace
> truth itself. (44)

As the "truth of fiction" she signals language as fiction and the failure of language to call

anything "true/real" into being. Because she is language, she is everything that Spenser

desires to master, and yet she remains impenetrable. Regardless of his attempt to make

language yield to his will by representing it as feminine, he cannot contain her/it.

Therefore, he repeatedly fails to produce the self he desires, and hence his "endlesse

worke". Butler makes a brilliant assertion with regards to language, a claim that helps to

refute the idea that the male poet, Spenser, was able to fashion the English male subject

(himself) by representing language/fiction/Una as woman ("available to appropriation" (Wofreys 44)). She states:

> Language is not an exterior medium or instrument into which I pour a self and from which I glean a self. The Hegelian model of self recognition that has been appropriated by Marx, Lukacs, and a variety of contemporary liberatory discourses presupposes a potential adequation between the "I" that confronts its world, including its language, as an object, and the "I" that finds itself as an object in that world. (196)

Wolfreys quotes a central axiom of Derridean thought with regards to naming and those who have the power to name others. He states "Every culture... 'institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language'. Mastery begins, 'as we know...through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations" (52). Book I, Canto I of *The Faerie Queene* and the *Letter to Raleigh* repeatedly show instances of 'Woman' in the position of master. Whether or not these are acts of false humility on the part of the poet, the inscription of the Queen Mother/Gloriana/Una as namer must not be erased due to our current perceptions of early modern misogyny. The formation of the English Renaissance male subject presented a unique set of conditions which should be taken into consideration when we study the period. Spenser was living under the aegis of a feminine monarch and his sense of self was always already constructed in a culture where the politics of language were dominated by Elizabeth I. Ilona Bell clearly explains the phenomenon of Elizabeth I and Elizabethan culture in *The Voice of A Monarch*:

> Simultaneously subject to and powerful enough to transgress cultural constraints on women, provoking and dashing antifeminist stereotypes, Elizabeth gave the traditional male discourse of politics and love a female body and a female voice, turning her 'liking' into a female counter-text that was radically difficult to read because it could not be interpreted or overmastered with the culture's assumptions about monarchs or women. (28)

Bell's observations align well with the arguments made up to this point. Regardless of how much effort Spenser put into the project of "master(ing) his mistress" throughout the thousands of lines of verse, he had to keep returning to his own humble origins (which the text could not mask) (Montrose). In the *Letter to Raleigh* and Book I, Canto I of the epic, Elizabeth I assumes her place as Spenser's master, at the top of Elizabethan culture. Our notions of culture as "paternal structure" should be challenged in order to avoid reinsribing mysoginist discourse particularly when the gaps in the logic of the text (in this case the Spenserian text) leave room for such rereadings (Butler 109).

CHAPTER II

Mary, Mary, Spenser's Dangerous Binary

Recuperating Spenser's (non-virgin) Marys

Although Elizabeth I was the primary cause of Spenser's "gender troubles" she

was not alone in producing such anxieties. The Spenserian text is the cultural product of a

society in which traditional patriarchal systems were to some extent destabilized by the

historical "presence" of a queen: but not just a singular queen, in fact three feminine

monarchs (Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots). The perspective of Elizabethan

England as a "troubled" patriarchy (or matriarchy) is supported by a number of scholars

and it stands in marked contrast with Wolfreys' assertion that:

> Like the society and culture that produces *The Faerie Queene*, the six books of
> Spenser's text display the ideological construction of the female as never
> completed, such is the 'problem' from particular patriarchal perspectives of
> women. (22)

Spenser's Una, as a symbol of unity (gendered female) to some extent contradicts the

notion that in "the six books" of *The Faerie Queene* women are constructed as "never

completed". In this chapter, I use historical information in conjunction with theory so as

to provide alternative views of those many places where the epic seems to be mimicking

traditional misogynist dialectics, but is in fact holding a mirror up to a society in which

the dominant English culture was embodied in its totality by a powerful unmarried

queen.[16]

---

[16] Ilona Bell writes: "Defending her conjugal freedom of choice was Elizabeth's most pressing concern,
but the debate also had much larger political ramifications, which set the terms for her future relationship to
parliament. After the opening sermons and the debate over her title, Elizabeth had reason to fear that her
opponents in parliament would try to use her female sex to subordinate her to their will. She therefore, took
the opportunity (in her) first parliamentary speech to declare, first, that she planned to govern the country
herself whether or not she married, and second, that it would be "unmeet" and "unfitting" for them who

Using a historical-theoretical approach, I examine the manner in which Elizabeth I

represented herself in order to preserve an ideologically necessary appearance of purity

and unity despite the pervasive traditional patriarchal "construction of the female as never

completed" (22). Elizabeth's image of purity was particularly important for her role as

the representative of the Protestant Church. Bell writes that:

> The first major confrontation between the queen and parliament concerned the
> sensitive and highly symbolic question of her title. Should she be named the
> "Supreme Head of the Church"? The title was claimed by Elizabeth's father
> Henry VIII, when he broke from Rome to marry, her mother Anne Boleyn. The
> issue had not arisen during Mary's reign because the Pope once again became the
> head of the English church. (46)

The author's assertions with regards to the question of the queen's role as "Head of the

Church" are significant to the arguments I make with regards to the figure of Una as

Elizabeth I in Spenser's epic poem. The poet knew that not all Protestant males agreed on

the title of "Head of the Church" for Elizabeth I (64). Bell writes: "as John Knox

explains, the biblical metaphor of head and feet was a synecdoche for the entire

patriarchal system of government" (64). She further explains that parliament conceded to

a temporary title of "Governor" because they wrongly assumed that Elizabeth I would

marry during her reign and that the title of "Head" would eventually be granted to her

husband (64).

Wolfreys makes a strong case in favor of a theoretical reading of *The Faerie*

Queene in which male identity is fashioned through the systematic othering and

destruction of female figures. He states that:

> Spenser utilizes specific discursive, cultural ideological 'place holders' of identity
> historically and materially given so as to generate and rethink-however

---

thought they could command to try to exert their power over her because it was she, not they, who had the
divinely given authority to 'command'" (61).

accidentally or unconsciously-the conceptual parameters of certain potent visual images of women and the feminine in relation to the poem's overarching project of self-fashioning. (21)

While my arguments are to some extent born out of Wolfreys' theory of the female figure as "other" in *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that in the "Spenserian mythopoetic worldview," the female figures that must be destroyed do not stand in for ontological "Woman" but for specific women whose historical identity is inextricably linked with Catholicism and foreignness (21). The preceding assertion aligns well with Wolfreys' suggestion that the epic authorizes the "Knight" who signals "England and Englishness" to act with force against "others' bodies, others' countries" in order to "forestall any anticipated transgression on the part of the other" (27). But instead of separating the categories of other as Wolfreys does when he identifies the other as "the woman, the foreigner and so on," my reading joins the woman and the foreigner into one great and powerful "Fem-nemy" (27). I emphasize the ethnocentric aspect of the othering of female representations which Spenser clearly engages in, so as to avoid reinscribing the notion that the "real/natural" difference upon which the male English subject's identity hangs in *The Faerie Queene* is that of sex/gender. Judith Butler like Simon de Beauvoir and other feminist-queer scholars view the process of othering as never being only about gender. For many scholars the process of othering always already involves issues of social class, ethnicity, race, and status hierarchies enforced through the discourse of the dominant culture. [17]

---

[17] In "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency," the author Sune Qvotrup Jensen explains the "theoretical points about othering and identity formation" (64). Jensen states that the "theoretical concept" of othering was "first coined" by "Spivak in 1985 (64). The author (Jensen) further notes that "this understanding of self and other is prevalent in de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1997)...de Beauvoir universalizes the theory of self and other in relation to both gender and other hierarchical social differences (1997,16)" (64).

As previously discussed in Chapter I, the low-born poet was speaking/writing

from outside the Elizabethan courtly matrix. He shows evidence throughout his verses

that he was oftentimes uncertain of his own authority. James P. Bednarz remarks that

"Spenser's published *Faerie Queene* was primarily a public fiction of political authority,

addressed to the monarch by an outsider, a low-level colonial administrator" (285). One

of the ways in which an outsider like Spenser could align his written work with the

ideologies of the dominant early modern Elizabethan culture was to participate in their

particular form of "other speak"(the information provided by authorized discourse and

authorized texts with regards to the "other"). Without the historical context surrounding

the feminine representations of evil, we are left in a purely theoretical, ahistorical vacuum

such as Wolfreys suggests when he posits that:

> The Spenserian epic mediates the high cultural traces of the late Elizabethan
> period through its representations of women, obviously enough. Through these
> culturally approved reproductions, and through the poet's grafting of cultural
> attitudes towards women onto his male characters, we can understand how the
> text reinscribes cultural expressions of the ruling class's gendered hegemonic
> infrastructure. (24)

Wolfreys' strictly theoretical inscriptions (with regards to the "fem-nemies of the

Protestant male subject) lead him to continue his analysis of the female figures of *The*

Faerie Queene from a problematic, overly masculinist perspective:

> Such containment and surveillance within a patriarchal culture is witnessed in the
> various books of the poem, through the constant re-working of the elements taken
> to constitute the female in her various culturally and mythopoetically generated
> guises of virgin, temptress, dragon, amazon and androgyne. (24)

My reason for quoting the preceding passages from Wolfreys' text is not to show that the

author wholly denies the historical moment in the shaping of Spenser's fictional narrative.

On the contrary, in his introduction, the author states that "Spenser transgresses both

continental and traditional poetic forms and concerns in his attempt to give a place to the historical 'taking place' or 'becoming of the English subject" (20). My point of contention with Wolfreys' argument has to do with his emphasis on the masculine-historical and the consequent total absence of the name "Queen Mary" from his reading of Book I. I would not have been able to produce this supplementation to his theoretical argument if the author's viewpoint with regards to *The Faerie Queene was* entirely ahistorical, but he does introduce such historical figures as Edmund Spenser, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney and the (supposedly) "male produced" Queen Elizabeth I. His approach to the Spenserian text allowed me the opportunity to bring my own knowledge of the Elizabethan period and its strong feminine agents to the foreground. My argument demonstrates why the historical moment is so important for understanding the changes that hegemonic language systems undergo over time. The reading Wolfreys suggests weighs in heavily on the side of the male subject (even though he asserts that the male subject of Book I is "decentered"(40)), and this rereading aims to free the unfinished Spenserian epic from its association with strictly patriarchal hegemonic literary forms thereby opening up a space for alternative, polyvocal perspectives.

The critical reading I propose in chapter II (specifically with regards to the virgin, the temptress and the dragon) suggests that the poet strategically repeated some of the images from Classical and biblical discourse, with variance, so as to open up gaps within the hegemonic matrices of the past. His aim was to make the strangeness of Elizabeth I's reign "intelligible" for future generations (Butler). Perhaps he wanted to be certain (as certain as any author can ever be) that his Protestant Queen would be read as the "good" and the "true" manifestation of female power. For instance, in Book I, Canto III, stanza

1, the poet speaker makes known the "allegiance" he owes onto "Woman-kind" (I.iii.1).

Although the later books of *The Faerie Queene* reflect a more subversive and uncertain

tone, the first three books of the epic (published in 1590) are celebratory and the poet

offered them to his queen as a gift. Through his acceptance and glorification of her will,

he hoped he would earn her grace, be incorporated into her "virtuous" political body and

be named as the new English gentleman in a cultural period marked by significant

changes in the old patriarchal systems. Bednarz explains that:

> By lowering himself in his patron's sight, he positioned himself to be lifted to
> eminence not by his own merit but through his patron's grace, obtained in the
> manner of its theological prototype from an act of pity (300).

Bednarz' inference is significant because in addition to underscoring Spenser's

relationship with Elizabeth as his royal patron, it helps to support the reading of Una

(Elizabeth as the head of the Protestant Church) as the Sacred Muse. Miller further

supports this view of the poet's imaginary and mutually beneficial relationship with his

queen when he writes:

> The poet who 'frames' his ideal portrait of Elizabeth within complex allegorical
> images of social hierarchy seeks at the same time and in the same gesture—by
> reflex as it were—to be himself constituted in the image of sovereignty, or as the
> 1596 title page would declare, 'to live with the eternity of her fame' (31).

Most scholars agree that Elizabeth's reign helped to solidify the identity of the

Protestant English subject.[18] In order to produce Elizabeth's epic, Spenser had to make

certain that her sacred image, especially the "retrait" of the Virgin Queen in her early

---

[18] The need for a new English identity may have been the direct result of the *Regnans in Excelsis*
papal bull of 1570 through which Elizabeth I was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. Her English
subjects were excommunicated along with her.

33

years when she ascended the English throne, would not be contaminated by remaining

traces of Catholicism (*FQ* II.ix). According to the author Jane Dunn:

> Weary of bloodshed, fearful of foreign wars, weakened by bad harvests and
> disease, the people welcomed the new Queen. But there was a foreboding too as
> to what the future would bring. Another female monarch, after the last disastrous
> experiment seemed too risky when England was in need of inspired and powerful
> leadership. (19)

Spenser had to contain the memory of Elizabeth's half-sister, Catholic Mary I, whose

ghostly fragments continued to haunt the Protestant English psyche nearly twenty years

after her death.[19] Along with Elizabeth I, the poet worked obsessively to clear his

Queen's literary portrait of the negative image of feminine monarchs that resulted in part

because of Mary Tudor's faults and in part because of traditional misogynistic discourse.

For instance, Dunn writes that Elizabeth had the unfortunate experience of having to deal

harshly with the Protestant preacher John Knox because of a "tract" he authored and

which happened to be published around the time of her coronation (19). Dunn remarks:

> The fiery Scottish Protestant John Knox was also to remember 1558 as a year of
> particular significance. His tract *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the
> Monstrous Regime of Women* was published, with unfortunate timing, just as
> Elizabeth came to the throne. By monstrous regiment he meant unnatural
> government and his blast directed against the women rulers in Europe at the time
> of his writing whom he saw as implacable enemies of the reformed religion: Mary
> I of England and the Scottish regent Mary of Guise. (19)

Spenser also dealt with an even greater challenge to the representation of

Elizabeth I within the epic then the traces of Catholic Mary I and traditional misogynistic

discourse; there was the delicate and more incendiary matter of the queen's cousin, Mary

---

[19] In *The Voice of a Monarch*, Bell states: "with a battered economy and depleted government coffers, the country was reeling from the violent upheavals of Mary's Roman Catholic reign. The widespread excitement about the restoration of a reformed Church of England couldn't entirely conceal the sobering fact that many were still committed to the old faith. Ireland, Scotland, and France posed immediate military concerns. Catholic powers in Spain, the Holy Roman Empire and the Papal See presented an ongoing threat of war. Lingering questions about Elizabeth's legitimacy only exacerbated the anxiety that many felt about the prospect of another female monarch, especially on as young and inexperienced as Elizabeth" (33).

Queen of Scots who laid claims to the English throne as early as 1561. As previously

stated, Spenser achieves this goal of purifying Elizabeth's image within the epic narrative

through the process of othering a specific figure of woman, a Catholic queen by the name

of Mary (in whatever form she presented herself and in whatever time period she

emerged). The poet appropriates the Classical "half woman/half serpent" trope and he

(refashions) the biblical "Whore of Babylon" in order to create the "mythopoetic

manifestation" of Elizabeth's half-sister Mary I and her cousin Mary Queen of Scots.[20]

Notably, in the "Whore of Babylon" image, the poet found the ideal metonymic device to

blend the image of both of these Catholic queens. The "temptress" and the "dragon" are

made one and the same. All of those who spoke through her "purple pall" were "other" to

the new English subjects (McCabe 231/*FQ* I.viii.16). Particularly with this one image

("The Whore of Babylon"), the poet handled the business of othering all non-Protestant

foreigners, Catholics and any who chose to follow the "evil" queen in all of her

manifestations. My inference with regards to the extent of the exclusion of others the poet

achieved through re-working the Whore of Babylon trope into his Duessa figure is based

on one of the most important assertions made by Richard McCabe:

> The Tudor mind was ill-accustomed to so sharp a distinction between politics and religion. For them, the Whore of Babylon was very much a dangerous political force and Mary's execution was regarded by many as essential to England's religious well-being. Moreover, in Protestant circles Mary was commonly regarded as the current incarnation of the Whore of Babylon or, as she was called in the English Parliament, 'professed Member of Antichrist'. (227)

My arguments in this section also stress the function of the poet not as "creator"

or "diviner of things to come", but as recorder of the past actions which Elizabeth had

---

[20] "Mythopoetic manifestation" is a phrase used by Wolfreys with reference to the Redcrosse Knight. I have used it here to show that the historical context for Errour and Duessa is useful for understanding the function of these monstrous women within the text.

employed (and was employing) in order to produce her own image. In other words, Spenser acted as a kind of court reporter delivering the news to the English people. The poet was showing himself to be a part of "Elizabeth's PR Machine," helping to spin a narrative which she herself was responsible for creating (Montrose 309, 317). Notably, the queen resisted entering into marriage her whole life and in so doing she preserved the image of herself as the Virgin Queen, until her death in 1603. Dunn asserts that "Elizabeth's insistence that she would not marry was a remarkable instance of revolutionary action and independence of mind" (17). Perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, it was Elizabeth who held her cousin Mary captive for 18 and a half years (1567-1587) and it was she who ordered her public execution. In producing the epic, Spenser was to some extent recreating Elizabeth's struggle to fashion herself.

Before I continue to provide the historical background necessary for understanding the ethnocentric agenda behind Spenser's demonization of the two Queen Marys, I will perform a brief psycho-sexual reading of the lines from the epic poem in which some of Elizabeth I's "others"(Errour, the "'false' Una," and Duessa), emerge. The psycho-sexual reading is done in order to show the ways in which Spenser sublimated (consciously or unconsciously) his fear of women in power. Many scholars agree that Elizabeth I had little tolerance for criticism even when it was cloaked in allegory. This was clearly shown by the example the queen made of John Knox when she "barred" him from reentering England (19). Thus, recognizing Spenser's need to sublimate his attack on women in positions of power adds weight to the suggestion that the poet had to maintain his submissive position before the queen in order to avoid her displeasure. If the poet had been entirely certain that his position as ontological "Man" was sufficient

guarantee of his authority, he would not have had to mask his more misogynistic verses in the manner expressed by the passages that will be read in the next section.

Sublimating Gynophobia

In his reading of Errour, Wolfreys cites the passage from *The Faerie Queene* stating that Errour was "halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, But th'other halfe did woman's shape retaine" (I.i.14). Wolfreys asserts that "Errour (also the prototype for Duessa) is transgression personified, and that transgression is determined by gender and sexuality, by an identity other than that of the courtly male" (46). But here it is important to note that prior to confronting the creature, Una instructs the Knight on what his reaction to the "monster vile" ought to be. She tells him that "God and man does hate" Errour. The logic follows that if he is man, he must hate this particular woman. Therefore, in this scene Una (as the matriarch) identifies the feminine other, the other to herself that "God and man does hate". First Una makes the utterance and then Errour becomes Redcrosse's "other" by Una's command.

The abject representation of Errour as half woman and half serpent lends itself to a variety of traditional Classical and psycho-sexual interpretations. One possible signification of Errour within the context of the epic is that she is the product of the unholy union between Eve (the ancestral mother of mankind) and the devil (in the guise of a serpent). Miller's assertion that "this image draws on many sources, but prominent among them must be the book of Genesis, for the woman-serpent notoriously consolidates the two agencies by which man fell from grace in Eden" supports my reading (248). Spenser's Eve/Satan dichotomy re-inscribes the feminine body as the

proverbial center of sin. The splitting of the female body in this manner is significant

because it aligns well with the theory of Julia Kristeva in her essay "From Filth to

Defilement" wherein she asserts that there is a strong correlation between notions of

abjection and the genitive powers of the female. The observations that follow focus on

Spenser's symbolic displacement of the womb from its "natural" position to the place of

the monster's mouth. This shifting of the womb is a significant move on the part of the

poet because it allows him to describe Errour's birthing process as a foul eruption

emanating from her mouth like vomit. He bypasses the repressive moral codes of

Elizabethan society that prevent him from naming the feminine parts involved in birth

while simultaneously using the discursive force (to transform nature) which validates his

role as a poet/creator. Through his metaphor Spenser inscribes the mouth as a place of

origins. Spenser's artistic maneuver is viewed as a sublimated act of transgression

because he gives himself poetic license to speak the unspeakable. This notion aligns well

with Wolfreys' statement that *The Faerie Queene:*

> transgresses … the proprieties and the limits of textual form and convention in order to bear witness in encrypted fashion to …inscriptions of Early Modern Subjectivity…coming into being at a given material moment (31)

The Errour episode indeed stages Redcrosse's battle to eradicate evil but when we

read the allegorical figure as a hybrid of Eve and Satan (in the guise of the serpent), the

monster appears to be part feminine and part masculine.[21] More importantly Errour is

inextricably linked with the production of corrupt(ed) Catholic texts. Spenser juxtaposes

Errour's bad textual "issue" with his own act of writing the epic so as to characterize his

---

[21] Errour's snake-like tail signals Satan (the male devil as serpent). Therefore, I read her lower (more "problematic") half as male.

narrative as a "good" literary production. The destruction of error is a rhetorical device which allows Spenser to defend his work from criticism and censorship. When Redcrosse destroys Errour's female creations (her foul texts), he presumably opens up a space for his male creation which is intended to supplant erroneous ideas of bad reading with new forms of moral knowledge.   In the heart of the battle the poet speaker states:

> She spewd out of her filthie maw
> A floud of poison horrible and blacke
> Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw
> Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slake
> His grasping hold, and, and from her tune him backe,
> Her vomit full of books and papers was (I.i.20)

The Redcrosse Knight instinctively turns away from the sight of the monster in keeping with Kristeva's notions of the bodily reactions one has in the face of the abject which in this text is signed as the woman/snake. Furthermore, in the A.C. Hamilton edition, Errour is glossed as representative of the Catholic Church (36). This association aligns well with Wolfreys' view that the black poison which flows out of the monster's mouth is synonymous with the ink that was used to print Catholic texts. The she-monster produces rotting flesh and erroneous texts in her mouth and these are expelled from her oral cavity as vomit. Kristeva's essay is relevant to understanding this scene because she reports that in borderline cases of *narcissism* subjects express "the fear of being rotten" (63). The use of Kristeva's theory is significant here because it supports the interpretation of the conflict between the Redcrosse Knight and Errour as a Freudian sublimation. The struggle points back to the fact that Spenser is having trouble separating from a feminine body. As previously stated, the body he fears will put his own self under erasure is that of Queen Elizabeth. The double inscription of Errour's mouth as a place of

origin and of absorption/destruction further supports this reading of the passage as a psycho-sexual symbol. Spenser's battle to separate from the feminine social body can be interpreted through Kristeva's assertion that gynophobia generally stems from the "subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (64).

An important point to consider in the scene where Errour and her monstrous offspring emerge is that Errour's issue may be compared to those of the male god Nilus which Spenser introduces in Stanza 21.   In these lines the poet speaker states that the "mud" which Nilus leaves behind when he overflows , breeds "Ten thousand kindes of creatures partly male and partly femall of his fruitful seed" (I.i.21). To which he adds "such ugly monstrous shapes elswher may no man reed" (I.i.21). Through the Nilus anecdote, the poet clearly takes a step back from his projection of the female body as the production site of misshapen beings, and shifts the attention over to the historical representation of a male deity in the same act of giving birth to androgynous creatures. This shift is important because it allows Spenser the opportunity to amend his suggestion that only powerful women are capable of producing filthy creatures. He transgresses the traditional linear construction of a narrative in order to return to another moment of genesis, one in which men are the guilty parties for monstrous creations. In addition, he gives himself credit for naming an event that no other man has named before when he states "elswher may no man reed" (I.i.21). The poet's admission of guilt in writing a transgressive passage (one that "elswher may no man reed") is significant because it offers a counter-argument to Wolfreys' claim that Una is a "transgressive" feminine figure when she names Duessa's "filthy" body in the scene from Book I, Canto VIII, to be discussed later in this argument. It is in these moments when certain male characters

from the epic are shown to be guilty of the same faults as the female speakers or actors that the text demonstrates a democratic treatment/handling of the sex/gender question.

The depth of Spenser's fear of certain powerful feminine figures becomes more apparent after the hero of Book I (Redcrosse) defeats Errour. It would seem that with the destruction of Errour (whose figure in this passage signals both the image of the Catholic Church as spiritual mother and a monstrous womb) the Redcrosse Knight would be able to enjoy his newly fashioned male subjectivity in peace, but this is not the case (or else *The Faerie Queene* would look more like a short story than an epic). In Stanza 45 of Book I, Spenser presents what I read to be the most transgressive genesis of all in the epic, the birth of Archimago's "'false' Una" (Wolfreys). Her origin scene crosses boundaries (natural/material/textual) because she is born out of a male text (if the early modern patriarchal norms were being reinscribed then the births generated by male texts would presumably be purifying because they are logical). The "'false' Una's" textual birth reaffirms my viewpoint that in *The Faerie Queene* those creatures born from a woman's "darksom hole" are not the only ones to be feared (I.i14). In the aforementioned stanza the poet speaker states that Archimago the magician:

> With charmes and hidden artes
> Had made a Lady of that other Spright
> And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes
> So lively and so like in all mens sight
> That weaker sence it coul have ravish quight
> The maker selfe for all his wondrous witt
> Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight (I.i.45)

Archimago's creation of a being through language mirrors Spenser's own purpose for producing the epic which is, as previously mentioned, to call subjects (soul/spirit) into being and to fashion them in accordance to the passages contained in his book. This

opens up a gap in the logic of the text because it suggests that even the formation of a subject through the use of language is susceptible to corruption. Through the narrative of the conjuring of the "'false' Una," Spenser suggests that not all male authors are fit to produce perfect English subjects. Archimago's project, his magic text, is antithetical to Spenser's epic plan for a homogenous national identity. In fact the sorcerer's book underscores the "impossibility" of this mission (Wolfreys 36). In a moment of ironic self-reflexivity the poet speaker says that in order to create his feminine specimen, the enchanter chose "a few words most horrible (let none them be read)" and "thereof did verses frame" (I.i.37). Through the preceding lines Spenser escapes the calumny that may befall him as a writer of nation-building texts. He confronts his anxiety about the false consciousness that "other" authors devise in order to infect the Elizabethan social body by projecting that ulterior motive out of his own text and onto the villainous beguiler, Archimago. The sorcerer is "evil" because his purpose is to trick the Redcrosse Knight (the English subject) into abandoning his mission to serve his queen. On the other hand, the bad author/good author binary that Spenser constructs through Archimago's creation scene inscribes him (Spenser) as the "good" poet because his intention is to create a faithful subject. Yet, the displacement of corrupt authorial intention away from his body of work and on to Archimago is simply one of the possible meanings that may be disentangled from the narrative surrounding the birth of the "'false' Una".

In the beginning of Book I, Canto II, it seems that Archimago's double bed-trick (the "feigning dream" and "the faire-forged Spright" (I.ii.i)) may not have worked exactly the way the magician intended it to, because the Redcrosse Knight does not satisfy the sexual requests of the "'false' Una." However, in Book I, Canto II, stanza 4, the sorcerer

produces a subsequent false image of Una in bed with another knight which succeeds in

pushing Redcrosse away from Christian truth (forcing him to misread truth as abject) and

leading him into the arms of Duessa (who is disguised as Fidessa (false religion) in Canto

II). In fact, it is arguable at this point that the "ydle" masculinist dreams created by

Archimago disrupt the ideal Spenserian matriarchal fantasy which I presented in Chapter

I (written into *The Letter to Raleigh* and the opening lines of *The Faerie Queene*)

(I.i.46). Archimago's forged sexual dream of "'false' Una" introduces the fear of

castration to the Knight who was up until this moment, "void of evil thought" (Redcrosse

is unable to perform sexually with the "'false' Una") and also completes the psycho-

sexual fantasy by representing the "'false' Una" as the veiled phallus (the "'false'Una"

hides a "bayted hooke" under her black stole) (I.i.42). That being said, Archimago is not

the true letter of the Law. He is not the Lacanian/Freudian transcendent "Name-of-the-

Father," but a "wicked maister," or a false spiritual father (perhaps a cunning Catholic

priest because he says "an Ave-Mary after and before") (I.ii.44). In the Spenserian epic,

the wicked father (Archimago) does not have the authority to supplant the true letter of

the newly instituted Elizabethan Law which up to this point in the narrative has been

equated with the Name-of-the-Mother, Una. Although he is not a figure of male

authority in the Elizabethan matrix, Archimago's fabrication causes the Knight of

Holiness to follow his body's carnal demands for copulation (pushing him into the

violent heterosexual matrix) instead of continuing on the path of his desire for a pure

union with his spiritual mother Una. Redcrosse's new mission is a deviation from the

goal of the original dream vision written into *The Letter to Raleigh* which was the desire

to incorporate or rather to be incorporated into the cultural/social body of Gloriana and

the holy body of Una as the Protestant Church. After Archimago confuses the Knight

with regards to the purity and unity of Una (as the embodiment of Christian Truth), he is

no longer sure of what he stands for—or stands in for (his identity is lost) and he feels the

need to prove his masculinity through an exaggerated gender performance in Canto II.

Although Wolfreys proposes that Redcrosse is repulsed by the "'false' Una's" overt

sexuality, my reading suggests that he finds her request disturbing because as his spiritual

mother, his union with her must not be illicit. Despite Redcrosse's naiveté he suspects a

"hidden foe" (I.i.49). If the Knight's existence is "mapped out" as Wolfreys notes, then it

is likely Redcrosse had already imagined or sensed that his union with Una would be a

holy one authorized by God (a marriage bond). Miller suggests that "since

Una…represents the true Church…her betrothal to the knight prefigures the marriage of

Christ to his risen congregation" (248). Therefore, I argue that even before he meets

Duessa, the Knight has arrived at the knowledge (via Archimago's dream), that he must

find a looser substitute for Una, one with whom he can satisfy his newly discovered

"unwonted lust" (I.i.49). This lustful male fantasy, according to Spenser's text, is not the

product of Redcrosse Knight's "natural", drives, but a textually constructed sexual desire

written onto his body by the false father.[22]

---

[22] Wolfreys argues that Redcrosse's "desire is only thinly masked, transferred, exteriorized as something
not of his conscious will, but of his weaker other self, called up from an unconscious alterity by the textual
manipulation of Archimago"(50). I argue that desire is "textual(ly) manipulated" to the extent that
Spenser's male subjects are always already the products of cultural ideas. What and who they desire may
be influenced by their material condition and directed by outside cultural forces (for example unauthorized
texts like those which Archimago employs in the creation of the "'false' Una". Spenser is attempting to
correct false representations of Una (Elizabeth I as the Reformed Protestant Church).

Devilish Doubles and Dangerous Liaisons/ Duessa's False Heterosexual Matrix

In the epigraph of Canto II, the poet speaker states:

> The guileful great Enchaunter parts
> The Redcrosse Knight from Truth
> Into whose stead faire falsehood steps,
> And works him woefull ruth (I.ii)

These lines are significant because they point back to the fact that the "great Enchaunter",

Archimago (as a false father figure), caused the original split between Redcrosse and

Una. Therefore, because of the division between the Knight and his spiritual guide

(spiritual mother), he is from that moment on always already seeking "feigned truth" to

replace his lost vision of the true goal (his unified Protestant-English self). In Stanza 9

the speaker continues:

> Subtill Archimago when his guests
> Saw divided into double parts,
> And Una wandring in woods and forests,
> Th'end of his drift he praisd his divelish arts,
> That had such might over true meaning harts (I.ii.9)

The A.C. Hamilton *Faerie Queene* text confirms the notion that the Knight becomes a

divided self only after Archimago separates him from Una because the gloss for stanza 9

indicates that the word "double" in these lines signifies that "the knight is divided from

himself" (45).

In Stanza 13 the poet speaker narrates the temptress Duessa's grand entrance onto

the pages of the epic as follows:

> A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
> And like a Persian mitre on her hed
> Shee wore, with crowns and owches garnished
> Her wanton palfrey all was overspred
> With tinsell trappings, woven like a waue,

45

Whose bridle rung with golden bels and bosses brave (I.ii.13)

Undoubtedly, in Canto II, the Redcrosse Knight has left the realm of the imaginary and has entered quite abruptly into a masculine symbolic order (in contrast to the feminine symbolic order I suggested in Chapter I). What are these male seducing symbols written onto the body of Duessa (qua Fidessa)? In stanza 13 we learn that she wears symbols of wealth and power. Where does her power come from? To the Christian reader (Spenser's contemporary target audience), Duessa's power originates either in hell or Rome or both. According to the Hamilton gloss, "Duessa is the great whore of Babylon" (46). The Hamilton text continues to support the notion that in stanza 13 Duessa signals the Whore of Babylon by stating that according to the gloss of Revelations: "'this woman is the Antichrist, that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures…whose crueltie and blood sheding is declared by skarlat'"(46). Her "'triple crowne'" or "papal tiara," signal her connection to the Pope (46).

Clearly, Fidessa-Duessa is not "Woman," to be taken by "Man" when he desires her in keeping with traditional patriarchal notions. The Spenserian text reflects the fact that during the Elizabethan period the Law and the word of God were not exclusively handled by males. The "Whore" gathers her followers with cunning words and in the epic Duessa's biological sex never plays a role in the manner in which she reproduces her congregation. Just as with the previous examples of "otherness" that came before her in the epic (Errour and Archimago's sprite) one cannot reduce her problematic figure to the matter of biological sex/cultural gender precisely because her biological sex is nowhere to be read and the "monster" performs a feminine gender role in order to seduce Redcrosse. I question Duessa's female identity specifically because the repressive moral

46

codes of Elizabethan England prevent the author from writing/revealing her "real/natural" biological sex. In Book I, Canto VIII, stanza 48, when Duessa is stripped of her robe, Spenser intentionally moves away from naming female genitalia. In place of female "neather parts" the poet writes that his "Chaster muse" blushes to write the "shame of all her kind".[23] The reader only learns that "at her rompe," Duessa has "a foxes taile" (I.viii.48).

Although Wolfreys focuses more on the gender identity of the enemies of Redcrosse Knight, he does note that Duessa signals the Catholic Church. In a similar manner McCabe argues that she stands in for the Catholic Church as the Anti-Christ but he adds that she also stands in for Mary Queen of Scots. Therefore, I argue that as a "poetic manifestation" of these cultural, social, religious and political bodies (the Church, the Queen), Fidessa (or Duessa) is a master text of images of otherness both male and female, a tapestry of institutions and subjects presumably infected and thus devalued by their faith in an "erroneous" doctrine. The only one who fails to recognize the dangerous markers covering the presumably female body of Fidessa is the English subject, Redcrosse. Without Una's perspective (without the wisdom of Queen Elizabeth I's perspective as the head and body of the Protestant Church), the subject is lost and he cannot "read" the cultural signs of alterity.

On first inspection Canto II seems to present the modern reader with a traditional Freudian/Lacanian heterosexual economy of desire. The new Protestant English male subject having lost sight of the goal (a holy union with his Mother church and country)

---

[23] In the absence of passages describing male or female genitalia/markers of biological sex, we rely on the poet's use of feminine pronouns and Duessa's gender performance to settle the problem of the shape shifting hag's unfixed gender identity.

reasserts his subject position by searching for an alternative object of desire to satisfy his carnal needs. In Canto II, stanza 20, Spenser accentuates the moment of Redcrosse's departure from Gloriana/Una's quest. In this stanza, the poet writes the new quest for false "manhood" (and "false" religion) as a "chase scene". After killing Fidessa's lover, a Sarazin (a Muslim Knight), the Redcrosse Knight pursues the Whore of Babylon. Significantly, Fidessa's lover whom Redcrosse slays in battle is *Sans foy* whose name signals "faithlessness". When he kills *Sans foy* in this scene, Redcrosse Knight stands in his place as the "faithless" Knight.[24] In a similar and simultaneous gesture to the move which resigns the Redcrosse Knight as *Sans foy*, Duessa now stands in the void left by the forsaken Una, as Fidessa, the new "'false' Una" of the text.

Significantly, this false woman, Fidessa, succeeds in seducing the Knight just moments after the "'false' Una'" fails to achieve the same ends. Fidessa's successful seduction of Redcrosse begs the question: how does a strange (foreign) woman, who might not be "woman" at all, (because Duessa may signal the Pope as Anti-Christ, Satan, or a hag with a fox's tail), lure the inexperienced squire of Holiness into Faerie Land's false heterosexual matrix of desire? The answer may be that Fidessa succeeds in the seduction of the male subject through an exaggerated feminine gender performance. Like the "'false' Una" fashioned by Archimago's words, "she" fashions "herself" through spells/words which produce her body and clothing in the way that "she" (or the author

---

[24] The Hamilton gloss for stanza 20 states that Redcrosse Knight's "flight from Una now becomes a flight after Duessa" (48). Also, that the "chivalric convention that allowed the victor to claim the arms of the defeated enemy is given special significance: in his Pyrrhic victory, the knight gains, and must later defend, a shield bearing the inscription '*Sans foy*'" (48).

and his culture) perceive will be most seductive to Elizabethan men.[25] She/he/it (I use "it" here because "the monsters" have animal parts written on their bodies) cries, she/he/it begs, she/he/it gives him "coy looks," she/he/it wears beautiful clothing, in short, she/he/it sells her/him/itself to the male subject as the object of desire (as defined by the standards of Elizabethan culture) (I.ii.27). Perhaps more importantly what Fidessa-Duessa can "do" better than any woman "real" or "imagined" is to lower herself in the presence of the male subject in order to increase his self-pride. She gives him "commandement" and "power" (I.ii.22). Fidessa's "gender performance" points to the fact that Elizabethan authors like Edmund Spenser were becoming increasingly aware of the fact that passivity was not a "natural" feminine characteristic, but a culturally imposed behavior. Moreover most scholars would agree that unlike the fictional Fidessa, Elizabeth I refused to bend her will to satisfy the demands of her male advisors (i.e. ministers or suitors). In stanza 21 the poet speaker describes Fidessa-Duessa's humility performance:

> She turning backe with ruefull countenaunce,
> Cride, Mercy mercy Sir vouchsafe to show
> On silly Dame, subject to hard mischaunce,
> And to your mighty will. Her humblesse low
> In so ritch weedes and seeming glorious show,
> Did much emmove his stout heroicke heart,
> And said, Deare dame, your suddein overthrow
> Much rueth me; but now put feare apart,
> And tell, both who ye be, and who that tooke your part.(I.ii.21)

---

[25] In Canto II, Fradubio (the man who has been turned into a tree by the sorceress Duessa) warns Redcrosse that the witch appears to be "Lyke a faire lady, but "fowle Duessa hyde(s)"(I.ii.35). In conjunction with the Hamilton text, which glosses Duessa as a "double being" and "biformed" with "neather parts" which no one dares to describe, I push towards a reading of Duessa that questions ~~her~~ "being" female. Therefore, Redcrosse's identity is not threatened by her gender *per se* but by Duessa's associations with false doctrine.

The reader knows these are false shows; she is Duessa, the "faire falsehood" which the poet speaker warned us about in the Canto II Argument sonnet. The Redcrosse Knight seems to be even more moved by her "humblesse low" because she is dressed in "ritch weedes" (I.ii.21). This is significant because with Fidessa the Knight experiences the ideal male fantasy of containing the female other even when she is more powerful than he is (she is a powerful queen who is brought to her knees by misfortune). Spenser is careful to present this particular scene as a moment of misperception on the Knight's part (the Knight is not aware that he is falling into a trap).

Clearly, by stanza 26 the Redcrosse Knight has lost his ability to reason and fails to recognize that Fidessa's enticing humility is forged. The poet speaker remarks "He in great passion al this while did dwell, More busying his quicke eies, her face to view, Then his dull eares, to hear what shee did tell" (49). The Knight is blinded by his desire and he listens to Fidessa but he cannot hear the blasphemy in her speeches. The poet wants his audience to read/know that the Knight is falling for Fidessa-Duessa's "gender parody".[26] Fidessa-Duessa is the Other "kind" of woman that Redcrosse Knight would meet after he loses faith in "Truth" (qua Una) (I.ii). However, Miller asserts that

---

[26] In *Gender Trouble* Butler states that: "If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender and performance"(187). Although Butler is specifically referring to the theatrical performance of "drag" when she writes about the dissonance of gender performance, I use the term "gender parody" here to underscore the fact that Duessa as metonym/or sign may be read or misread as male because she signals Anti-Christ. Alternatively, she may be read as a feminine body that has been overwritten by Satan's male power. In light of these possible readings, the male devil may be performing feminine gender in order to seduce the Redcrosse Knight. However, the devil is seducing Redcrosse into desiring not only illicit sexual relations but false religion, wealth and power. I do not read gender parody/performance into the character of Errour because Errour is inscribed as purely abject (naked "original sin"). The poet does not suggest that Errour attempts to "mask" her "impure" body except for the fact that she lives in a cave. However, Duessa's robe, her gestures and manners, "mask" her "unreadable/unknowable" sex.

"Redcrosse" must "sojourn with Duessa: to learn her difference from Una" (248). The Redcrosse Knight's (hence Spenser's) new knowledge of the difference between Duessa and Una is as Miller claims "in effect to separate the woman from the serpent" (248). Miller's suggestion is noteworthy because it supports my reading of *The Faerie Queene* as the cultural product of a society that was challenging the notion of fixed gender roles and undoing some of the work of misogynist discourse in order to pay homage to their feminine monarch Elizabeth I.

Ironically, Fidessa tells the hero of Book I a personal narrative that is almost identical (with slight variation) to the one told to him in Canto I by Una and which was also repeated to him by the "false' Una" in the dream vision. Notably, the change in the narrative occurs when Fidessa claims to be the daughter of an Emperor (connecting her to the Roman Empire) whereas Una is the daughter of a King. At this point in the epic, The Redcrosse Knight has already been bonded twice by his word to two different versions of "truth" (one "true", one 'false') and in Canto II, he is about to fall for the same story a third time. In stanza 22 Fidessa states:

> The wretched woman, whom unhappy howre
> Hath now made thrall to your commandement,
> Before that angry heavens list to lowre,
> And fortune false betraide me to thy pore,
> Was, (O what now availeth that I was?)
> Borne the sole daughter of an Emperour,
> He that the wide West under his rule has,
> And high hath set his throne, where Tiberis doth pas. (I.ii.22)

Fidessa-Duessa's narrative as told by her in stanza 22, is significant because in his lifetime Spenser would have experienced (in varying degrees) the reigns of Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots and he most likely heard countless stories retold by

his friends in Court about the legitimate or illegitimate claims that each one of these women had made to the English throne (at one historical moment or another). All three of these feminine monarchs would have been recognized by their subjects in England or in Scotland, as ordained political and religious bodies. But for the poet Spenser there could only be one Una, one Christian truth and he sincerely hoped she was Elizabeth I. In Book I, Canto II, the poet speaker expresses his devotion to Una's cause by stating:

> And now it is empassioned so deep,
> For fairest Una's sake, of whom I sing,
> That my frail Eyes these Lines with Tears do steep,
> To think how she through guileful handeling,
> Though true as touch, though Daughter of a King,
> Though fair as ever living Wight was fair,
> Though nor in Word nor Deed ill meriting,
> Is from her Knight divorced in Despair,
> And her due Loves deriv'd to that vile Witch's share.(I.ii.2)

The preceding passage shows that Spenser wasn't just hoping that his Queen was the embodiment of Christian truth (as the Head of the Reformed Protestant Church), he was working feverishly together with Queen Elizabeth I and the printers to make sure that her truth and Christian truth were recorded as One.

Evil Becomes "Her": Producing Mary Tudor/ and Mary Stuart

The Book I considerations of Errour's snake-like train and Duessa's associations with Anti-Christ used in the previous sections to support the psycho-sexual reading were presented in chronological order (as they appear in *The Faerie Queene)*. This diachronic reading of the wicked female identities featured in the first three books of the epic (1590) helps to underscore the notion that in Spenser's epic "evil" is also in the process of becoming a textual portrait of an abstract idea (the embodiment of evil). Read in this

manner Errour seems to be a rough draft of "the Enemy" of the English subject, in the

process of becoming the "face of falsehood," Duessa (I.viii.49). In this section I

concentrate specifically on the female figures of Errour and Duessa because as Miller

states "both travesty that mystical body (Una) in their monstrosity" (248).

　　　With regards to the historical tensions that inform Spenser's epic, Miller asserts

that "the political rivalries that shaped the lives and deaths of competitors for power in

Tudor England were defined by a structural dilemma inherent in the very idea of the

monos archos, the single unitary ruler" (121). His claim is significant because it reaffirms

the notion that Elizabeth could never have achieved her position as the one, true, ruler of

England without the constant threat of Mary Stuart's challenge to that authenticity. Mary

Stuart was almost queen of England twice. She was betrothed to Prince Edward (the only

son of Henry VIII) when she was only 6 months old and she would have married him at

age 10 had it not been for the political and religious agendas of Cardinal David Beaton

and the Pro-French lords of Scotland.[27] Perhaps the entanglement of the two Mary's

begins from the moment Mary Tudor became queen of England by claiming the throne

and ordering the execution of Lady Grey who was Edward's appointed successor. If

instead, Mary Stuart had married Edward when she was 10, as Henry VIII had once

planned, Mary Stuart would have been queen of England rather than Mary I. This

historical fact would have caused a further interweaving of the lives of Mary I and Mary

Stuart in the minds of the English people. The pairing of the Mary's would have been a

useful political tool for the agents responsible for Queen Elizabeth I's rise to power upon

the death of Mary I in 1558. Mary I's original plan was to exclude Elizabeth from

---

[27] Guy, John. *Mary Queen of Scots*. Boston: Mariner Books: Houghton Mifflin.2004.Print.18

succession which would have left the claim to the English throne open for Mary Stuart, but because Mary Queen of Scots (Mary Stuart) was married to a Frenchman, Philip (Mary I's Spanish husband) felt that Mary Stuart should be barred from succession. Therefore, Mary Stuart lost her claim to the English throne a second time and Elizabeth I became Queen of England by a stroke of good fortune. So Elizabeth inherited the throne from Mary I and became the Protestant Virgin Queen.

On first inspection it would appear that in the text of *The Faerie Queene*, Errour signals Mary I, and that Duessa stands in for Mary Queen of Scots because of the order in which they appear and because of certain distinctive details in their descriptions. But something unusual happens in Book I, Canto VIII, whereby the atrocities committed by Mary I against the Protestant people are transferred onto the actions of Duessa (who presumably represents Mary Queen of Scots). Mary I had violently persecuted the Protestants during her reign thereby earning herself the title of Bloody Mary. In Book I, Canto VIII, stanza 36 the poet speaker narrates the gruesome vision of Orgoglio's dungeon by stating:

> all the Floor (too filthy to be told)
> With Blood of guiltless Babes, and Innocents true,
> Which there were slain, as Sheep out of the Fold,
> Defiled was, that dreadful was to view,
> And sacred Ashes over it was strowed new. (I.viii.35)

He continues in stanza 36:

> And there beside of Marble Stone was built
> An Altar, carv'd with cunning Imagery,
> On which true Christians Blood was often spilt,
> And holy Martyrs often doen to die,
> With cruel Malice and strong Tyranny:
> Whose blessed Sprites from underneath the Stone
> To God for Vengeance cry'd continually,

> And with great Grief were often heard to groan,
> That hardest Heart would bleed, to hear their piteous Moan. (I.viii.36)

The transference of guilt for the murder of the Christian martyrs from Mary I (as recorded in Foxes Book of Martyrs) to Mary Queen of Scots is a bold move on the part of the poet and it seems he may have wanted (consciously or unconsciously) either to damage the reputation of Mary Queen of Scots further (in order to clear Elizabeth I of the accusations that might be made by future generations for ordering the death of her cousin) or to create a loophole in the description of Duessa that would prevent problems for himself in the future.

Undoubtedly, due to Mary I's transgressions, the name Mary would have been a source of fear for the Protestant people of England. Moreover, Mary Stuart was in fact a threat to the new English subjects because she might restore Catholicism and attempt to annex England to the rest of Catholic Europe. But Elizabeth I knew that by preserving her status as virgin she could keep her subjects loyal. As the Protestant Virgin Queen she was married to her own English nation. The poetic arrangement of these feminine monarchs (Elizabeth I, Mary I and Mary Queen of Scots) into the binary good queen/bad queen would prove useful for the propaganda machine of the "good" queen to justify the elimination of her "evil" twin. Queen Mary (qua Duessa) signals the excess of feminine monarchy, the extra which had to be cast out of society or terminated in order for unity and peace to triumph over evil and discord. Duessa's Catholic alterity secures Una's Protestant oneness.

The notion that Errour may be a more abstract model of Duessa, works well with Wolfreys' assertion that Una "is the opposite not only of Duessa, but also we may

contend, Errour who is constructed as the female figure most feared by the Protestant male" (45). To which I add that the female figure most feared by the Protestant male was "Catholic Queen Mary". It is interesting to note that in the preceding lines Wolfreys claims that Una is the opposite of Errour and Duessa because this signifies that evil existed a priori to Una's emergence in Faerie Land and that it reemerged in another form following her appearance in that world. The order of the events involving Errour and Duessa featured in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* aligns well with the historical information regarding the reigns of Mary I, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. Specifically, Elizabeth's half-sister Mary I ruled England for six years prior to Elizabeth's reign. In the epic Una and her Redcrosse Knight, defeat Errour but the threat of the reemergence of the Catholic Church (allegorically represented as a monster) is only temporarily laid to rest. In Canto II, Duessa threatens to take Redcrosse Knight away from Una's quest to save her kingdom. This is significant because Mary Stuart only became a "real" threat to Elizabeth when she returned as a young widow to Scotland in 1561. McCabe writes:

> In the conflict between Una (a Protestant virgin princess) and Duessa (a 'widowed' Catholic queen denied, as she claims her true inheritance) for the affections of 'Saint George of merry England,' one is certainly justified in seeing a reflection of the long-running dispute between the virgin Elizabeth and the notorious Scottish widow. There can be little doubt that Una's union with George 'shadows' Elizabeth's celebrated 'marriage' with her kingdom and contemporary annotators saw in Duessa's attempt to frustrate the union a clear allusion to Mary's efforts to further her own title to the English crown. (227)

According to McCabe, "Spenser's Duessa" mirrors the image of Knox's monstrous Queen Mary. Knox was none other than the Protestant preacher who Elizabeth I shut out of England for his *Monstrous Regiment* pamphlet. McCabe asserts that "The

figure who did most to impress and Apocalyptic image of Mary upon Tudor consciousness was John Knox, who cast her as the arch-enemy of the Protestant reformation" (227). He adds that "All the primary characteristics of Knox's Mary are also those of Duessa: her rank hypocrisy, her physical allure and even her talent for arousing sympathy through tales of woe and outbursts of tears" (228). In light of McCabe's analysis, Book I of the epic may be viewed as Spenser's response to Knox's purely anti-feminine piece. The poet wanted to make certain that future generations did not misread his own virtuous queen as Knox's Mary. For some scholars, Mary Stuart may have been considered a more legitimate heir to the English throne than Elizabeth herself. But because Mary Stuart was Catholic this made her undesirable as queen in her home country of Scotland (as is clear from the work of John Knox) and perhaps more importantly for purposes of this argument, in post-reformation England.

CONCLUSION

In the middle of all of this historical doubt (mistaken identities and religious dissension) the young poet Edmund Spenser penned his first lines of poetry. His most famous early (pastoral) work, *The Shepherd's Calendar* was published in 1579, but by 1580 Spenser would be sent to Ireland. There is still much debate surrounding the appointment of Spenser as Lord Grey's secretary in Ireland, but one possible answer fits well with the arguments I have presented up to this point. In Bruce Danner's book entitled *Edmund Spenser's War on Lord Burghley*, the author notes a commonly accepted suggestion made by Edwin Greenlaw regarding Spenser's appointment to Ireland (4). Greenlaw proposes that a circulating manuscript of Spenser's poem *Mother Hubbards' Tale* was perhaps the cause of the exile (4). While Bruce Danner explores other possible causes for Spenser's war with Burghley and the motives for his appointment to Ireland, the fact remains that Spenser's penchant for reporting (and embellishing reports) on the lives of the knights and ladies of Elizabeth's court (in his verses), made him a *persona non grata* in England.

Fortunately, in 1590 (the year the first three books of the epic were published) Spenser would find himself back in Elizabeth's favor with the aid of Sir Walter Raleigh whom the poet had met while he was working in Ireland. It is highly probable that Spenser began the first three books of *The Faerie Queen* prior to his appointment to Ireland in 1580. There are letters to Gabriel Harvey which point to the fact that Spenser was requesting his manuscript of *The Faerie Queene* in April of 1580. The letter to Harvey indicates that Spenser began writing his epic poem while he was still living in England. In the letter to Harvey, Spenser writes:

> Nowe, my Dreames and Dying Pellicane being fully finished … and presentlye to bee imprinted, I wil in hande forthwith with my Faery Queene, whyche I praye you hartily send me with al expedition, and your frendly letters and long expected judgement wythal, whyche let not be shorte, but in all pointes suche as you ordinarilye use and I extraordinarily desire.[28]

The above referenced letter to Harvey is noteworthy because it indicates that Spenser was in England, in the middle of the courtly drama, when he began to write the first three books of the epic poem. It had been many years since the reign of Mary I ended (20 years) and Elizabeth's reign was in full swing, but the trial and execution of Mary Queen of Scots was a fresh incident (Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded in 1587).

Spenser was very possibly capitalizing on the confusion between the two Mary's-- Mary I and Mary Queen of Scots-- when he created the duplicitous Duessa. The more traditional reading of Duessa suggests that she represents Mary Queen of Scots within *The Faerie Queene*. The interpretation of Duessa as Mary Stuart most likely began as soon as the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1590. Spenser's creation of Duessa couldn't have been timelier. Duessa embodied all of the people's anxieties about the Catholic Church, Spain, France, idolatry and feminine monarchs. Duessa signaled the fouling of all things Marian.

McCabe makes a case that perhaps the poet did have Mary Stuart in mind when he wrote Book I. Specifically, McCabe notes that:

> by having the same character represent the Whore of Babylon in Book I and Mary in Book V, Spenser contrives to establish a narrative and thematic continuity more acutely responsive to the anxieties of the times than has hitherto been recognized. (227)

---

[28] Smith, G. Gregory ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. 1904. "To My Long Approoued and Singular Good Frende", Master G. H.Letter from Edmund Spenser to Gabriel Harvey dated 1579.

If Spenser did in fact begin working on *The Faerie Queene* before 1580, he must have known (or sensed) before it happened, that Mary Queen of Scots would pay the price for the Catholic oppression the Protestant people of England had experienced as Mary I's subjects. He felt artistically free to demonize Mary in *The Faerie Queene* and all that she stood for (Catholicism, ornamentation, idolatry, feminine sexuality) thereby metonymizing evil and sublimating years of repressed anger for himself and for the Protestant people. Mary Stuart was tried and executed in 1587 (seven years after Spenser requested his manuscript from Harvey). And the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in England in 1590, just 4 years after Mary Stuart was beheaded for treason.

The historical information supports the view that to some extent Queen Elizabeth I fashioned her own identity by repressing, containing and ultimately killing her "Other". But if the poet Spenser is to be viewed as more than a mere historian, then his artistic creations are images of what had already been and what was to come. The work of a poet is to transgress the existing limits of language because the poet must speak the unspeakable or rather the as yet unspoken. Poets move language beyond the established structures of meaning and posit new meaning in the spaces created by their transgression. Spenser would be considered artless by the standards of Aristotle's poetics if his verses were merely a chronicle of past events. If the author was proving his "puissance" through his writing, then the boldness he showed in fashioning Duessa is best understood by appreciating just how closely he was holding the mirror up to the "fair Eliza". In creating Duessa, Spenser was issuing a warning to his own beloved queen; that falseness would ultimately be exposed and justice would be served (in this world or at the world's end).

However, the poet's conscious (or unconscious) threats to his matriarch (articulated in the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*) are empty, like those of a needy child or a scorned lover. Perhaps Miller explains the poet's relationship with the monarch best when he states that: "If Elizabeth is in one sense the radiant center that fixes all else in place…the poet…is her effaced or repressed counterpart, a center for the rhetorical production of sovereignty" (50). Strikes on women in power in *The Faerie Queene* function as rhetorical devices intended to secure Spenser's poetic identity within the Elizabethan matrix. The poet is merely showing the queen what could happen to her image if a master of the word such as himself were to turn his poetic abilities against her rather than in her favor.

The readings of *The Letter to Raleigh* and the 1590 version of *The Faerie Queene* (the first three books of the epic) I performed in Chapters I and II, suggest that Spenser's vision of identity is, as Julian Wolfreys contends, "modern" in its view of the "textual construction" of the self (Wolfreys). The author of *Transgression* states that:

> When concentrating on the constructions of male subjectivity and the males production and projection of images of women and formations of female sexuality from the male subject's perspective, it is to be noticed that the Spenserian text, the male subject reworks constantly and endlessly concepts and images of the feminine, concepts and images which are generated largely, if not completely from cultural positions that are masculine, if not phallo- or logocentric. (21)

I have however attempted to show the way in which a historically contextualized analysis helps the reader to locate the places in the Spenserian text where traditional misogynistic discourses are destabilized, transformed and in some cases overthrown within the fictional narrative. The historical supplement is necessary in order to show that the poet was not merely repeating the traditional hierarchical male/female binary within the poem.

His unfinished epic is a reflection of the male subject's formation under the aegis of a feminine monarch. It shows evidence of a male writer questioning his own authority in a historical moment when a woman was sitting in the position of absolute power. Through this analysis I was seeking to shed light on the fact that even when we perform readings of early modern texts in the present, we can fall into the pattern of reinscribing "Man" into a preferred/dominant position over "Woman" even when the social hierarchy of the English Renaissance indicates that this patriarchal paradigm was upset by the historical presence of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was not merely the product of her poets' imaginations. She performed her gender in a "revolutionary" way. The queen fashioned her own identity through her voice, her actions and her policies. But most importantly she reigned for more than 40 years without a king by being something "other" than a traditional feminine monarch. She actively resisted marriage because she knew that this single action of refusal would allow her to preserve her sovereignty, her "self" so to speak. Perhaps more significantly, the arguments that were made in Chapter I suggest that Spenser had no desire to reproduce the hegemonic heterosexual matrix without variation because this structure excluded the low-born men such as himself from the work of cultural production.

In addition to questioning the notion that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* can be safely labeled as a hegemonic patriarchal text, Chapter II shows that by supplementing the reading of the epic with the relevant historical information, Wolfreys' claim that in the poem, Spenser "grafts cultural attitudes towards women onto his male characters" may be challenged (24). Many scholars will agree that the cultural process of othering is undeniably a central function of *The Faerie Queene*, but othering is never reducible to

gender. We should resist putting the political, social and cultural bodies of Mary I and Mary Stuart (Mary Queen of Scots) under erasure because if we strip the text of the two Queen Marys' historical trace, we run the risk of misreading the characters of Errour and Duessa as Classical feminine tropes rather than "mythopoetic manifestations" of Elizabeth's others (Wolfreys 21). An ahistorical reading might cause modern readers to insist on the phallocentric aspect of othering at work in the epic rather than on its equally problematic ethnocentric function.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bednarz, James P. "Ralegh in Spenser's Historical Allegory." Spenser Studies 4 (1984): 49-70. Print.

Bell, Ilona. *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Berbegal, Peter. "A Mediation on Transgression." (1998). CTheory.net. Web.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Cheney, Donald. "Spenser's Fortieth Birthday and Related Fictions." Spenser Studies. Volume 4.1984.3-31. Print.

Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medussa." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Second Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al.New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010. 1938-959. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "From Dissemination." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* Second Edition. Ed.Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010. 1697-1734. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "From Of Grammatology." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* Second Edition. Ed.Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010. 1680-1697. Print.

Dunn, Jane. *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. Print.

Felluga, Dino."General Introduction to Psychoanalysis." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. January 31, 2011. Purdue University.

Frye, Susan. *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*. Kindle ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.

Guy, John A. *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print.

Hadfield, Andrew. *Edmund Spenser: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. "Language." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2010. 982-97. Print.

Helgerson, Richard. *Self-crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System*. Berkeley: University of California, 1983. Print

Jenks, Chris. "The Centre Cannot Hold." *Transgression*. London: Routledge, 2003. 42-43. Print.

Jensen Qvotrup, Sun. "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency." Qualitative Studies 2.2 (2011): 63-78. Web.

Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection". New York: Columbia UP, 1982. 1-31.Print.

Levin, Carole. *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1994. Print

McCabe, Richard A. "The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI." English Literary Renaissance 17.2 (1987): 224-42. Print.

Miller, David Lee. *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 Faerie Queene*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988. Print.

Montrose, Louis A. "'Shaping Fantasies':Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture. The Johns Hopkins University Press,1986, 304-30.

Sidney, Sir Philip."The Defense of Poesy". 1909-14. English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay. The Harvard Classics." The Harvard Classics.Web. 08

Smith, G. Gregory ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. 1904. "To My Long Approoued and Singular Good Frende, Master G. H.," Letter from Edmund Spenser to Gabriel Harvey dated 1579.Web.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Qveene*. Ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki. 2nd ed. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2007. Print.

Spiller, Elizabeth A. "Poetic Parthenogenesis and Spenser's Idea of Creation in *The Faerie Queene*." Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 40 (2000): Print.

Sutton, James M. *Materializing Space at an Early Modern Prodigy House: The Cecils at Theobalds*, 1564-1607. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004. Print.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Transgression: Identity, Space, Time*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.