

SPENSER'S BURNING LIGHT:
THE SOUL'S TRANSFORMATIONS
IN THE FAERIE QUEENE

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ABSTRACT

The extent of Spenser's Neoplatonic influence has long been the subject of debate, and even proponents of a more fully Neoplatonist Spenser have often hesitated to read *The Faerie Queene* in the full light of this tradition. While the general consensus has acknowledged the deep and abiding influence of Neoplatonism in *The Fowre Hymnes*, published late in the poet's career, Spenser uses some of these doctrines and paradigms as early as *The Shepheardes Calender*. A survey of the shorter poems reveals certain constants in Spenser's representation of the soul: its immortality, preexistence of the body, and tri-partite structure, and the doctrine of transmigration, which represents spiritual progress through a series of transformations. These characteristics resurface in *The Faerie Queene*, where they provide an indispensable guide for Spenser's plan to "fashion" the soul of his reader. While some would object that these Neoplatonic borrowings contradict the poet's overt Protestantism, especially regarding the doctrine of original sin and the implications of humanity's fallen nature, Spenser resolves these conflicts through the apophatic teachings of Christian mysticism in the last half of Book I. Spenser's paradigm of the soul's progress begins with Holinesse, by which the soul examines its fallen nature in the presence of the divine, before turning to confront worldly and cosmic evil as embodied in the dragon of Book I's climax. The book's other evil figures—Archimago, Duessa, and the "Sans Brothers"—reflect the soul's failure to resolve its own disharmonies in the absence of grace, culminating in Redcrosse's hellish imprisonment in Orgoglio's dungeon. Arthur enters the narrative as both a vehicle of divine grace and an adumbration of Redcrosse's unrealized potential. Redcrosse then enacts the soul's reorientation towards grace in the House of Holinesse.

The subsequent books present the soul's further development in a series of virtues that project the internal harmonies of the sanctified and sufficiently-fashioned individual into human relationships, through which they can begin to reshape the world of fallen nature in such a way that prefigures the eventual reintegration of the soul, and possibly the entire universe, back into the divine presence.

DEDICATION

To all who have been understanding, supportive, and patient. And to the wonderful musicians, from Blind Willie to Brahms to Brian Wilson, whose works played as these chapters came into being.

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1. THE SOUL IN THE WESTERN TRADITION

Well, won't somebody tell me—
Answer if you can—
Won't somebody tell me,
What is the soul of a man?

– Blind Willie Johnson, “The Soul of a Man”

Cutting through the scratchy atmosphere of an old 78rpm record with a raw bass voice rattling like a down-tuned guitar string, the gospel-blues singer Blind Willie Johnson transfixes his listeners with a perennial question: “What is the soul of a man?” However quaint or even downright irrelevant these words might sound to many a modern ear, Johnson is sermonizing in the call and response style, and woe to the dozing congregant or careless passerby who fails to search his or her heart for an answer! Still, how does one even begin to address a question that has perplexed the great philosophers, theologians, and poets of nearly every age and civilization? Even the modern fields of psychology and neuroscience have yet to resolve the problems of consciousness, once unquestionably assigned to the domain of the soul. In *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, Neuroscientist Gerald Edelman addresses the difficulty of arriving at a purely materialistic explanation of our mental processes: “To reduce a theory of an individual’s behavior to a theory of molecular interactions is simply silly, a point made clear when one considers how many different levels of physical, biological, and social interactions must be put into place before higher-order consciousness emerges” (Edelman 48). In the face of this dilemma, the soul reemerges with its old glory somewhat reduced—even an Edelman or a Jung would hesitate to grant immortality to this useful construction—but perhaps retaining enough of that native dignity

to resume its symbolic role as a representation of some the deepest questions concerning our shared humanity.

Whether or not our modern society can expect a comprehensive answer to the question of the soul in the foreseeable future, our own consideration of the problem can provide crucial insight into the worldview of a man like Blind Willie Johnson and, by extension, the spiritual world of his creative works. For his part, Johnson answers the question with homespun evangelical mysticism: “I read the Bible often, / I tries to read it right. / And far as I could understand, / [It’s] Nothing but a burning light!” It seems an appropriate enough answer for the blind and itinerant street musician, exuding a mystery that transcends Johnson’s day-to-day experience. But how deceptive is that “Nothing”! Although Johnson’s conception of the soul remains somewhat vaguely defined—more an impression than an observable phenomenon—its centrality in the singer’s moral and spiritual universe is undeniable. As Johnson confesses in another song, his ragged voice edged with urgency and concern, “[I] got a Bible in my home, / If I don’t read, my soul be lost: / Nobody’s fault but mine” (“Nobody’s Fault but Mine”). For the singer, questions of the soul’s nature and its ultimate destiny represent nothing less than the central problem of human life. Even if the soul cannot be directly observed by analytical methods, perhaps we can detect its presence and come to understand something of its elusive nature by way of its supposed influence on the physical world, especially through the actions of human beings. Whatever usefulness this proposition might or might not have in our observations of the world around us, the idea of the soul provides an indispensable vantage for understanding such sprawling and comprehensive poetic visions as *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, or Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, each of which might be said to comprise its own miniature universe with their respective cosmic orders and metaphysical machinery.

For *The Faerie Queene* in particular, a study of the soul such as I am proposing will provide insight into both the general structure of the poem and into the subtle meanings of even the most seemingly insignificant episodes. The allegorical method used in the poem is particularly suited to express matters of the soul, as it is itself a form of embodiment which gives concrete form to abstract concepts. The multiple layers of the poem's allegory allow Spenser's vision to attain a far greater complexity and consistency, which in turn will require the utmost sensitivity and caution in its interpretation. As Una admonishes Spenser's Redcrosse Knight toward the beginning of his adventure: "Oft fire is without smoke, / And perill without show" (I.i.12.4-5).¹ However, like Spenser's Knight of Holinesse at a later point in his quest, wearied by the burden of his own despair and consumed with the weighty physicality of bodily existence, we as readers are constantly at risk of confusing the vehicle of the allegory—the knights, ladies, combats, and all the conventional machinery of high romance—with the sublime substances it shadows. Our own search for the soul in *The Faerie Queene* will be greatly aided by a brief survey of Spenser's literary, philosophical, and theological influences and with an examination of some of the more explicit statements on the soul that we find in the poet's shorter works, particularly *The Shepheardes Calender*, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, *Muipotmos*, and *The Fowre Hymnes*. As I intend to demonstrate, each of these works is involved on some level with the transformations of the individual soul across various levels of emotional and spiritual experience, employing the characters and symbols of Spenser's complex allegory to illustrate the condition of the human soul as it develops across various states of order and disorder, disease and health. Although Spenser does not lay out an orderly, self-consistent geography that can be charted and

¹ All direct quotations from *The Faerie Queene* will use the Longman edition of Hamilton, Yamashita, and Suzuki, eds.

mapped, like Dante's meticulously ordered cosmos or even Tolkien's Middle Earth, his imaginative universe does abide by certain moral and metaphysical constants which are laid bare through the exercise of latent powers of the soul, revealed in the practice of contemplation, and applied through virtuous actions.

As a highly educated Elizabethan, Spenser would have been quite studied in a rich array of philosophical traditions which informed the sophisticated conception of the soul we repeatedly encounter within his poems. Throughout *The Faerie Queene* and those of Spenser's shorter works most concerned with matters of the soul, Neoplatonism provides a persistent influence on ideas about the soul's nature, its relation to the physical world, and the means of its eventual escape into a spiritual realm of permanence and stability, all of which I intend to elucidate over the course of this paper. However, the Neoplatonism with which Spenser would have been familiar was not itself a codified, monolithic entity so much as a confluence of often disparate philosophical traditions. As Robert Ellrodt explains in his influential yet controversial study *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser*: "The syncretic nature of Renaissance Platonism is well known and requires no further emphasis. Zoroaster, Pythagoras, 'thrice-great Hermes', the Orphic hymns, the Cabbala and Arab philosophy entered into it, together with Plato and Plotinus" (Ellrodt 9). Although I will take exception with much of Ellrodt's argument, particularly with his statements on Spenser's lack of familiarity with Pico, Ficino and other significant sources of Renaissance Neoplatonism, the subtle distinctions he traces between certain Neoplatonist and Christian ideas will be worth considering and many of his investigations into Spenser's sources have proven invaluable.² It is my position that the influence of the broader

²Elizabeth Bieman concisely and effectively identifies the strengths of Ellrodt's argument, along with its glaring weaknesses: "With incisive analytical scholarship Ellrodt demonstrates Spenser's familiarity with the Neoplatonic lore available in the Renaissance. But he separates, as Spenser

Neoplatonist tradition on Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is much greater than Ellrodt has allowed (or even many of his critics, for that matter), and I hope that my study of the soul in Spenser's work will both reveal the extent of the Neoplatonic influence on the way Spenser conceives of and represents the soul and also demonstrate the value of the soul to our understanding of the poem as a unified whole. As I intend to illustrate, a Neoplatonic or Christian Platonist conception of the soul is crucial to Spenser's purpose in the epic, as stated in his "Letter of the Authors": "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" ("Letter" 15). This fashioning is a transformation that takes place not within the "self" of modern criticism—a term that gestures towards a concern with internal realities while remaining comfortably on the surface—but within the very soul of the attentive reader. At this point, one might surely ask, where is the soul in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*? It is the seat of every heroic virtue, the field of every pitched battle between Spenser's patron knights and personified vices, the hidden cradle of every blessed *locus amoenus*, be it ever so far-flung and unattainable; it is at once the fount of the awesome internal resources of the poem's heroes and the source of their transcendent interpersonal bonds; it underlies the very cosmos of the poem, which Spenser draws to a human scale. For Spenser's monumental work is at once a well-proportioned body and an orderly universe, brimming with the life of a single unified soul, the presence of which I hope to convincingly trace through the wide and untamed tracts of Fairy Land.

And in my reading, the separate books of *The Faerie Queene* along with their respective virtues all build on one another in a representation of a journey through increasingly complex

almost certainly did not, elements in this lore into Jewish, pagan, Christian, Platonic, Neoplatonic, and so on, and argues against the significance, for his reading of the Christian Spenser he admires, of any element inconformable to his conception of Spenser's orthodoxy" (136).

states of existence as the soul gains control of itself and the body it inhabits and enters into progressively intermingled relationships with other souls and bodies. This ascent of the soul has its parallels in Spenser's shorter poems, especially *The Amoretti* and *The Fowre Hymnes* and in the Petrarchan sonnet sequences they both transform and imitate. I will argue that *The Faerie Queene* in its successive movement from virtue to virtue lays out a series of heroic actions of the soul, which Spenser's attentive readers are also invited to experience as they follow the transformative quest of each book's respective patron knight. In taking this approach, I will build on the work of critics like Alastair Fowler and Elizabeth Bieman, who read the books of *The Faerie Queene* as an unfolding progression of interrelated ideas—Fowler through an ever unfolding numerological scheme and Bieman through the mythic and rhetorical structures derived from the tradition of Plato's dialectic. This project, however, focuses exclusively on the soul as the focal point for a series of dynamic transformations that drive the poem forward. In these chapters, I intend to show that the various heroic actions in Spenser's epic all begin as movements of the soul, for as concerned as much of *The Faerie Queene* is with righteous or even militant action, this action is consistently propelled by an undercurrent of contemplation which reveals itself in the allegorical focal points that appear in each book of the epic. Of course, however deep these moments of stillness and contemplation, their quiet abstractions must still be actively confirmed in court, wilderness, and all the vast human world in between. In this essential balance, Spenser is in agreement with his friend and patron, Sir Philip Sidney, who proclaims in his *Defense of Poesy* that "the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest" (1053). Although some of Spenser's virtues will appear more immediately concerned with inwardness and others with such external affairs as courtship, conflict resolution, and

statecraft, each of them makes a significant contribution to the poet's portrait of the perfected soul. And there is precedent for such an exchange in the tradition of Western contemplative spirituality. As Thomas à Kempis writes in *The Imitation of Christ*, "We must diligently search into and regulate both the outward and inward man, because both contribute to our advancement" (1.14.5; 1.19.3).³ Just as well, every virtue in Spenser's model contains some element of either social alignment—private or public—the chief difference being a matter of mode or degree.

Book I plays a significant role in this progression of the virtues as it is the only book concerned with the soul's immediate interaction with the divine. As "The Legend of Holinesse" it is the most overtly Christian book of *The Faerie Queene* and the one with the profoundest mystical depths; however, its particular brand of Christian mysticism is heavily informed by such Neoplatonic theorists as Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and their various successors in the Christian Platonist tradition. Over the course of Book I, Spenser addresses many of the questions and accusations typically leveled at Neoplatonists from their more orthodox critics, particularly the question of original sin as an indelible influence in the human soul. The conflict of Book I concerns the very life and death of the soul and its hero, Redcrosse, is described as "that sowl-diseased knight" in his moment of greatest peril, as he suffers from the lingering effects of his encounter with Despayre (I.x.24.1). In a certain sense, the virtue of Holinesse contains all the others within itself in imitation of the Plotinian "One," the original "hypostasis" or state of existence from which everything in the universe was derived and continues to emanate. The

³ I have chosen to quote from John Wesley's 1741 translation for its beauty of expression, although the numbering of chapters and sections in Wesley's abridged text differs somewhat from that found in most other editions. For the sake of clarity and convenience, my citations provide Wesley's numbering, followed by the traditional numbering, with the exception of any quotations for which the two systems align.

accomplishments of Redcrosse in Book I certainly seem to atone for the heroes of the other books so that they can pursue their comparatively secular quests for self-improvement without wrestling themselves with the question of original sin. In Book II's treatment of the soul and the body, the dilemma of original sin arises again to some degree, but the concern there is primarily with the suffering of the fallen body as represented in both the destructive pleasure of Acrasia and the perpetual death in life of the ghoulish Maleger. The enemies of the soul who haunt Spenser's "Legend of Temperance" are all representatives of the warring elements within the fallen body in which the soul has the temporary misfortune of having been imprisoned. Likewise, the enemies of temperance in Spenser tend to possess a spectral nature, from the elemental Cymochles and Pyrochles, to the vampiric Acrasia and undead Maleger, as if to suggest the ultimate insubstantiality of the body when compared to the eternal soul.⁴ Notably, the soul as represented in Book II's Knight of Temperance is never in danger from the existential perils that it faced in Book I. Drawing heavily on Neoplatonist and Christian Platonist traditions, the allegory of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* follows the journey of an individual human soul as it is progressively "fashioned in vertue and gentle discipline" in preparation for its eventual union with the divine. The virtue of Holinesse in Book I serves a special role as the gateway to the other virtues, at once the wellspring from which they proceed and a spiritual justification for the secular and humanistic sphere which encompasses the virtuous actions of the succeeding books. The epic builds from this initial, private triumph to the image of a perfected, earthly society,

⁴Guyon's attempts to restore some order to the regions inhabited by these ghastly beings bears a fascinating resemblance to Blake's mythology of the psyche's fragmentation into the Four Zoas and their subsequent decay into the masculine Spectres and feminine Emanations, all struggling through the process of reintegration necessary for humanity's spiritual awakening (Freeman 227). As Freeman explains, the Spectres offer Blake's response to the Neoplatonists, as "souls that have descended through the gate of birth into generation" (Freeman 203).

glimpsed briefly in the last book, before finally presaging the possibility of the complete redemption of the physical universe in an ultimate return to the divine.

Before soaring to such heights on the wings of Platonic doctrine, however, we will first begin with the comparatively stark and humbling description of the soul in the Homeric poems. After all, Homer is one of the great, ancient teachers of virtue held up as a model in the “Letter of the Authors,” as Spenser writes, “I have followed all the antique Poets historicall, first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis” (15). One can hardly blame a modern reader who hears the poet’s claim with some astonishment, for the city raids and vengeance killings celebrated in Homer’s epics are far distant from the righteous actions and internal probity we would typically demand from our preferred moral exemplars. To put it simply, Spenser’s Homer is not our own, as any learned poet of the Renaissance would have approached the ancient epics in the light of a long and ongoing tradition of commentators who were accustomed to read the poems as moral and philosophical allegories, interpretations which often accompanied translations of the poems in the form of explanatory glosses and appendices.⁵

However, if we take Homer at his word for the time being, we will encounter a conception of human existence that is as austere as it is beautiful. For we find in Homer that the central tragedy of each individual human life is its eventual cessation with death, but this can also be its crowning glory as the event against which all of one’s actions are measured. As Jasper Griffin explains in *Homer on Life and Death*, “It is the pressure of mortality which imposes on

⁵For an extensive account of the tradition of philosophical commentary surrounding the Homeric epics, see *Homer the Theologian* (1986) by Robert Lamberton. And Elizabeth Bieman offers further insight into the various Platonist and Neoplatonist interpretations of Homer that would have been available to Spenser in her book *Plato Baptized: Towards the Interpretation of Spenser’s Mimetic Fictions* (1988).

men the compulsion to have virtues; the gods, exempt from that pressure, are, with perfect consistency, less 'virtuous' than men" (93). Against the dehumanizing violence of the world portrayed in Homer's epics, human beings are often reduced to little better than prey animals and slaughtered livestock, and this cruel order of existence remains untempered by any hope of a more fortunate existence in the hereafter. For all the suffering Homer's warriors endure, the souls of the slain flee their mangled bodies with cries of grief and remorse. And so we read of Hector in his final moments: "Flying free of his limbs / his soul went winging down to the House of Death, / wailing his fate, leaving his manhood far behind, / his young and supple strength" (22.426-29). Far from the most essential component of human existence, the soul that lingers on into the next life is little more than an image or "eidolon" of the deceased; true personhood in any significant sense of the word has faded with the last rattle of the dying breath. Even Achilles, that hero of heroes who once craved undying fame above the softer pleasures of the common life, rebukes Odysseus for praising the status he has gained among the other slain spirits in Hades:

Let me hear no smooth talk
of death from you, Odysseus, light of councils.
Better, I say, to break sod as a farm hand
for some poor country man, on iron rations,
than lord it over all the exhausted dead. (11.574-81)

The dreary monotony of Homer's afterlife is a painful nonexistence to which absolute oblivion would even be preferable. Indeed, the elaborate funeral rites and the ceremony of cremation seem to have been dedicated more to freeing the soul from the body and easing its transition into forgetfulness than to offering any lasting honor for the enjoyment of the deceased (Rohde 18-

19). In the Homeric vision of human existence, life itself is the chief good and the heroic individual is all the more remarkable for his ability to reap the potential of such a temporary and fragile state. And it is along these lines that contemporary philosopher Mark Edmundson describes the heroic ideal of which Achilles is the chief embodiment: “When one possesses an epic unity of being, mind and heart and body have merged completely” (Edmundson 22). Even when some internal division separates the ancient warrior from the heroic ideal, this disjunction entails a sort of death, such that a brief and strenuous life in the full realization of one’s potential becomes more desirable than a long life of comfortable mediocrity.⁶

Analogues to the dismal afterlife of the Homeric poems appear across the ancient world, with striking similarities in the literatures of the Ancient Near East. As in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when Gilgamesh attempts to rouse Enkidu’s spirits to heroic pitch before entering battle against the monstrous Humbaba: “Where is the man who can clamber to heaven? Only the gods live forever with glorious Shamash, but as for us men, our days are numbered, our occupations are a breath of wind” (71). To shrink from this sobering reality into self-consciousness is in some sense to repudiate the birthright that makes us gloriously human. However, this does not prevent Gilgamesh from pushing back against the inevitable after the death of Enkidu. Traveling into the land of the dead, Gilgamesh seeks out Utnapishtim, the only man the gods have spared from death, only to be chided: “There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand forever, do we seal a contract to stand for all time?” (106-7). According to this vision, anything beyond living a

⁶ As many readers would recognize, this choice of comfort or strenuous action was a major motivation for Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*. The sophist Prodicus likewise imagines such a dilemma in the “Choice of Heracles,” which pictures the young hero at a literal and figurative crossroads in his life, confronted by the figures of Virtue and Vice. The ladies respectively offer a difficult but rewarding existence versus a life of cheap and temporary happiness. Of course, Heracles proves himself a moral exemplar in choosing the former (Waterfield 246-9).

good life in one's present circumstances is mere futility. And, likewise, how similar to the somber musings of Homer's souls in the underworld are the words of the world-weary sage in Ecclesiastes: "All that thine hand shall find to do, do it with all thy power: for there is neither work nor invention, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whether thou goest" (*Geneva Bible*, 9:10). If the ancient Hebrew writer of this passage believed in a resurrection or some substantial existence in the hereafter, he certainly found it no satisfying replacement for the ephemeral pleasures of the current life. Modern translator Robert Alter suggests as much as he explains his choice to avoid the term "soul": "I am aware that 'my being' is more awkward than 'my soul,' but 'soul' strongly suggests a body-soul split—with implications of an afterlife—that is alien to the Hebrew Bible and to Psalms in particular" (Alter xxxiii). The Hades of the Hellenistic world has its rough equivalent in the Sheol of the ancient Hebrew texts, and the identification is such that the original translators of the *Septuagint* made frequent use of the term "Hades" in their Greek text. Often translated into English as "the pit" or "the grave," Sheol looms as a nightmare landscape within the poetic language of the Old Testament, both as reality for the dead and as a metaphorical expression of absolute dejection and despair. As the Psalmist cries out, "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth. / But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the Lord: in thee is my trust: leave not my soul destitute" (Psalm 141:7-8).⁷ This decision between life and salvation or death, despair, and "the pit" belongs to the inscrutable God of the ancient Hebrews, try as the Psalmist might to bargain.

No less urgent was the Egyptian impulse to solve the riddles of the soul, death, and the afterlife. Vast monumental structures and the elaborate mummification process stand as grim yet

⁷ *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version.*

impressive testaments to a shared existential horror. In one elegiac poem of Ancient Egypt, a female speaker mourns her husband, who has crossed over the horizon to the land of the dead: “Those who are in the West are cut off, and their existence is misery; one is loathe to go to join them. One cannot recount one’s experiences but one rests in one place of eternity in darkness” (357).⁸ Once more, this perpetual non-existence is a fate worse than oblivion. Such a conception adds appeal to the Theravada Buddhist ideal of absolute extinction of being and consciousness with the attainment of Nirvana: However, Mircea Eliade finds a revolutionary development in the cult of the resurrected god Osiris: “We here have a valorization of death, henceforth accepted as a sort of exalting transmutation of incarnate existence” (*Religious Ideas* 99). The world received a new breed of hero in Osiris, a spiritual pioneer who explored the realms of death and extended his guidance to anyone willing to take the same journey. But the successful transition remained a matter of rituals, the memorization of sacred formulas and incantations. In many ways, the occult writings of Hermes Trismegistus continue in this tradition, despite the anachronistic assumptions traditionally associated with these texts. Still, the possibility that one might escape death and the resulting state of oblivion came as a significant development, with a corresponding awakening to new possibilities taking place among the earliest philosophers in the Greek world.

After Homer, the ancient Greek vision of the soul took on new and complex dimensions in the speculations of the Pre-Socratic philosophers. Not only did the soul become the crucial element in our conscious existence for many of these early thinkers, but its survival after the body’s dissolution gained greater emphasis for them as well. At the vanguard of this revolution in Western thought was the sage Pythagoras, along with his secretive band of followers. As

⁸ *From Primitives to Zen: A thematic sourcebook of the history of religions*, edited by Mircea Eliade.

Eduard Zeller writes, “The dualism, which separates matter and mind, body and soul, God and the world, won however a place in Greek philosophy even at this early period, when Pythagoreanism arrayed Orphic mysticism in a cloak of science” (Zeller 26). Perhaps the most notorious doctrine of the Pythagoreans is that of transmigration or reincarnation, for they held that the soul has become entrapped within the body and will continue in the cycle of death and rebirth until the accomplishment of a final separation that will bring an end to this perpetual state of suffering (Waterfield 88-89). The devotee of this path could only attain such liberation through a secretive process of dietary restrictions and cleansing rituals in the light of which the Pythagoreans appear more akin to a mystical sect than a school of philosophers. Despite this regimen, they still generally held the exercising of mind over body to be the most effective means of freeing the soul from its fleshly bonds (Zeller 33). An equally imposing if much more withdrawn figure was the priestly Heraclitus, who taught that the soul was a kind of highly refined fire, of a kindred nature to the celestial fires that give life to the universe (Waterfield 36). For Heraclitus, fire was the primary substance of the material world, the most exalted element which gives life and motion to a universe in constant change (Zeller 46-47). And then there was Empedocles, perhaps most renowned for his description of the universe as a battleground of four warring elements, marshaled in turn by the forces of Concord and Strife and equally for his eccentric and occult demeanor. Empedocles too seems to have also explored the idea of transmigration, placing his own emphasis on the process as an upward path toward spiritual fulfillment. So Empedocles writes of the final movements for purified souls at the end of this cycle, “In the end as prophets, singers of hymns, healers, and leaders / They come among the men of this world, / And then they spring up as god, highest in honour” (Waterfield 141). We need have little doubt as to where the poet-prophet placed himself in this hierarchy, as he threw

himself into the crater of Mount Etna, seeking one final, happy change in the cleansing embrace of the volatile element.⁹

Sometimes hailed as the father of philosophy, Socrates represents not so much a shift in doctrine—for he professed to teach nothing—as a revolutionary departure in technique. Rather than making doctrinaire claims about justice, virtue, or goodness based on observable phenomena, Socrates sought a means to uncover these concepts in their truest nature. John Laird, who begins his study *The Idea of the Soul* with Socrates, writes that he “believed that man’s chief end, and the purpose of the universe in ordaining man’s existence, was precisely to care for the soul” (Laird 2-3). Unlike many of his more overtly mystical and theurgic predecessors, however, Socrates taught that the soul can be purified not through ritual, diet, and other external applications, but only by the reasoned pursuit of questions and analysis known as dialectic. To the mingled joy and dismay of his fellow Athenians, Socrates made it his practice to question those he examined until leading them into a state of outright perplexity, an experience memorably described by the aristocrat Meno: “If I may be flippant, I think that not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. Yet I have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth often on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well too, or so I thought. Now I can’t even say what it is” (*Meno* 80a-b).¹⁰

⁹ This story is widely regarded as apocryphal, but it has become so closely associated with the legend of Empedocles’s life as to make it worth repeating (Zeller 54). Whether transmuted into the stuff of the heavenly fires or the same mortal dust for which the rest of us are bound, the philosopher-sage of Etna has taken on that ethereal mode of existence reserved for a creature of the poetic imagination.

¹⁰ Plato also describes Socrates’s methods as a mind-numbing poison in the *Symposium*, in which Alcibiades exclaims, “I’ve been bitten by something more poisonous than a snake; in fact, mine is the most painful kind of bite there is. I’ve been bitten in the heart, or the mind, or whatever you like to call it, by Socrates’ philosophy, which clings like an adder to any young and gifted

Something has certainly changed within Socrates's ravished auditor, but Meno has not yet become enlightened—in fact the dialogue ends before he has learned what he had intended to learn: whether or not virtue can be taught. He has, however, abandoned any of his previously held notions about the nature of virtue and is therefore ready to begin the investigation in earnest.¹¹ In the end, it seems, these discussions can only take one so far. If Socrates's last words as reported by Plato are authentic, Socrates would seem to suggest that his soul stands to profit after its separation from the body: "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget" (*Phaedo* 118). The implication here is that Socrates is being healed, even as his body succumbs to the influence of the hemlock; therefore, death itself is not the illness but the medicine for the very disease of mortal existence.

Although Plato did not completely invent many of the characteristics of the soul which he professed, we can say that he brought such ideas as the soul's survival of the body, its transmigration, and its purification through the project of philosophical discourse to a much greater refinement. There are definite borrowings from the Presocratics in Plato, but the greatest debt is to his teacher Socrates, whose words and techniques remain an indelible presence throughout Plato's works, especially in the earlier dialogues. It is often difficult, however, to disentangle the older philosopher's teachings from Plato's own, as Plato had not only thoroughly absorbed Socrates's teachings but often used the character of Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own ideas. Perhaps Mark Edmundson's description of their relationship can offer some

mind it can get hold of, and does exactly what it likes with it" (218a). Perhaps Plato means to liken the philosophy of his master to the serpent on the rod of the famous healer Asclepius, the venom of which both harms and heals.

¹¹ This is the turning point known in the Platonic tradition as *metanoia*, which Bieman defines as follows: "turn of consciousness, conversion; in New Testament, often translated as repentance; in this book, similar to metaphoric baptism" (295).

clarification: “Socrates has demonstrated how deep the human need is for positive enlightenment, but he has not provided the teachings. And it is this that Plato and all who have followed him have tried to do” (119). And thus, Plato goes beyond Socrates in his search for absolute truth, leading in time to what is often celebrated as Plato’s greatest discovery, the theory of forms or ideas. As Plato teaches, the forms are the true objects of knowledge that the seeker can only reach after raising his or her mind above the evidence of the senses to ponder realities in the intelligible realm or “world of thought” (Zeller 129-30). The process of dialectic provides the proper method for this ascent by allowing the soul to analyze its own nature rather than reasoning from external phenomena. The idea of the soul’s preexistence will have a crucial part to play in Plato’s epistemology, as demonstrated in the *Meno*, where Socrates professes, “Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed” (81c-d). Thus, learning is but a process of remembering that can only commence once the seeker has abandoned the preconceptions that misdirect the mind and prevent a proper investigation of things as they actually exist.

We could hardly find a fuller and more satisfying representation of this epistemic process in Plato’s works than in the famous Allegory of the Cave in Book VII of *The Republic*. In this passage, Socrates describes a group of captives in a dark cavern, who are bound so by the neck and the foot that they are unable to move or look away from the firelight and shadows that play across the wall. These shapes—nothing more than shadow puppets manipulated by the captors—represent the phenomenal world as revealed to our bodily senses. Having learned from Heraclitus to distrust a universe in perpetual flux, Plato decided that absolute truths must exist elsewhere, if

they are to exist at all, for “the Heraclitan world of coming into being and ceasing to be, with its eternal changeableness, cannot be an object of knowledge” (Zeller 129). Likewise, the Socrates of *The Republic* represents the true philosopher as one of these captive individuals who has broken loose from his bondage to sensory activity and wandered out into the light of the sun. In this “upper world,” the fugitive finally sees the objects and realities of which the shadows in the cave were but a lifeless imitation. From here, Socrates lays out the path to absolute enlightenment:

And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul’s ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of the good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this. (*Republic* 517b-c)

This is surely one of the great, transcendent moments in the Platonic corpus, as it reveals the ultimate consummation toward which Plato’s followers would aspire through rational or spiritual means, or even a combination of them both. And, as the final clause indicates, this is not merely a solitary achievement but a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to improve either oneself or others. For by no other means, as Plato admonishes, can one arrive at a true and direct understanding of goodness, beauty, or even the soul itself.

Plato presents his famous tripartite model of the soul in *The Republic*, presumably to illustrate the interrelationship of the social classes in his ideal city, but this doctrine will have an immense and lasting influence on philosophers and spiritual thinkers alike. Like the city of *The Republic*, with its divisions of workers, guardians, and rulers, the soul as Plato has Socrates delineate it contains appetitive, emotional, and rational levels that under healthy conditions will employ their faculties to work together as a single, unified organism. The lowest of these levels Socrates describes as a chimerical, amorphous monster: “Mold, then, a single shape of a manifold and many-headed beast that has a ring of heads of tame and wild beasts and can change them and cause to spring forth from itself all such growths” (*Republic* 588c). This terrible apparition is the appetitive soul, which directly interacts with and maintains the body in all its alimentary functions of growth and digestion. While crucial to humanity’s existence as embodied beings, the appetitive soul constantly threatens to plunge the higher faculties downward into materiality and corruption. Likewise, Plato assigns to the emotional soul the form of a fierce lion that forces the appetitive soul below it into submission but can itself grow tyrannical and subject the entire body and soul to its own will. Ruling supreme over these lower levels is the rational soul, which takes on the appearance of a man. This rational element takes its proper place in dominion over the soul’s lower faculties, as Plato writes: “And on the other hand, he who says justice is the more profitable affirms that all our actions and words should tend to give the man within us complete domination over the entire man and make him take charge of the many-headed beast” (*Republic* 589a-b). An analogous model of the soul appears in *The Phaedrus*, in which the human individual takes the form of a charioteer driving two unequally yoked horses: one earthly and sluggish, the other fiery and quick, while each soul manages them in devotion to its patron god as they race across the heavens. Once again, the yielding of control to either of the

subordinate creatures leads to the downfall of the entire being (246a-d). As in the teachings of Pythagoras and Empedocles, the body itself is a union of warring elements, which can only be controlled by a soul in full mastery of itself: “the only being which can properly have mind is the invisible soul, whereas fire and water, and earth and air, are all of them visible bodies” (*Timaeus* 46.d). But does the soul survive the dissolution of these bodily elements and if so, what sort of existence does it lead elsewhere, either partial or intact?

Plato addresses the soul’s immortality and traces its trajectory after death in such works as the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*. Although the images and details of the telling vary from dialogue to dialogue, Plato consistently frames these teachings in a mythic, oracular style, as if to suggest that we are no longer in the realm of easily communicable and digestible truths, possibly borrowing here from the occult methodologies of the Pythagoreans. The *Phaedo* especially occupies a crucial position in Plato’s corpus as it presents Socrates preparing for his imminent death with a lengthy meditation on the afterlife, perhaps delivered more for his companions’ comfort than his own.¹² The mythic vision takes on sweeping cosmological proportions as it follows the wanderings of departed souls through the bowels of the earth, a journey with so “many forkings and crossroads” as to require a guiding spirit to preserve each soul from losing its way (108a). For the whole of known civilization exists in a mere hollow of the earth, as Socrates explains, and the denizens of the hollow lead but a degraded and inferior existence compared to the occupants of the earth’s true surface. The natives of these upper

¹² As with all the dialogues to some degree or another, there must surely have been some imaginative recreation involved in Plato’s composition of the *Phaedo*. However, we have all the more reason to believe this of the *Phaedo*, as the titular character recalls after providing a list of all the individuals present for the events of the dialogue: “I believe Plato was ill” (59b). It is likely no coincidence that Plato seems much more ready to place his own teachings in the mouth of his master than in the other dialogues concerned with the events leading up to Socrates’s death.

regions, however, lead an existence to which we ground dwellers can only aspire: “In a word, as water and the sea are to us for our purposes, so is air to them, and as air is to us, so the æther is to them” (111a-b). Like the prisoners in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, the hollow dwellers see only obscured representations of the truth, hindered as they are by the material substrate in which they live, while those in the upper world view the truth more directly. It is the goal of humanity to aspire toward these upper reaches, and even those who have undergone a lengthy purgation in the underworld’s winding rivers of mud and fire will eventually receive another chance to strive upward, born once again into the mortal world of the hollow. Although Socrates admits that this cosmological vision is perhaps no more than a fabulous tale in terms of the places, personages, and lengths of time involved, the teachings on the improvement of the soul are consistent with Plato’s philosophy. And he is quite direct in explaining the best path for the soul to follow in its upward journey:

There is one way, then, in which a man can be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul—if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments, as foreign to his purpose and likely to do more harm than good, and has devoted himself to the pleasures of acquiring knowledge, and so by decking his soul not with a borrowed beauty but with its own—with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality, and truth—has fitted himself to await his journey to the next world. (114d-155a)

The whole of this splendid cosmological vision Plato has devoted to mapping out the stages of an interior journey with as much to teach us about leading a good and virtuous life in our current existence as in any conception of the hereafter. As elsewhere, Plato’s program as laid out in the *Phaedo* centers on the soul’s realization of its own native powers and potentialities through a

process of increasing self-awareness, culminating eventually in the crucial, revelatory moment of *anamnesis* or remembrance.¹³ And aside from any definite metaphysical teaching we might be tempted to draw from the episode, it is certainly of interest that the *Phaedo* employs reincarnation as a paradigm for the individual's intellectual and spiritual development, a theme Plato will further develop in the mythic passages of the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*.

As the visionary climax of the *Republic*, the Myth of Er is possibly the greatest and most extensive of Plato's myths of transmigration and the afterlife. As related by Socrates, this oracular discourse recounts the otherworldly experience of Er, a man slain in battle who claimed to have visited the realms of the afterlife before returning just in time to prevent his own cremation. Once again, Plato describes the punishment of certain unfortunate souls in the subterranean world of Tartarus while others go on to a period of reward in the heavens. After a cycle of a thousand years, however, the whole lot of souls—with some nefarious exceptions—are gathered together once more to be reborn into the universe as another human being or some other creature of their choosing. As Socrates emphasizes, the choice makes all the difference in the ultimate fate of the individual's soul, and we must train ourselves in the present life “so that with consideration of all these things he will be able to make a reasoned choice between the better and the worse life, with his eyes fixed on the nature of his soul, naming the worse life that which will tend to make it more unjust and the better that which will make it more just” (618d-e). As the souls select their next incarnation, whether it be from human to animal fierce or tame, animal to human, or from one sort of human life to another, we might recall Plato's earlier explanation of the tri-partite soul and the constant peril the higher life of the rational soul faces

¹³ This act of remembrance or *anamnesia* is of course the necessary inverse and remedy for *amnesia*, the state of forgetfulness under which the soul suffers on entering the physical world. See Mircea Eliade, “Plato, Pythagoras, and Orphism” (*Religious Ideas* 197-202).

from the beastly lower levels that threaten to overwhelm it. Here too, one's prosperity depends on the reigning in of the animal nature through the knowledge of goodness provided by philosophy. In the *Phaedrus* too, the winged chariots representative of human souls make their successive rounds—each an entire lifetime—in an epic chariot race across the heavens, aided by the recovered knowledge of their past lives, and allured by the possibility of a reunion with the immaterial world “beyond the heavens” from which they were derived. Although the machinery of the myths changes from telling to telling, certain details remain consistent, particularly the upward movement of purified souls, whether by the growth of wings or the increasing rarefication of the body as they grow more and more in their resemblance of the good, and the downward, earthbound trajectory of the ignorant and corrupted.

It must be noted, of course, that the story of Plato's influence is also the story of his interpreters, who often approached the philosopher through the lens of their own socio-cultural perspective and influences. Huntington Cairns addresses this problem in his introduction to *The Collected Dialogues*:

But his poetic insight has often been confused with mysticism, even with mysticism's most obscurantist manifestations. His discussion of the one and the many, the doctrine of love and eternal beauty, the Demiurgos, and similar matters, have all been mistakenly used, by mystics and occultists, as grounds for their own doctrines. He has been a source of inspiration to many types of mysticism but his writings have been repeatedly misread. (Cairns xv)

While one could very well criticize Plotinus and his Neoplatonist successors as misreaders of Plato, as Cairns goes on to do, their interpretation of Plato's philosophy remained a dominant cultural force through the middle ages and well into the Renaissance. While Plotinus showed

more concern for producing a consistent and codified system out of Plato's works, he also imbued them with his own hierophantic practices, much in the manner of the Presocratics. And here we must address the difference between Platonism proper and Neoplatonism: while the former represents a direct approach to Plato that takes him more or less at his word, the latter represents a sprawling, organic system united by a set of assumptions about the soul and its relationship to the universe, both visible and invisible, and to the mysterious One. We can basically collapse the entire Neoplatonic cosmos into the three primal hypostases, which Plotinus held as the essential levels of reality: the One, the Intellect (or Mind), and the Soul. These concepts are sometimes known as the Neoplatonic Trinity, and as we will see later, their somewhat intuitive alignment with the persons of the Christian Trinity has encouraged many a Christian thinker to assume the two systems were essentially compatible, a process in which they were aided by the generally syncretistic temperament of Neoplatonist thought, including the assumption that ancient pagan civilizations had received a divine revelation to rival that professed by the Hebrews of the Old Testament.¹⁴

The Plotinian One is "a source and term of all being that transcends all knowledge" (O'Brien 15). Elmer O'Brien traces the idea back to Philo rather than Plato, offering the doctrine's disparagement of all knowledge derived from the senses, favoring instead the direct contemplation of the One, as proof that it could not have come from Plato (15). In Neoplatonic cosmology, the influence of the One reaches down from the heavens into every corner of

¹⁴ This is the "ancient theology" that would become a recurring fascination for the Neoplatonists' successors in the Renaissance. Among the most common rationales was the notion that Pythagoras had traveled to Egypt to study under Hebrew scholars, from whom he received monotheistic teachings that he would pass down to his countrymen in the form of obscure allegories and occult teachings. Plato too was held to be a recipient of this alternative Mosaic revelation (Bieman 70).

creation, even the internal universe of the human individual. As Elmer O'Brien writes, "To be the correlative of the cyclic rhythm of the macrocosm, the inner rhythm of the microcosm must somehow tend towards a oneness" (O'Brien 26). The process described here is a "drawing inward" of thought, reaching upward to the One through the soul's "center." It is by recognizing its kinship with the One that the individual soul learns to look beyond the physical universe and discern the intelligible realm. The second hypostasis or the Intellect appears in the works of Plato as the world of the Forms (or Ideas), which is also the level that Plato and the Neoplatonists typically assign to the pagan gods and other divine, yet subordinate, spiritual entities.¹⁵ The third and final hypostasis, the Soul, is the only one of these cosmic principles to directly influence the physical world, as it inhabits the body in the form of the individual human (or animal) soul and the universe at large in the form of the World Soul. After realizing its relation to the three hypostases, compared to which the body is little more than a mere shadow or an afterthought, the soul becomes rapt in the contemplation of the essential unity of all things in which it participates:

All this accomplished, it gives up its touring of the realm of sense and settles down in the Intellectual Kosmos and there plies its own peculiar Act: it has abandoned all the realm of deceit and falsity, and pastures the Soul in the "Meadows of Truth": it employs the Platonic division to the discernment of the Ideal-Forms, of the Authentic-Existence and of the First Kinds [or Categories of Being]: it establishes, in the light of Intellection, the unity there is in all that issues from these Firsts, until it has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm: then,

¹⁵ In Christian Platonist adaptations of Plotinian cosmology, the second hypostasis is typically considered the sphere of the angels, designated as "the Angelic Mind." This cosmic realm has been fertile ground for a lineage of Hellenistic theologians, most significantly Pseudo-Dionysius, who unveils its sophisticated structure in his treatise *On the Celestial Hierarchy*.

resolving the unity into the particulars once more, it returns to the point from which it starts. (Plotinus 1.3.4)

This movement of the soul toward the One, insofar as it is attainable within the circumstances of mortal life, is only a temporary flight, and yet it is preparatory to the more prolonged journey the soul will make when death has severed all ties to the body that has kept it tethered to the material world. One might understandably view this as a rather dismal perspective on the human body.

According to his student Porphyry, Plotinus himself sometimes seemed to despair at even having to live in a body, which he elsewhere describes as little more than a shadow cast by the soul.¹⁶

As Plotinus writes of the ideal relationship between soul and body: “The sovereign principle, the authentic man, will be as Form to this Matter or as agent to this instrument, and thus, whatever that relation be, the soul is the man” (4.7.1). The human individual, as Corrigan elaborates, “is the unity of both elements, soul and a specific human body, in the *logos*” (Corrigan 81). The relation of soul and body remained a complicated paradox for Plotinus and his followers, one their successors in the Christian era would attempt to resolve through the central Christian mysteries, with a particular emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation.

Some of the most significant theologians in the first few centuries of the Christian era were the recipients of intensive secular educations in the Greek and Roman classics, putting many of them in contact with the works of Plato and Plotinus or the various late classical pagan writers who drew from their ideas. St. Augustine, for instance, credits certain “Platonist Books,” apparently works by Plotinus and Porphyry, with their realizations about the nature of the soul and its relationship to the physical world for leading him toward Christianity (Chadwick 121n). However, as Augustine’s thought on these subjects develops, he adopts some positions contrary

¹⁶ See MacKenna’s introductory note to *The Six Enneads* of Plotinus (v-vi).

to Plotinus's on the nature of the soul and its relationship to the divine: "Moreover, the soul of man, although it bears witness of the light, is 'not that light', but God the Word is himself 'the true light which illuminates every man coming into the world' (7.13). Here Augustine disavows Plotinus's model of the soul's neat and orderly descent from the two superior hypostases, as becomes more clear when we examine his reference to the opening verses of St. John's Gospel. In essence, Augustine's disavowal of the Plotinian explanation of the soul's divine nature and its inherent consubstantiality with the One casts doubt on the entire Plotinian paradigm of spiritual ascent. Any upward movement of the soul in Augustine's conception will have its impulse, not in the goodness and abilities of the individual aspirant, but in those qualities imputed by God to the unworthy soul in an act of grace.

It is from Plotinus and other Platonists that Augustine learns the practice of contemplation, a corrective to the physicality of Manichean beliefs and rituals which he found increasingly vulgar and stifling: "By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel, and was given power to do so because you had become my helper" (*Confessions* 7.16). We should note here that Augustine does not attribute this realization to the inherent powers within his soul, as Plotinus probably would have, but to a manifestation of divine grace. For Augustine, this would have been a crucial distinction to set his beliefs apart from those of the proponents of the Pelagian heresy, who denied the absolute and inevitable corruption of the human soul by original sin and the role of divine grace in moral endeavors (Tornau). As harsh as Augustine's teachings on original sin may sound to the modern ear, this doctrine opens the penitent soul to divine grace, which the Pelagians would deny, as their teachings "placed the terrifying weight of complete freedom on the individual: he was responsible for his every action; every sin, therefore, could only be a deliberate act of

contempt for God” (Brown 350-51). This will be a significant point of contention well into the Renaissance when Ficino and Pico would defend their Neoplatonic systems against their orthodox detractors in the church, and it is a question with which Spenser would have had to contend as well, considering the Calvinist climate in the English Church of his day and that sect’s apparent hostility to the Pelagian model of spiritual self-determination.¹⁷

One of the chief themes in Augustine’s discussion of the ancient Platonists is their compatibility on many levels with Christian doctrine, on which he expounds at length in *The City of God*: “If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows and loves this God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists” (*City of God* 8.5). This is at once a vindication of Augustine’s own formidable classical education and an opening up of a large body of material for Christian interpretation. Despite his acknowledgment of certain truths among the pagan philosophers, Augustine takes exception to the residue of polytheism that still lingers throughout their works: “These are, as it were, their gold and silver, which they did not institute themselves but dug up from certain mines of divine Providence, which is everywhere infused, and perversely and injuriously abused in the worship of demons” (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.60). Like Plotinus before him, Augustine envisions humanity as occupying an intermediate position in the universal hierarchy of created beings, although the soul’s malleability allows it to rise or descend to another rank: “The wicked are displeased by your justice, even more by vipers and the worm which you created good, being well fitted for the lower parts of your creation. To these lower parts the wicked themselves are well fitted, to the

¹⁷ See “The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism” by Roy W. Battenhouse (447-8).

extent that they are dissimilar to you, but they can become fitted for the higher parts insofar as they become more like you” (*Confessions* 7.22). Though Augustine denies the Platonist belief that the soul’s journey through the universe entails a series of physical reincarnations, he uses the imagery of transmigration to portray the transformations the soul undergoes as it gradually makes its way back to its celestial home. Perhaps it should come as little surprise that one of Augustine’s most noteworthy departures from the Platonists he references concerns his treatment of the problem of evil. For Plotinus, evil was little more than a tempting illusion, the deluded act of mistaking the material world of becoming for the immaterial world of true being, in which everything simultaneously emanates from and coexists with the One. In the thought of Augustine, of course, the nature and origin of evil is inextricably bound up with the doctrine of Original Sin, with the implication that all human disobedience to the divine will, in past, present, and future, are products of the corrupted human will inherited from Adam. This is a ponderous inheritance that distorts human nature in both body and soul, “impregnated with a crude materialism” (Bonaiuti 160). If there is a Plotinian equivalent to Original Sin, it must refer to that original falling away from the One; this descent, however, brings no lasting harm to the soul, whose return to the One is inevitable, even if delayed over a great succession of ages in cosmic time.

Throughout the Middle Ages, other Christian thinkers have adapted the mystical and cosmological teachings of Plato and Plotinus for their own purposes. In the *Life of Moses*, St. Gregory of Nyssa not only maps the stages of the soul’s ascent to the divine onto events in the life of the biblical Moses, but he also postulates on the continued development of the soul after death, not through successive physical incarnations but through a process of eternal growth and spiritual development he refers to as Perpetual Progress (Boersma 576). Another crucial theorist

of the medieval church, Pseudo-Dionysius echoes the contemplative teachings of Plotinus as he espouses a *via negativa* in his *Mystical Theology*, urging his followers to abandon all knowledge drawn from the physical world in their search for spiritual enlightenment.¹⁸ Likewise, his *On the Celestial Hierarchy* develops the Plotinian hypostatic cosmology into a complex network of angelic beings in their descent from the Divine Presence. And in the fourteenth century, the anonymous English author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* drew heavily on the Dionysian teachings, espousing an apophatic theology that requires the spiritual seeker to find enlightenment in the rejection of any knowledge based on the world of physical experience.¹⁹ We find yet another model of spiritual ascent through love in the *Rime Sparse* of Francesco Petrararch, which begins with carnal desire and progresses to spiritual longing after a period of penitence and loss. And in the “Letter to Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro,” frequently anthologized as “The Ascent of Mount Ventoux,” Petrarch traces his intellectual journey as a parallel upward path to the more direct route of his clergyman brother. Through the circuitous ascent, Petrarch holds faith that he too will arrive at the same spiritual destination represented by the mountain peak. His reflections toward the end of the letter are worth considering: “I wondered at the natural nobility of our soul, save when it debases itself of its own free will, and deserts its original estate, turning what God has given it for its honour into dishonour. How many times, think you, did I turn back that day, to glance at the summit of the mountain which seemed scarcely a cubit high compared with the range of human contemplation,—when it is not immersed in the foul mire of earth?” (2484-85). As Petrarch explains, these recollections were prompted by his consultation of Augustine’s

¹⁸ For a brief overview Pseudo-Dionysius and his place in the Platonic tradition, see C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (70-75).

¹⁹ In the assessment of Jaroslav Pelikan, a renowned church historian and Orthodox theologian, the broader Platonic tradition contributed apophatic principles to Christian theology, which he refers to as a “language of negation” and “lexicon of transcendence” (2).

Confessions, during which he could not help but to compare his own spiritual wandering to the saint's "mid-life" conversion.²⁰ A similar spiritual restlessness preoccupied Dante Alighieri, whose model of a spiritual universe in the *Divine Comedy* follows certain Plotinian principles in its grand design, especially as the pilgrim narrator journeys into the highest reaches of the spiritual universe in the *Paradiso*. And the other key to Dante's cosmos is the following principle, which St. Augustine attributes to the Divine Will: "For you have imposed order, and so it is that the punishment of every disordered mind is its own disorder" (*Confessions* 1.19). If the Plotinian hypostases and their interrelationships provide a map for Dante's cosmos, this Augustinian principle, which appears throughout the *Divine Comedy* as the rule of *contrapasso*, suiting the punishment to the crime, is effectively the legend for the map.

Much of Platonist thought survived through the writings of Boethius, whose commanding reputation was nearly unmatched through the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. As W.P. Ker explains, "Boethius was fortunate in the time of his life and death, and in the choice of his theme. No other writer commands so much of the past and future" (73). In some respects, Boethius's most influential work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, is a primer of Platonist philosophy. Boethius speaks in Platonist terms when he describes the descent of the universe from a state of primal unity: "The natural world did not take its origin from that which was impaired and incomplete, but issues from that which is unimpaired and perfect and degenerates into this fallen and worn out condition" (3.P10). While this description of nature's fall certainly resembles Plotinus's model of the universe's emanation from the One, the degree to which the physical creation is tainted for Boethius suggests the influence of the philosopher's Christianity and

²⁰The relevant passage in the *Confessions* reads, "People are moved to wonder by mountain peaks, by vast waves of the sea, by broad waterfalls on rivers, by the all-embracing extent of the ocean, by the revolutions of the stars. But in themselves they are uninterested" (10.15).

possibly his familiarity with Augustine's teachings on Original Sin as a corrupting force within the human soul as well as the universe at large. Like a good Platonist, Boethius speaks of salvation through the contemplation of eternal principles as these transcend the influence of Fortune and are akin to the harmonies of the rightly proportioned soul. And he is brought to these realizations by the goddess-like figure of Lady Philosophy, a benevolent being who seems to inhabit the higher reaches of the Neoplatonic cosmos, somewhere just below the realm of the Forms, just as she shares an affinity with the higher faculties of Boethius's own soul.²¹ Despite the author having spent a lifetime in distinguished public service and intellectual investigation, Lady Philosophy hails him as one of the unlearned masses, whose life of internal disarray betrays a fundamental ignorance of universal principles, signs of a ruling intelligence beneath the accidents of the physical world:

So sinks the mind in deep despair
And sight grows dim; when storms of life
Inflate the weight of earthly care,
The mind forgets its inward light
And turns in trust to the dark without. (1.V2.1-5)

She is also a literary ancestress of other intermediary bearers of enlightened wisdom, such as Reason and Nature in the *Roman de la Rose* and perhaps even the deified Beatrice of Dante's *Paradiso*. And for Spenser, Lady Philosophy provides a model for both the Dame Nature of the *Mutability Cantos* and Sapience in the "Hymne to Heavenly Wisdome." Lady Philosophy is essentially the representation of a universe in sympathy with the human soul down to its very

²¹ See Antonio Donato: "Self-Examination and Consolation in Boethius's "Consolation of Philosophy" (408).

foundations, however harsh the realities (or perhaps more appropriately the unrealities) of the physical world reveal themselves to be, at least according to the witness of our immediate circumstances. She, therefore, prompts the imprisoned philosopher to recognize his place within this universal harmony and to conduct himself accordingly through the pursuit of virtues, internal human principles correspondent to the natural laws that govern the cosmos.

Boethius's description of earthly affairs is dominated by the notorious metaphor of the Wheel of Fortune, which both elevates the suffering into happier circumstances and plunges the prosperous into penury and despair. Here, the capricious Fortune bears a resemblance to Porphyry's interpretation of the goddess Circe as a spirit of transformation and the mistress of the cyclical forces of reincarnation.²² Philosophy reminds us, however, that these shifts of rank and circumstance one experiences on the farthest rim of Fortune's wheel are ultimately inconsequential, having no legitimate bearing on the life of the soul. As the antithetical force to the sirens of worldly desire, Philosophy exhorts Boethius to "Leave then the dangerous places of delight, and make your home safely on the low rocks" (Boethius 30). She appeals here to Boethius's desire for stability amidst the tumults of earthly life, and his soul's inherent longing for a return to its heavenly home. Both of these desires are fulfilled in the practice of virtue. As Philosophy explains, "For man is constituted so that when he knows himself he excels all other things; but when he forgets who he is, he becomes worse than the beasts. It is natural for other living things not to know who they are, but in man such ignorance is vice" (Boethius 33). While Boethius nowhere affirms a physical reincarnation, he embraces the idea that the human soul can inhabit a better or worse place in the universal hierarchy as it either debases or exalts itself, even

²²For Porphyry's interpretation of Circe as a goddess of change and transformation, see Lamberton (115-19).

if this represents only an internal change of one's spiritual condition. Of course, this is still a more significant change for most of the authors discussed here than a mere shuffling from one mode of flesh into another.

Perhaps no individual did more to revive Platonist thought in the west than Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine nobleman responsible for the publication of Plato's collected works in his influential Latin translation with accompanying commentaries of some of the more important dialogues. Many of these writings, such as the complete text of Plato's *Timaeus*, had been unavailable to Western readers since the early middle ages, and their rediscovery was a major catalyst in the ongoing intellectual revolution across the academic disciplines. But reviving the texts themselves was not enough for Ficino and his circle, who saw to the founding of a new Platonic Academy in Florence and orchestrated elaborate, formal dinners inspired by Plato's *Symposium*, such as the one commemorated in Ficino's influential commentary to that text, which is itself presented in the form of a dialogue. Ficino also brought renewed attention to the writings of Plotinus through translations and commentary that were published alongside his Latin translations of Plato's works. His own philosophy, which drew heavily from the Plotinian lineage, Ficino held to be a faithful recreation of ancient Platonic thought, although today it would typically be identified as a form of Neoplatonism in acknowledgment of Plotinus's influence along with the syncretistic inclusion of such influences as astrology, alchemy, hermeticism, and a heavily allegorized interpretation of classical paganism, much of which would have been quite alien to Plato himself. Still, Ficino fits firmly within the lineage we have been exploring in the care he takes to navigate the life and development of the individual soul.

Perhaps no other figure bridges classical Platonism and the humanistic assumptions of Renaissance Neoplatonism more comprehensively than Ficino, although it would be remiss to

dissociate him from the Christianized forms of Platonism that circulated in the middle ages. As Paul Kristeller writes in his overview of the Florentine master's thought, "His emphasis on the inner ascent of the soul towards God through contemplation links him with the mystics, whereas his doctrine of the unity of the world brought about by the soul influenced the natural philosophers of the sixteenth century" (58). Even when discussing such seemingly disparate subjects as astrology, medicine, or magic, Ficino keeps the well-being of the soul ever within his sight as he discusses the various cosmological influences and elemental affinities that can bring it either prosperity or harm. David Wilcox explains the essential unity of Ficino's thought, as exemplified in the *Theologia Platonica*:

The fundamental concept of the *Theologia*, as well as of the rest of Ficino's work, is that God is immanent or inherent in human personality. This concept, which reached the level of explicit mysticism, underlay many of his most important themes. It provided a theoretical basis for the creativity of the human spirit and especially for the glorification of the artist, for he used his own direct relation to God to create out of his own resources a thing of beauty. (Wilcox 113)

This approach opened the greater poets among the pagans as sources of an ancient revelation, which Ficino and his like-minded disciples sought to harmonize with the Hebrew revelation of the Old Testament and its ultimate fulfillment in the teachings of Christ. As I will later demonstrate, Ficino's version of Neoplatonism bears quite a significant influence in the works of Edmund Spenser, including certain syncretistic assumptions that would otherwise appear contradictory to some of the poet's more orthodox positions.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a charismatic, younger contemporary of Ficino, achieved enough in his short life to become one of the most celebrated Neoplatonist theorists of the

Renaissance. In the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* Pico presents a concise formulation of his philosophy, staging a defense for humanistic education and the study of the pagan philosophers as a method for improving the soul. So optimistic is Pico concerning the potential of the human individual that he attributes the power to command the forces of nature to the soul that has mastered itself, essentially describing a form of white magic like unto the powers that give Prospero command over a host of elemental spirits in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.²³ Boethius and Plotinus also attested to the awesome powers within the human soul, though neither of them explores the full ramifications of these claims to the degree of Pico in the *Oration*: "O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills" (96). In the hands of no other writer would these words mean quite so much, for Pico demands that we take these claims quite seriously. His optimism for human potential, like his enthusiasm for learning, is boundless. "The summit of the ascent is an illumination and intoxication whereby man is united with divinity" (Bainton 82). In the prophetic vision of Pico, the matter of myth and metaphor become sparkling realities. At times, Pico's great hope for humanity to transcend their collective flaws and evolve upward takes him remarkably close to the ancient Hellenistic doctrine of *apokatastasis*, "which implies that we receive nothing new from God in our salvation, and that the final state is simply the return of the soul to squandered innocence" (Edwards 112). This is the essence of universal salvation, a heretical doctrine that suits Pico quite well in his highest moments of humanistic idealism.

Pico was also an enthusiastic syncretist, probably to an even greater degree than his master, Ficino, and professed the belief that a single transcendent truth could be discerned

²³For a discussion of the nature and sources of Prospero's magic, see "Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus," by Barbara A. Mowat (168-87).

beneath the major religious systems of the world. In the *Oration*, Pico blends a Neoplatonist paradigm for the ascent of the soul through contemplation with biblical emblems such as Jacob's Ladder in a beautiful and ambitious fusion of Christian and Platonist thought. Often interpreted as a typological representation of God coming down to earth in the person of Christ, for Pico, Jacob's Ladder becomes an emblem of humanity's inherent ability to strive upward toward reunion with the divine.²⁴ Despite his interests in hermeticism, magic, and various occult traditions, Wedeck and Schweitzer note that Pico "was among the first to dismiss astrology as entirely false, a part of his conception of man's freedom and power of creation" (463). Though Pico was a rather controversial figure in his own day who was forced to defend himself before representatives of the church, he would later gain the respect of such a thoroughly Catholic figure as Sir Thomas More, who would memorialize him in a philosophical biography. Of course, More seems to take great pains to establish Pico as a representative of authentic Christian zeal and Catholic orthodoxy. Ever the idealist and iconoclast, Pico himself would crown his young life with a short-lived attempt to pursue the ways of a wandering ascetic, only to take ill, perhaps from the stringent demands of a life of poverty and ascetic discipline. Tragically, the body would have its needs met regardless of however high the young Pico's soul was determined to soar. Perhaps Castiglione heeded this warning toward the end of his *Book of the Courtier*, as one of the ladies at court brings Pietro Bembo, still standing in the glow of his lofty final

²⁴Pico interprets this figure as an invitation for humanity to imitate the motions of "the contemplative angels" through mastery of the soul's internal hierarchy: "When we shall have been so prepared by the art of discourse or of reason, then inspired by the spirit of the Cherubim, exercising philosophy through all the rungs of the ladder—that is, of nature—we shall penetrate being from its center to its surface and from its surface to its center. At one time we shall descend, dismembering with titanic force the 'unity' of the 'many,' like the members of Osiris; at another time we shall ascend, recollecting those same members, by the power of Phoebus, into their original unity. Finally, in the bosom of the Father, who reigns above the ladder, we shall find perfection and peace in the felicity of theological knowledge" (*Oration* 18-19).

discourse on the Ladder of Love, back down to earth with a firm, yet playful, pinch, teasing the enthused philosopher, “Take care, messer Pietro, that with these thoughts your soul, too, does not forsake your body” (4.71). And with similar logic, Spenser follows the most spiritual book of *The Faerie Queene* with Book II’s meditations on the chronic problems of the human mind and body in the face of disease, discomfort, and mortality.

In terms of native-born English writers, perhaps Spenser’s two greatest contemporaries to draw from the creative fountains of Neoplatonism were Sir Philip Sidney and John Lyly. Indeed, Spenser’s own appreciation of Neoplatonic teachings may have developed substantially during the period of his association with the Sidney Circle, although his previous association with the luminous Gabriel Harvey likely provided quite a respectable foundation. In *The Defense of Poesy*, especially, Sidney espouses a Platonic belief in knowledge as a force for the individual’s elevation in the universal order: “This purifying of wit—this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit—which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of” (1053). Of course, these doctrines do not come without the corresponding disparagement of the human body and the aspiration to escape our material confinement through a concerted effort of mind and soul. As Sidney writes, “But all, one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying of his own divine essence” (1053). Naturally, Sidney champions poetry as one of the most reliable mediums for elevating the benighted soul into the cleansing daybreak of these hidden revelations. Sidney unites the Greek characterization of the poet as *poeta* or “maker” with that of the Romans who crowned the poet as *vates* or prophetic “seer,” qualities which combine in the

Sidneian conception of poetry as the craftsmanlike creation of a “golden world” based on a superior realm of hidden ideas.²⁵ In a private letter to Edward Denny, concerning the gentleman’s continued education, Sidney advises, “The knowledge of ourselves no doubt ought to be most precious unto us, and therein the Holy Scriptures, if not the only, are certainly the incomparable lantern in this fleshly darkness of ours” (212). However, an endorsement of worldly, philosophical learning comes soon after, suggesting a pedagogical and ethical paradigm much like Spenser endorses in his “Letter of the Authors” and implicit in his ordering of the virtues in *The Faerie Queene*.

So much for Sidney as an aesthetic theorist, but how faithfully does he apply these principles in his own poetic works? In *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney references certain conventionally Platonic conceptions of love, beauty, and truth as universal principles, though he often treats these doctrines with a certain air of cynicism and detachment, as typified by the presumptuous courtier Astrophil. And Astrophil notes as much with a cavalier dismissal: “True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made, / And should in soul up to our country move: / True, and yet true that I must *Stella* love” (5.12-14). Progress up the Ladder of Love is arrested by the end of the sequence, leaving Astrophil in the bitter pains of an unfulfilled courtship that he is doubtful ever to transcend. The final paradox expresses Astrophil’s self-satisfaction and bitter frustration with the distant object of his affections: “So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevail, / That in my woes for thee thou art my joy, / And in my joys for thee my only annoy” (108.12-14).

²⁵ John C. Ulreich, Jr. further explains this distinction with reference to the Aristotelian and Platonic understanding of poetic form as *mimesis*: “Aristotle and Plato perceive the same process at work, but from opposite points of view. Where Aristotle conceives of an underlying energy actualizing itself in the forms of our experience, Plato contemplates that substantial energy as being which is fully realized in itself (hence self-subsistent) but always working to express itself by imparting its form to an imperfect matter” (140).

Does Astrophil sabotage his own chance to transcend this emotional suffering merely out of misguided bravado? Perhaps, but this final sonnet shows enough self-consciousness on Astrophil's part to make the choice seem dignified, even heroic. In refusing to transcend either his love for Stella or the resultant suffering, Astrophil lays claim to the full realm of human experience, the reality of being a brilliantly flawed creature with spiritual aspirations and bodily desires, along with the internal turmoil arising from this tension.

In the realm of drama, Spenser would have found another suitable model in the mythopoetic compositions of John Lyly, whose *Endymion* is essentially a philosophical treatise dressed in the colorful guise of a supernatural, courtly romance. At its original reception, Lyly's play would have appealed to a social milieu in which certain basic Neoplatonic conventions had become the common currency of stage, prose romance, and courtly verse. A number of these other works, however, fall into the popular and somewhat shallower category that Ellrodt terms "courtly" or "aesthetic Platonism" (11) An urbane poet or reasonably literate courtier of the time would hardly have needed to open a single treatise of Platonic philosophy to become conversant enough in these conventions to appease the tastes of this literary zeitgeist. Lyly, however, seems to have delved deeper into various Neoplatonic source materials than many of his scribbling peers. As David Bevington surmises in his excellent critical introduction to *Endymion*,

Lyly may indeed have been familiar with a Renaissance Cabalistic interpretation of the Endymion myth, promulgated especially by Giordano Bruno, Giovanni Piero Valeriano Bolzani, and Giulio Camillo, in which Endymion's sleep signifies the ecstatic striving of the soul to seek union with God through contemplation, and in which Cynthia's chaste kiss signifies the receptivity of the Divine to that noble longing. (Bevington 12)

And here we may also discern echoes of that strain of Christian Platonist mysticism typified by Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and John of the Cross, in which the soul's fleeting enjoyment of the divine presence becomes eroticized in its passion and intensity. For the smitten Endymion, the goddesslike Cynthia becomes the object of uncompromising devotion, against whom his previous beloved, Tellus, a serving woman to Cynthia, appears coarse and earthly. As Endymion proclaims in the throes of his lovesick lunacy, "Whom have I entertained but mine own thoughts and thy virtues? What company have I used but contemplation? Whom have I wondered at but thee? Nay, whom have I not contemned for thee? Have I not crept to those on whom I might have trodden, only because thou didst shine upon them?" (2.1.16-21). In this monologue, delivered in the author's euphuistic style, Lyly takes the Petrarchan impulse to greater heights, as he reimagines the praises of the fawning courtier as the outpouring of a soul from the depths of contemplation, whose every action derives from his aspiration toward a heavenly ideal, manifested in the beauty and virtue of Cynthia. It should come as little surprise that the discarded Tellus receives this proclamation poorly, as her love represents the bewitching enticements of the physical world. Like Circe before her, Tellus drugs the young lover, robbing him of the conscious exercise of the intellectual abilities so critical to the soul's advancement. Her plans are foiled, of course, once Cynthia grants Endymion the kiss of awakening, a true act of graceful condescension, which was the stuff of distant fantasy in the courtier's previous, waking existence. Thus Endymion's enchanted slumber adumbrates not only the deathlike descent of the soul from its original state of heavenly blessedness into the pain and ignorance of embodied, temporal experience, but also the corresponding passage of the properly directed soul into a higher state of existence through the transitory medium of bodily death.

Throughout these chapters, I want to emphasize that Spenser's Neoplatonism is of a deeper, more authentic strain than has often been allowed, even by many of the proponents of a more thoroughly Neoplatonist Spenser. For too long, a critical commonplace has held that the bulk of the Neoplatonic influence in Spenser's works appears in *The Fowre Hymnes* and somewhat in *The Amoretti*. Much more rarely does *The Faerie Queene* feature prominently in these discussions, although this has not always been the case, particularly with Spenser criticism before the twentieth century. After surveying the shorter works, where Spenser's use of Neoplatonist ideas about the soul are more explicit, I will establish a model of Spenser's soul that I will then use in a reading of *The Faerie Queene*, where many of the same ideas are implicit beneath the surface of the allegory, shining through like the "burning light" of the old gospel-blues song.

But now to return to the blind prophet who set us on our journey. For all of his artistry, Blind Willie Johnson spent the last days of his life sleeping in the ramshackle remains of his burned out house, exposed to the elements and huddling under damp newspapers for warmth. His guitar had been reduced to a charred and warped body, deprived of its life giving harmonies, and the singer's own physical frame was not long in following.²⁶ We could scrutinize Johnson's lyrical remains in an attempt to come to an answer for his original burning question, but perhaps we can learn just as much about the "soul" in Johnson's music from "Dark Was the Night—Cold Was the Ground," an enigmatic, wordless lamentation on the period of grief and expectation following the crucifixion, which was selected for inclusion on the gold record of the Voyager I space craft as an enduring testimony to the pains and glories of our shared human condition: "A

²⁶For a brief sketch of the scattered facts and lingering mysteries of Johnson's life, see Samuel Charter's liner notes to *The Complete Blind Willie Johnson* (8-16).

combination of emotional and psychological states—longing, remembrance, regret—appeared to them to be contained within one song: ‘Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground’” (King 63).

In the next few chapters, as we examine Spenser’s works, perhaps we would do well to remember Johnson’s example, as the soul could prove more distant under direct observation but reveal its glory within the anguished tones of lived experience.

2. THE SOUL'S JOURNEY IN SPENSER'S SHORTER POEMS

The mainspring that activates all human life lies not in human beings' moving their arms, legs, and backs, but in their consciousness. In order for a human being to do something with his legs and arms, it is first necessary for a certain change to take place in his consciousness. This change, which defines all subsequent actions of that person, is always minute, almost imperceptible.

– Leo Tolstoy, “Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?”²⁷

In preparation for the reading of *The Faerie Queene* that will be presented over the next few chapters, I will now take a closer look at those of Spenser's shorter works that will reveal the most concerning Spenser's conception of the soul. As I wish to demonstrate, these poems often address the spiritual and metaphysical questions relevant to this discussion much more directly and therefore represent an invaluable resource for uncovering and interpreting similar significations where they lie hidden within *The Faerie Queene*, however obscured beneath the veil of the epic's allegory. Indeed, certain Neoplatonic figures and paradigms dedicated to the growth and development of the soul persist throughout the shorter poems, disclosing a great deal about Spenser's sense of his own moral purpose as a poet. In their separate ways, works such as *The Shepheardes Calender*, *Amoretti*, *The Fowre Hymnes*, and *Muipotmos* share a fundamental concern with the evolution of the soul as it struggles upward towards higher levels of existence, whether their primary concern be the soul of the speaker or of the attentive reader as experienced vicariously in the events and characters of the poetic text. For Spenser, following the example of

²⁷Excerpted in *The Portable Nineteenth-Century Reader* as “How Literature Teaches us About Moral and Psychological Life” (529-31).

Virgil in his projected path from pastoral, to epic, to a consummation in the exalted philosophy of *The Fowre Hymnes*, was careful not to neglect the mental and spiritual development of the attentive reader, whose own psycho-spiritual journey remains at the forefront of even the most outlandish quests through the alien terrains of Fairy Land or of the various other testing grounds of the poet's imaginative universe. To navigate this labyrinthine, symbolic landscape, I recommend that we begin at its absolute center with the human soul, before tracking this elusive entity along the trajectory of its flight outward through the material creation and both upward and inward toward the divine.²⁸

Perhaps no work gives us more clues as to the shape of Spenser's early musings on the life of the soul than *The Shepheardes Calender*. While this virtuosic collection of pastoral eclogues was not Spenser's earliest published work (an honor which belongs to the poems Spenser wrote to accompany the emblem book *A Theatre for Worldlings*), it was the first in which Spenser revealed himself as a fully realized artist with a profound sense of national duty and moral responsibility. As the first phase along the Virgilian path to poetic greatness, pastoral was a natural enough starting point for a poet of Spenser's gifts and temperament. However, beneath his disarmingly simplistic depictions of humble shepherds in the English countryside,

²⁸My terminology and imagery here owe somewhat to C.S. Lewis's fictional allegory of a journey through the afterlife, *The Great Divorce*, which in turn builds its vision of the soul's progress through the metaphysical realm on descriptions from the writings of the Patristic theologians, with a particular emphasis on Gregory of Nyssa. For Nyssa, the soul's journey toward God is one of "perpetual progress" through this life and into the next, a never-ending ascent, illustrated in his *Life of Moses* with an allegorical interpretation of the prophet's ascent of Mt. Sinai. This is similar as well to the trajectory navigated by Dante's celestial pilgrim through the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. In each of these examples, a journey upward and outward through physical space is understood to represent the soul's inward progress toward the essential core of its own being, where it finds itself ushered into the divine presence. And in *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "In particular, be careful of the words 'in' and 'up,' for much error and deception in the lives of those set out to be contemplatives can be traced to a distortion of the meaning behind these two words" (113).

singing and discoursing on such conventional pastoral subjects as the pains of unrequited love or the daily management of their flocks, these poems reveal Spenser's early interest in the life and development of the soul, particularly in their preoccupation with the turbulent inner life of the shepherd-poet Colin Clout. Still, even this most dynamic of characters within *The Shepheardes Calendar* does not stand wholly as an entity unto himself, as the collective work holds each eclogue alongside the whole of its companions through the meta-textual organizing principle of the calendar year. As Isabel MacCaffrey explains Spenser's singular brilliance in implementing this structure:

His "originality" lay in combining a group of eclogues with a calendar framework, that is, variety with unity. It is a typically Spenserian invention: the two forms neutralize each other's disadvantages and cooperate to produce a structure that uniquely combines symbolic range and resonance with the most fundamental ordering pattern in our experience, the life-cycle itself. (89)

Spenser uses Colin Clout as an authorial stand-in, a device which the poet will revisit in later works such as *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* and Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*. However, the poet's inclusion of other voices in the front-matter and critical apparatus such as Immerito, presumably the identity under which Spenser narrates most of *The Shepheardes Calender*, and the elusive E.K., who may or not have been Spenser himself, the complexity of the work expands across multiple axes. Even the callow and impetuous Cuddie contains some glimmerings of his young creator's energy and vision. Although a character like Cuddie or even Colin himself cannot transcend the seasonal cycle in which they are inevitably caught as characters within the microcosm of Spenser's pastoral world, they can still point the way for both the poet and reader who may be able to integrate the limited possibilities of these fictional shepherd-poets into their

own perspectives as they struggle toward a higher state of existence that transcends life, death, and the material cycles which so fully define and demarcate life experiences, even in the seemingly stable world of *The Shepheardes Calender*.

Both the opening and closing eclogues of *The Shepheardes Calender* are dominated by the melancholic voice of Colin Clout, who, in both instances, laments his fruitless love for Rosalind, a shepherdess from the neighboring town. While such amatory frustrations typically provide the standard fare of pastoral verse, Colin's proves a chronic case, persisting across the entire span of months and seasons documented within *The Shepheardes Calender*. At first glance, Colin's deflated mood would appear synchronous with the intemperate conditions of the world around him, as we first meet the young poet voicing his solitary woes in the "January" eclogue: "Such rage as winters, reigneth in my heart, / My life bloud friesing with unkindly cold" (25-6). Experience with Spenser's diction, however, ought to indicate that this is not the typical sympathy between the lowly, rustic narrator and the natural world that the reader might understandably expect from pastoral poetry. For the cold of Colin's melancholy—the work of one of the chillier humors—is here "unkindly" or unnatural, even within the "January" eclogue's frostbitten desolation. The effects of this disordered condition, however, are not limited to the interior landscape of Colin's troubled psyche. As the young poet notes in the "January" eclogue, his internal misery has also begun to afflict the once flourishing lambs of his flock:

Thou feeble flocke, whose fleece is rough and rent,
Whose knees are weake through fast and evill fare:
Mayst witesse well by thy ill government,
Thy maysters mind is overcome with care. (43-6)

It would only seem to make practical sense, of course, that the livestock under Colin's care would suffer privation as a result of both the inclement winter weather and the lovesick shepherd's inattention to their needs. However, Colin's address to his flock also suggests a relationship much like that between soul and body (or between higher and lower parts of the soul as described in the Neoplatonic hierarchy). According to Plotinus, the soul is the very organizing principle or "form" which determines the nature and essential functions of the body to which it is connected (*Enneads* 1.1.7). It is thus the soul's purpose to "shepherd" the body as, in their turn, the higher, reasoning and intellective faculties within the soul must also guide their emotional and appetitive counterparts, often portrayed in the Platonist tradition as beasts dwelling within the soul's lower levels and interfacing in their turn with the corresponding parts and systems of the human anatomy (chiefly the heart and digestive tract). And Plato as well describes this internal maintenance with another rustic simile, particularly appropriate for our context, explaining that the one who takes up such a task behaves "like a farmer who cherishes and trains the cultivated plants but checks the growth of the wild" (*Republic* 588b). In contrast to Plato's careful farmer, Colin's shoddy husbandry of the docile animals in his care presents a stark reminder of the more dangerous and destructive beasts that Colin has allowed to breed and range freely within the hidden landscape of his soul. In an intensively allegorical work such as *The Faerie Queene*, these internal scourges would most certainly have taken on any number of threatening forms and phantasmagoric permutations, brandishing whatever clubs, claws, barbs, or other grisly armaments were most suitably adapted to the true nature of the beast. This, of course, is not the mode in which *The Shepheardes Calender* typically brings out such hidden conflicts, using instead a web of allusive and self-referential, internal harmonies and dissonances, set against the backdrop of the seasonal cycles in all of their mythic significance.

However, should we still consider Colin's dejection as a perfectly natural response to the wintry setting in which we initially find him—or, in our modern parlance, to say he suffers from seasonal depression—we learn soon enough that his condition is chronic, persisting well beyond the zodiacal New Year celebrated in the "March" eclogue. These poor spirits remain unshaken even through the traditionally life-restoring seasons of spring and summer, which only seem to mock the dejected shepherd with their promises of cyclical renewal. Once again, we will need to look deeper than the influence of nature for the cause of the young shepherd's persistent distemper. In one study of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Lynn Staley Johnson equates Spenser's tale of Colin with Renaissance commentaries on the classical myth of Narcissus, the ill-fated hunter who wasted away while contemplating the beauty of his own face as reflected in a pool of water. As Johnson writes, "Colin Clout functions as a similar mirror, wherein we may see the decay of talent, of youth, and of beauty. Seen thus, Colin serves as a powerful warning of the effects of time" (Johnson 106-7). Despite all of Colin's brilliance and natural potential, Spenser presents in him a portrait of the deluded soul, whose very attempts at introspection are but glances into the clouded mirror realm of material existence. And perhaps even starker is the diagnosis of Isabel MacCaffrey, who calls Colin "an antihero, his unredeemed existence tracing a movement which defines the failure of man to realize his *own* nature" (93). Caught thus between the innocence of Spenser's Arcadian England, a lost paradise in which Colin no longer finds himself fit to live, and his failure to attain the light of a revelation to bear him spiritually into an imperishable realm, the Colin of *The Shepheardes Calender* represents a state of the soul and a phase in the author's own poetic career that Spenser knew he would have to leave behind in order to advance along his projected teleological course toward the complementary aspirations of spiritual and poetical enlightenment. Though Spenser has already perceived the limitations of

the Colin persona, his decision to continue masquing in this humble guise reveals the limitations of the pastoral mode while projecting the traits that Spenser will more fully embody as he embraces his self-proclaimed destiny as a visionary poet in the mode of Homer and Virgil, as they are celebrated in the interpretations of the Neoplatonists, and in alignment with Philip Sidney's description of the poet as inspired seer or *vates*.

Yet still, one might ask, how close does Colin come to achieving this grand consummation? On reaching the "December" eclogue, we find Colin trapped within the same miserable, self-defeating cycle, having failed to transcend his circumstances through either his love for Rosalind or the power of his poetic craft, which has so often received the praise of Colin's countrymen. Recalling the struggling poet's lament in the "June" eclogue, we learn that little has changed for Colin by the close of the year: "But I unhappy man, whom cruell fate, / And angry Gods pursue from coste to coste, / Can nowhere fynd, to shroud my lucklesse pate" ("June" 14-16). By the time of "December," Colin remains ever alienated, unable to reintegrate himself into the society of his fellow shepherds.²⁹ This spiritual and emotional homelessness seems a step beyond the typical dejection of the melancholic lover, recalling the wanderings of Virgil's Aeneas, the prototypical exile, also famously driven "from coste to coste" at the whim of a spiteful deity. Unlike the Latin patriarch, however, Colin laments a squandered destiny as he reaches the twelfth division of his own book. And the barrenness of the young shepherd's hopes at this point is further emphasized by Colin's desperate final gesture, as he hangs the fragments of his shattered flute in the branches of the tree above him, an act of bitter resignation that echoes that of the exiled Hebrew speaker in Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babel we sate, and there we

²⁹For more on this theme, see Catherine Nicholson, "Pastoral in Exile: Spenser and the Poetics of English Alienation," (41-71).

wept, when we remembered Zion. / We hanged our harpes upon the willowes In the middes thereof. / Then thei that led us captives, required of us songs and mirth, when we had hanged up our harpes, saying Sing us one of the songs of Zion” (137.1-3).³⁰ For Colin, as revealed in his conversation with Hobbinol in the “June” eclogue, paradise is a state of mind from which the shepherd-poet in his perennial gloom has found himself spiritually and emotionally exiled, even while his more lighthearted companion remains comfortably within the safe and familiar landscape of pastoral innocence.³¹ And Colin acknowledges as much as he exclaims to his more fortunate friend, “O happy *Hobbinol*, I blesse thy state, / That Paradise has found, whych *Adam* lost” (“June” 9-10). The idealized rural landscapes of pastoral poetry have long communicated the emotional and spiritual experiences of their speakers’ deceptively complicated internal lives, a technique which Spenser dramatically emphasizes as each of the two friends reinterpret their shared surroundings according to his own respective joys or sorrows.

But there are hopeful resonances even in Colin’s typological self-identification with such biblical figures of displacement and loss. As the plight of the exiled Psalmist anticipates the eventual return to his beloved Jerusalem, when considered against the larger biblical narrative,

³⁰ Quoted from the Coverdale translation of the Psalms, as included in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, edited by Brian Cummings.

³¹ Contemporary theologian Walter Brueggemann offers a useful model of these contrasting emotional and spiritual states in his book *Praying the Psalms*. According to Brueggemann, the Psalms address three basic categories of internal experience: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation (2). An individual like Spenser’s carefree Hobbinol exists within a state of orientation, represented in spatial terms with a landscape that ministers to his needs with all the comforts of familiarity and continuity. Colin, by contrast, experiences the spiritual depths of disorientation, associated spatially in the Psalms with such stark and dismal locales as the pit of death or the land of exile. Even so, Brueggemann sees such places and the internal crises they represent as fertile ground for hopeful optimism: “Our lives always move between the pit and the wing, between the shattering of disorientation and the gift of life” (41). For Colin to experience such a radical reorientation would perhaps require a similar act of grace, which the poor, downtrodden shepherd seems to be in no condition to see or expect.

the wintry despair of *The Shepheardes Calender*'s final eclogue would appear to usher in the arrival of another spring. According to Colin's own pronouncement, however, this is a spring that he is likely never to experience, as the ever dejected poet judges that he has crossed the threshold into the winter quarter of his own life-cycle, with old age, infirmity, and death bearing down relentlessly upon him. Of course, this state of affairs could represent Colin's spiritual condition just as well as his physical age—after all, he is only about twelve months older than the brooding young man we first encountered in "January." The Colin of "December" has much in common with C.G. Jung's description in "The Stages of Life" of the individual who has passed over the middle station or "noon" of the human life-cycle, recognizing, in turn, the decline of one's physical powers and the accompanying descent toward mortality. Moreover, the model of human aging Jung puts forth in his essay accords quite well with Spenser's vision in *The Shepheardes Calender*: "But there is something sunlike within us, and to speak of the morning and spring, of the evening and autumn of life is not mere sentimental jargon" (15). Each of these seasons has its peculiar crisis, and the latter half of life can potentially devolve into meaninglessness as the individual's energies shift away from such youthful and active endeavors as the pursuit of romance or career, both of which, we will recall, poor Colin has renounced by his final appearance in "December." As a clinician, Jung suggests that such individuals may find new depths of meaning in the transcendent values of culture, spirituality, and the arts (18-19). Failing to find his own path forward, the retrospective Colin resigns himself to despair and spiritual death, although there remains the hope that Colin's winter will be a lesson to those in the yet undiminished verdure of life's summer or spring. In this capacity, Colin plays a similar role to Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*, whom the poet Statius credits for his spiritual conversion: "You did as he who goes by night and carries / the lamp behind him—he is of no help to his own

self but teaches those who follow” (*Purgatorio* 22.66-69). And the same may be said of the Hebrew bard of Psalm 137, who anticipates the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, although this promise will not be fulfilled until another generation. Likewise, Colin’s own comparison of himself to the exiled Adam implicitly predicts the arrival of Christ, the second Adam, who will lead his soul from death into the paradise of eternal life, the ultimate typological fulfillment of the exiles’ return to Jerusalem—or Eden for that matter—a state of existence in which the sunlike affinities within the human soul hang ever at their zenith.

As Colin’s melancholic star wanes, however, the voice of another potential poet-prophet arises in the dazzling and provocative “October” eclogue, in which Cuddie, a herdsman’s boy of incipient poetic abilities, discourses with the more practical, worldly Piers on the true purpose of poetry and its proper role in society. Previously, Cuddie has served in a lighter, sometimes humorous capacity as the upstart critic of the elderly Thenot in “February” and the self-assured judge of the exuberant poetry contest in “August.” His description in the argument to “October,” however, would appear to lift the young novice to unprecedented heights, as our commentator E.K. proclaims, “In Cuddie is set out the perfecte paterne of a Poete” (p. 128). Ever the pedant, perhaps even E.K. misses the important nuances of the dialogue, as many critics would rather hastily point out that Cuddie presents a rather shoddy example of the poetic ideal, especially when held up against the comparatively celebrated and accomplished Colin. But perhaps this impetuous young poet is well aware of the sublime heights that more seasoned poets may reach, even if he cannot yet fully aspire to them himself. As the course of the discussion leads an increasingly exhilarated Cuddie to reject erotic passion as the principal source of poetic inspiration, the young man intones a rhapsodic celebration of what he presumably believes to be a more potent and sublime motivation:

Who ever casts to compasse weightye prise,
And thinks to throwe out thondring words of threate:
Let powre in lavish cups and thriftie bitts of meate,
For *Bacchus* fruite is frend to *Phoebus* wise.
And when with Wine the braine begins to sweate,
The numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse. (“October” 103-8)

On first appearance, Cuddie’s enthusiastic mingling of poetic composition with orgiastic revelry in this passage might resemble the twentieth-century beat prosody of Kerouac or Ginsberg more so than the matter of the tragic and epic muses, whom the young poet courts in the succeeding lines.³² All too often, it seems, critics have interpreted Cuddie as a less capable inferior to Colin Clout, invoking as he does here the very Bacchic savagery which so notoriously precipitated the destruction of Orpheus, his own chosen paragon of vatic poesy.³³ I would like to suggest, however, that the drunkenness Cuddie celebrates is of a more dignified nature, conjuring up a possible connection to the use of intoxication and similarly intensified states of sensual rapture by patristic theologians and medieval mystics to capture the ecstasy of a heightened spiritual experience in the presence of the divine. As in certain mystical commentators on the Song of Solomon, Cuddie’s descriptions of intense sensual pleasure stand in for the extra-sensual experiences that await the contemplative pilgrim in the upper reaches of the soul’s path toward

³² Ginsberg does, however, sound rather like the young Cuddie as he explains the inspiration for *Howl*: “I suddenly turned aside in San Francisco, unemployment compensation leisure, to follow my romantic inspiration—Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath. I thought I wouldn’t write a *poem*, but just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble magic lines from my real mind—sum up my life—something I wouldn’t be able to show anybody, write for my own soul’s ear and a few other golden ears” (222-23).

³³ For Orpheus as paradigmatic of Spenser’s chosen trajectory, see Joseph Loewenstein, “Echoes Ring: Orpheus and Spenser’s Career” (287-302).

reunion with its creator (Pope 114). For similar descriptions, we need only look to such Christian Platonist authorities as Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Marsilio Ficino, Spenser's indebtedness to whom I will discuss much more fully in my upcoming discussion of *The Fowre Hymnes*. Unfortunately for Cuddie, all of these authorities recommend that such moments of transcendent vision be sustained with a degree of consistency and discipline that Cuddie finds beyond him.

And to further explore Cuddie's praise of sensual oblivion, we may also find in it an implicit endorsement of the perennial mystical path known as the *via negativa*. This longstanding monastic discipline requires that the spiritual seeker train his or her attention away from the experience of the senses to focus on the latent knowledge that lies hidden within the individual soul. We will find a useful explanation of the *via negativa* in the words of the anonymous medieval author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, himself a professed disciple of Pseudo-Dionysius: "Now, as you know, quality and quantity are not properties belonging to God or to anything spiritual. Therefore, do not try to use your interior or exterior senses to grasp the spiritual... What I am trying to say is that man knows the things of the spirit more by what they are not than by what they are" (138-39). Thus the poet who would perform the spiritual task of composing oracular verse, must first deprive himself of sense so that his "brain sweats." Cuddie's poetry already demonstrates something of this power, as Piers exclaims, "Seemeth thou dost their soule of sence bereave, / All as the shepheard, that did fetch his dame / From *Plutoes* balefull bowre withouten leave" (27-29). For later Christian Platonists like Ficino, this extra-sensual rapture of the mystical practitioner in the presence of the divine represented by the *via negativa* would harmonize with the heightened, poetic madness described by Plato in the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion*, in which Socrates makes the following appraisal of the poet's sublime gifts:

For the poets tell us, don't they, that the melodies they bring us are gathered from rills that run with honey, out of glens and gardens of the Muses, and they bring them as the bees do honey, flying like the bees? And what they say is true, for a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him. So long as he has this in his possession, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy. (534a-534b)

This passage is one of the many cases in which Plato summons the powers of myth and mystery to answer a question that appears beyond the scope of reason, and we have seen how Spenser's "October" eclogue incorporates this strategy of Plato's dialectic. Thus the truly great and awakened poet must unite the nascent, spiritual vision of Cuddie with the experienced craftsmanship of Colin to become both *vates* and *poeta*, the poet-prophet who can sing convincingly on matters of the soul, the eternal forms, and other hidden mysteries, drawing inspiration from the boundless wellsprings of the singer's own inner life.

Among the most personal of Spenser's works, as it draws upon the events of the poet's true-life courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, the *Amoretti* documents the growth and evolution of the soul, along with various disturbances and setbacks, over the course of an ultimately fulfilled and joyfully requited love affair. Such an irenic trajectory distinguishes the *Amoretti* from other popular sonnet cycles of the day, such as Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, and from the example set by Petrarch's original *Rime Sparse*, in which the conventional speaker finds he must either transcend the material bounds of carnal desire through the careful application of spiritual virtues or abandon the fruitless courtship to frustration and despair. As Anne Lake Prescott writes, "*Amoretti* is loosely Neo-Platonic: as the Idea of Beauty and Goodness, Elizabeth lifts her lover

above the mundane” (“Shorter Poems” 152). Rather than abandoning his desire for an earthly beloved in order to ascend the platonic Ladder of Love as modeled by Petrarch, Spenser negotiates an alternative path toward spiritual growth and transcendence within the institution of marriage, including as he does so all of the physical intimacy such a union suggests. Therefore, the *Epithalamion*, Spenser’s sumptuous ode written as a “lasting monument” to his own marriage, must also figure into our consideration of the transformations and growth of the lover’s soul over the whole course of the *Amoretti*. In Spenser’s hands, the lover’s yearning for absolute communion with the beloved, expressed in such figures as a lone bird calling for its absent mate, becomes a type or prefiguration of the final reunion with the divine that ultimately awaits the worthy soul in the distant prognostications of Christian mystics and Neoplatonists alike. Rather than wholly conforming to the process portrayed in the Ladder of Love and other platonic paradigms for the ascent of the soul—or, for that matter, rejecting them outright—Spenser in the *Amoretti* stops short of the requirement to wholly abandon erotic desire for an earthly lover, re-conceptualizing this spiritual ascent as a flight of two souls linked in unison through the sacrament of marriage.³⁴ As G.K. Hunter states, “Spenser’s sequence is far more concerned with the relationship and far less with the individual. The lover’s ‘I’ or ego is often completely ignored and even where mentioned is usually absorbed into a pattern which aborts self-definition” (Hunter 128). This impulse to merge completely with another soul reappears in *The Faerie Queene*, where it builds, with the inclusion of more and more souls, towards the realization of a larger cosmic unity.

³⁴This is marriage as spiritual ascent or *anagoge*. Bieman defines the word and traces its origin in the Platonic corpus: “Socrates’ dialectic proceeds by tacking into a wind that blows from beyond the limits of logic, from the locus of the gods to whom he offers oblique thanks. The key to this conceit is the word *anagoge*, employed by the Neoplatonists of the early Christian era for the work of elevating the spirit, whether by dialectic or by theurgic means” (42).

In keeping with the hopeful trajectory of the *Amoretti*, the sequence maintains a generally irenic and conciliatory quality throughout, increasingly so as the sequence progresses. Of course, the courtship still has its conflicts and frustrations, particularly in the earlier sonnets, of which Louis Martz writes, “These too, I feel, tend to disappear within a dominant tone of assurance and poise and mutual understanding that controls the series” (804-5). While the *Amoretti* contains no shortage of violent machinery from the traditional Petrarchan armory, as the speaker finds himself assailed by various darts, projectiles, and sudden ambushes, Spenser works toward bringing these tensions and their resultant traumas to a productive and harmonious resolution, ultimately strengthening the bond between the conjoined souls of the speaker and his beloved lady. Here Spenser proceeds along similar lines to Plato’s dialectic, in which initial dissonance and disagreement eventually give way to greater clarity and mutual understanding. The Spenser of the *Amoretti*, however, is not content to enclose his speaker’s inner life wholly within the comfortable pale of either Platonic or Petrarchan convention. As Donna Gibbs notes, “On the occasions in the sequence when the lover invokes Platonic notions, he often finds them wanting. They cause him inconvenience and hardship and fail to bring the satisfaction that he desires” (166). And why should it be otherwise? The sequence purports itself to be, at least in part, drawn from the sourcebook of lived reality, and it all too often proves the case in an actual love affair that the received conventions and categories for such intimately profound experiences become lame and insufficient. Rather than discard the experiential paradigms of Platonic wisdom, however, Spenser adapts them to more closely reflect the transformations of the soul in love, as witnessed in the poet’s own internal life.

While the *Amoretti* wings its way toward the destined end of a peaceful and harmonious resolution, the earlier poems of the sequence examine the conflicts and ambivalences that often

afflict a lover's soul during the initial stages of a courtship. These initial disturbances take the form of a power struggle waged across three axes, with love as a personified force, the beloved lady, and the will of the speaker himself, all vying for dominion over the lover's inner life. The figure of Love or Cupid appears as the youthful and haughty, pagan deity from the tradition of courtly, erotic lyrics masterfully represented by Petrarch and by Dante in the *Vita Nuova*. As revealed in the earlier poems of Spenser's sequence, Love has a double nature, as also witnessed in the equally fantastic and grotesque atmosphere of Spenser's House of Busirane, in which the deity appears at once as a jocund, carefree boy and a warrior god, a hybrid of Apollo and Mars, lording over the heaped corpses of his vanquished foes. And the speaker of the *Amoretti* surely counts himself among these smitten and humiliated masses as he supplicates for mercy from this "Unrighteous Lord of love" (10.1). He is helpless to do otherwise, for love has transformed the speaker's life from the superficial details of his outward expression right down to the complex of urges, emotions, and rationalizations that comprise his very soul. Thanks in large part to the Petrarchan tradition, certain aspects of this process through which Love claims his victims have become widespread enough as to appear more or less universal within Western culture. The description C.S. Lewis offers in *The Four Loves* will be particularly useful here: "Eros enters him like an invader, taking over and reorganising, one by one, the institutions of a conquered country. It may have taken over many others before it reaches the sex in him; and it will reorganise that too" (93-94). Such an uncompromising, internal revolution bears a striking resemblance to the iconoclastic tumult of the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, with all of its potential for both destruction and transformation.³⁵ For, in the *Amoretti*, the sacred,

³⁵ See David Loades's *Politics and Nation: England 1450-1660* for an extensive examination of the political motivations, spiritual justifications, and public uneasiness surrounding this tumultuous policy that transformed both the political landscape and the English imagination

cloistered chambers of the lover's soul give way to Cupid's beleaguering forces, the divine imprint is razed from the altar of the heart, and the pagan idol of the armed god of Love established in its place. These radical upheavals within the heart of the speaker would only seem to confirm Cuddie's proclamation back in the "October" eclogue: "For lordly love is such a Tyranne fell: / That where he rules, all power he doth expell" (98-99). The cruel, winged god does not hold sway alone, however, but with Elizabeth Boyle, the beloved lady, acting as his viceroy and occasional rival for power, the immediate cause of the lover's pain and the source of his eventual deliverance. Although the catalyst for the disruption of the monastic quiet of the lover's heart, it is only through the lover's self-effacing worship of the apotheosized Elizabeth Boyle that the idol of the courtly God of Love can be replaced with a more appropriate object of veneration.

In keeping with Petrarchan convention, the mistress of the *Amoretti* appears at first as an imperious, goddess-like figure whose goodness and beauty instill the speaker with mingled terror and admiration. The beloved is both the longed-for prize and the ultimate judge of worthiness, essentially holding the keys to the speaker's spiritual and emotional life or death. On a meta-contextual level, she is the intended audience for the *Amoretti* itself, whom the speaker, hoping to gain her carefully withheld favor, entreats to "read the sorrowes of my dying spright, / written with teares in harts close bleeding book" (1.7-8). And in a certain sense, we might credit the beloved lady as a co-author of the entire sequence, drawn, as it purports to be, from the poet's subjective responses to the many upward and downward turns of the couple's courtship. For her

(144-56). Even amongst the Protestant population, the Dissolution of the Monasteries had a long afterlife as a crude and aggressive violation of sacred spaces, for which the inheritors of the new wealth and even the public at large might have to atone through productive and reverential use of former monastic property.

part, the historical Elizabeth Boyle certainly played no small role in shaping these events, as evidenced in Spenser's occasional inclusion of the lady's lively repartee and the nimble ripostes she executes against her suitor's bold advances.³⁶ But from early in the sequence, their interactions are portrayed as something more than the typical back and forth banter of a newly blossoming relationship. As Spenser envisions her, the commanding, near-omniscient apparition of his beloved dictates even the closest operations of the speaker's mind and heart:

You frame my thoughts and fashion me within,
you stop my tounge, and teach my hart to speake,
you calme the storme that passion did begin,
strong through your cause, but by your vertue weak. (8.9-12)

This poem provides one of the sequence's essential expressions of the Ladder of Love, wherein the speaker finds his openly erotic impulses subverted, their energies redirected toward the pursuit of higher realizations in the spiritual contemplation of the beloved. And in the orderly paradoxes of these lines, typically Petrarchan as they may sound, we find the very qualities that will move the speaker forward in his journey toward a successful courtship. Along with the speaker, we too may begin to see the lady as a representative of greater forces at work in the universe, as her transforming influence moves from the inner reaches of the speaker's being and outward into his verbal and physical expressions, until we find that it radiates its goodness and meaning into the essential fabric of the little world bound within the *Amoretti*. As our poet writes, "Dark is the world, where your light shined never; / well is he borne, that may behold you ever" (8.13-14). Beneath the flattery and hyperbole, these lines hide the celebration of a higher,

³⁶In a brief but insightful article, Fred Blick reveals an elaborate system of puns and name play, a feature of the couple's courtship in which Elizabeth Boyle would have participated as an active collaborator or even co-author (309-15).

universal intelligence as represented in the beloved lady. In Neoplatonic terms, the beloved lady's relationship to the God of Love suggests a subtle parody of the first two hypostatic entities of the so-called Plotinian trinity, with Love as the primal source or first mover and the beloved as the medium through which the deity manifests itself into the sphere of the speaker's experience, with the private microcosm of the speaker's soul coming in to complete the picture. But we would also do well to remember that a parody must of necessity mirror its intended object, howsoever it distorts the image. As such, the speaker might very well find himself ushered into the dread presence of those same divine entities which he has so casually mocked.

The somewhat lighthearted comparisons of the beloved lady to a beneficent, cosmic intelligence, possibly identifiable with the Intellect or Angelic Mind of the Neoplatonists, just as often gives way to the existential dread and self-loathing the speaker experiences in the presence of such an otherworldly creature. In this fearsome capacity, the beloved lady of the *Amoretti* has much in common with *The Faerie Queene's* awesome Gloriana as the paragon of virtue and chiefest aim for both erotic and heroic ambition in Spenser's epic, along with such figures as the Heavenly Venus, grand genetrix of Neoplatonic cosmology, and Astraea, the classical goddess of justice who removed to the stars to become an object of aspiration for all of human society. In the singular vision of the cultural critic and historian Henry Adams, there was no greater source of energy and power known to the mind of the pre-industrial west than the figure of the Divine Virgin: "She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction—the greatest and most mysterious of all energies; all she needed was to be fecund" (Adams 384). In Adams's historical vision, the Virgin would not yield her supremacy as a divine being until the creation of the energy-generating dynamos that the author witnessed at the Paris Exposition of 1900, and one can easily imagine what Adams might have had to say for the

nuclear age. The power of the atom, when conceived in mythic terms, shares many of the attributes of the Divine Virgin, who might be described as inscrutable, otherworldly, and fickle, a sentiment which the painter Salvador Dalí conveys in *Leda Atomica*, his masterpiece of postwar, nuclear angst.³⁷ The atom, like the Divine Virgin, is an irresistible force to be both worshiped and feared. Such a realization comes close to the plight of the self-pitying speaker of the *Amoretti* as he imagines the pages of his book, analogues for himself as both body and soul, held as a quivering captive in the lady's delicate hands, "which hold my life in their dead doing might" (1.2). With this invocatory first poem, Spenser acknowledges Elizabeth Boyle as the goddess-like co-creator of the imaginative universe bounded by the collected sonnets of the *Amoretti*. Should the offering of these verses displease her, the Divine Lady might cast them into the fire or otherwise shame them into the netherworld of obscurity with a censoring remark, just as easily as Donne's mistress might crush the flea that had come to envelop a microcosm of meaning by the poet's invention.

If the lady has her despotic qualities, however, the speaker proves himself little better, as he repeatedly fantasizes about reversing the power imbalance by debasing the lady and himself taking up the mantle of a tyrannical oppressor. And he admits as much in his desperate petition to the God of Love: "But her proud hart doe thou a little shake / and that high look, with which she doth comptroll / all this worlds pride bow to a baser make" (10.9-11). The speaker prepares himself for a violent conquest throughout the first half of the sequence, becoming both hunter and soldier in the image of the armed god of Love, whose tyrannical service he cannot resist. The

³⁷ On Dalí's creation of a personal mythos, blending veneration of the Divine Virgin with the emerging threat of nuclear annihilation, see Gaillemín (116-24). In his words, "the artist tried, like a nuclear age Leonardo da Vinci to combine science and mysticism, and to inspire religious fervor by bringing to life the apocalyptic spectre born on Bikini Atoll (117).

fear of captivity and powerlessness drives the troubled lover to ever-increasing paranoia as “loves soft bands” in the first sonnet (1.3) become the “cruel bands” of *Amoretti* 12 (12.12). These images of captivity suggest a deep and unresolved ambivalence towards the marriage bond, which seems to present both speaker and beloved with an unavoidable power disparity. While the lover fears his soul’s imprisonment to sensual desires, a jail to which the beloved holds the keys, the lady rightly fears for her own safety and virtue against the physical and institutional power of the man who courts her. Yet, as the sequence continues, it becomes all too clear that the speaker’s aggressively masculine attempts to match the lady’s spiritual might with a predatory power of his own will only place him on the path to greater humiliation and the ultimate frustration experienced by other, less fortunate speakers in the sonnet tradition, such as Sidney’s *Astrophil* or the rest of his countless and pitiable company.

The lady’s surrender on her own terms in *Amoretti* 67 brings the conflict to an armistice, allowing the two to continue on more benevolent terms than the dynamic of conqueror and conquered, predator and prey. Finally the two can proceed toward a mutual realization of the marriage bond which avoids the guilt and victimization that could place either of the couple’s emotional well being, or even their very souls, in jeopardy. Appearing in this poem as a helpless deer, ever in flight from the speaker’s exhausted huntsman, the beloved suddenly softens her demeanor toward the speaker, who with the ribbon of “her owne goodwill hir fyrmely tyde” (67.12). For the speaker, the event presents itself as something of a mystery, as he remarks, “Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld, / so goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld” (67.13-14). This dramatic discontinuity between the speaker’s lust-filled, erotic attempts at domination and the lady’s surrender of her own serene good will essentially nullifies the preceding conflict and ushers their courtship into a new age of deepened empathy and mutual

communication, the supple ribbon now replacing the harsher “bands” as a symbol of wedlock. Spenser’s symbolic language in this section of the sequence echoes the sentiment of the Anglican marriage rite, which featured “emotional and companionate language as central to the ceremony” (Cummings 711). These familiar significations Spenser combines with the transcendent spiritual achievements of friendship in the Neoplatonic tradition, such that, much like Book IV’s Cambina and other figures of concord in *The Faerie Queene*, Elizabeth Boyle stills the troubled waters of the speaker’s soul and replenishes it with inner strengths of her own.³⁸ With Spenser’s assurances, the sonnets themselves become as permanent a symbol of the couple’s deeply metaphysical bond as any wedding ring: “but you shall live by fame: / my verse your vertues rare shall eternize” (75.10-11).

If Elizabeth Boyle is sometimes a dread deity in the *Amoretti*, she is also a harbinger of divine mercy, condescending to the speaker’s level of existence much like Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* meeting the cosmic pilgrim in the Earthly Paradise in order to join his soul in its upward flight. The eyes that wound with their piercing, judgmental glare can also mitigate the pain inflicted on the speaker, even of attacks directed at him by the Lord of Love himself: “when suddenly with twinkle of her eye / the Damzell broke his misintended dart” (16.11-12). She plays the rebel within Cupid’s court and will only requite the speaker’s advances if she can do so with her freedom intact and her spirit undiminished. With the betrothal represented in *Amoretti* 67, the sequence shifts from an ongoing power struggle to a state of balance in which each party consents to be held within the other’s control, much to the surprise of the speaker, whose wishes to play the tyrant are remitted by the lady’s willful submission. This moment represents a turning

³⁸ This all accords with the definition of marriage in “An Homilie of the State of Matrimony”: “It is instituted by God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual frendly felowship, to bryng forth fruite, and to avoyde fornication” (253).

point for the couple, after which the speaker's upward striving toward a seemingly unattainable ideal, as exemplified in the earlier sonnets, becomes a lateral flight towards a beloved who deigns to coexist with the speaker on his own lowly level. This dynamic is represented quite strikingly as the speaker's heart, seat of the emotional soul in the Neoplatonic tradition, bursts dramatically from its owner's chest: "My hart, whom none with servile bands can tye, / but the fayre tresses of your golden hayre, / breaking his prison forth to you doth fly" (73.2-4). The two are thenceforth bound together spiritually and emotionally in a manner resembling the lovers in Plato's *Phaedrus*, who pursue a tandem flight in winged chariots towards their mutual goal of ultimate, spiritual transcendence. Of course, Plato's lovers in the dialogue must strive toward this long desired end over the course of repeated lifetimes, separated by unnumbered deaths and eventually reuniting to begin the cycle anew. The achievement shines all the more gloriously against the unrelenting gloom of the final sonnet in *Astrophil and Stella*: "But as soon as thought of thee breeds my delight, / And my young soul flutters to thee, his nest, / Most rude Despair, my daily unbidden guest, / Clips straight my wings..." (108.5-8). In the end, poor Astrophil has gone nowhere, even if that is precisely where he would like to stay. All of this is not to ignore the unmistakable melancholy that lingers over the end of Spenser's sequence, as the couple endure an indeterminate period of separation before their union can be sealed. But now, at least, the speaker suffers with a degree of hope.

The journey of the lover in the *Amoretti* moves through its own cycles of death and rebirth, which force the speaker to kill off whatever is mortal and venial within himself in order to bring forth latent spiritual powers that had lain dormant within his being as bulbs beneath the earth, waiting for the light and warmth of spring. One such moment comes with the lady's absence at the end of the sequence, leading to a period of spiritual contemplation and the

temporary death of the speaker's physical desire. Spenser responds to this somber interim with one of the most endearing images of the *Amoretti*, as the speaker pines for the fulfillment of the promised day:

Lyke as the Culver on the bared bough,
Sits mourning for the absence of her mate:
and in her songs sends many a wishfull vow,
for his returne that seemes to linger late..." (89.1-4)

The poem demands comparison with "Amoretti 76," which depicts the poet's private thoughts as tiny, winged creatures, coming to lodge within the warmth and safety of the lady's breast. But this masculine fantasy of nestling "twixt her paps like early fruit in may" is chastened and subverted by the winged metaphor in "Amoretti 89." In representing himself as one dove from a mated pair, Spenser chooses to identify with the role of the female bird, perhaps as a gesture toward a longstanding tradition in Western spiritual thought in which the soul was often associated with the female gender, especially in the context of mystical experience.³⁹ A significant example of this inverted gender dynamic appears in *The Dark Night of the Soul* by the 16th century Catholic saint, John of the Cross, who depicts the extra-sensual raptures of the mystical experience as a clandestine tryst between the feminine soul and a bold and masculine, romantic lover. The erotic language of *The Dark Night's* feminine speaker reveals a soul

³⁹ As Robert Reid notes in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, "The soul is regularly feminine but may, as a quasi-divine soul of the world, be represented as androgynous, as are Venus (iv x 40-1) and Nature (vii vii 5)" (665). And Bieman ties the problem of the soul's gender in with early attempts to integrate the Neoplatonic teachings on the soul with the Judeo-Christian scriptures: "Under such paradigms, the fall in Eden acquired overtones which led, in Philo as in most early Christian writers, to an ascetic repudiation of the physical (whether *physis* of the universe or of the individual) in favour of the spiritual, and to a concomitant denigration of all that was symbolically female" (70). Similarly, the beloved of the *Amoretti* becomes the motivating force that in-*forms* the lower, cruder elements of the speaker's mind and body.

enthralled with the spiritual mysteries of the western apophatic tradition: “I abandoned and forgot myself, / laying my face on my Beloved; / all things ceased; I went out from myself...” (541). The speaker has also assumed a position like that of the Shulamite bride in the Song of Solomon, the most celebrated epithalamium in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as she awaits the return of her royal lover, often identified as Christ in his capacity as bridegroom of the church, according to a traditional allegorical reading of the text.

While this eroticized language of mystical, spiritual communion, would typically suggest the repudiation of bodily desires for the sake of a spiritual fulfillment, they blend in the *Amoretti* with certain eucharistic connotations, in which the enjoyment of the beloved becomes inescapably intertwined with the physical sensation of eating. In a sequence where the beloved lady takes the role and features of a goddess, these associations become nearly incarnational, suggesting the doctrine of transubstantiation as the speaker “feeds” on certain irresistible aspects of her presence. The swooning lover describes all of this with apparent relish:

Whylest rapt with ioy resembling heavenly madnes,
my soule was ravisht quite as in a traunce:
and feeling thence no more her sorowes sadness,
fed on the fulness of that chearfull glaunce.
More sweet than Nectar or Ambrosiall meat
seemd every bit, which thenceforth I did eat. (39.9-14)

Here the very appetites and desires that defined the early stages of the speaker’s infatuation have been sublimated within a Christian Platonist paradigm that holds even romantic love, at least once sufficiently purified, as a source of transcendental rapture, switching out the language of orgiastic materiality for the sacramental experience of the divine. Language such as “rapt with

joy” and “my soul was ravisht” may sound rather suspect to the modern ear, and the imagery is precisely as sexually explicit and forceful as it sounds. The “heavenly madness” of the preceding lines also bears a compelling likeness to the dithyrambic fury praised by Cuddy in the “October” eclogue, who employed the imagery of drunkenness to capture the altered mental state accessed by the inspired poet. However, the violence of the speaker’s passions in *Amoretti* 39, while echoing the intensified language of spiritual ecstasy, still suggests the possessiveness and cruelty with which the lover pursues the object of his desire at this earlier moment within the sequence. He dines on it not with the higher spiritual faculties but with the lower, appetitive regions of the soul that are bound directly with the body’s animal processes. The speaker now discovers this transported state in the very thought of his beloved, whose real presence only seems to deepen for him during their physical separation: “All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me, / and all theyr shewes but shadowes saving she” (83.9-14). Whereas Plotinus and much of the Neoplatonist tradition would insist upon a withdrawn contemplation of the divine light within the seeker’s own soul, the *Amoretti* finds the same level of self-realization as mirrored and perfected in the soul of another.

The sequence leaves the speaker, as it were, poised between the realm of merely material existence and a higher life among the luminous forms, of which he has come to recognize the mistress as an earthly representative. And toward the end of the *Amoretti*, we hear the results of Spenser’s modified Ladder of Love on the speaker in yet more striking terms as he consoles himself in the absence of his beloved:

Of which beholding th’Idaea playne,
through contemplation of my purest part,
with light thereof I doe my selfe sustayne

and thereon feed my love-affamisht hart. (88.9-12)

The ambiguity of these lines maintains a beautiful balance around the phrase “my purest part,” which might refer to either the highest and purest faculties within the speaker’s soul or yet that portion within it that has become most closely identified with the spiritual essence of the beloved lady. As the schema of the Ladder of Love would require, the purified image of the lady has been imprinted so completely in the subtler regions of the speaker’s mind that she exists within him in a significant way. If nothing else, I hope it is at least clear by this point that the two are inseparable, despite the momentary, physical absence in which the couple are left at the end of the sequence. However, the speaker still struggles in his solitude, confessing, “I starve my body and my eyes do blynd” (88.14). Clearly, the abstracted and purified depiction of the lady within the speaker’s mind is insufficient in and of itself to completely fulfill his spiritual nor even his physical longing toward the absent beloved. As revealed in the *Epithalamion*, physical desire will return in due season, not as an unwelcome intruder into the soul’s most sacred spaces, but to claim its honored position within the sacramental context of wedded love, a means of grace by which the natural processes of desire and procreation can rightfully flourish.

Spenser’s celebratory wedding hymn, the *Epithalamion*, relieves the pain of separation which overshadowed the final poems of the *Amoretti*, unfolding the events of Spenser’s own wedding day in a detailed pageant of preparations, rituals, and festivities. Ultimately, the poem fulfills the journey of the soul initiated in the *Amoretti*, which models the spiritual progression of the rightly directed lover through the twists and turns of courtship, up until the eve of the long anticipated union. Across its modest length, the *Epithalamion* underpins its descriptions of the wedding ceremony and the consummation of the wedding night with echoes and shadings of the soul’s longed for mystical communion with the divine. Like the passionately inspired Cuddie of

The Shepheardes Calender, Spenser invokes the example of the classical tradition's prophetic poet par excellence: "So Orpheus did for his owne bride, / So I unto my selfe alone will sing" (16-17). And in so doing, he identifies the poem with the visionary mysticism which the myth and cult of Orpheus represented in the late classical tradition, as well as in the interpretations of many Renaissance commentators.⁴⁰ As Richard Neuse writes, "The poem is born of a sense of privation, and the Orpheus simile indicates what is to be its major task: to invoke, by the magic of its music, the presence of the bride. And here we see another way in which the wedding song brings to fulfilment [sic] what has been a 'failure' in the sonnet sequence" (Neuse 536). So Spenser goes about framing the little cosmos of his wedding day to the finest degree of ritual and meticulously ordered time.

Beyond the public, allegorical pageantry of the wedding ceremony, Spenser readily invests deeper, spiritual meanings into even the poem's more delicate, private moments. G.K. Hunter praises the poem for its comprehension of "the sense of a sacramental occasion, representative of human destiny, at once this wedding and all weddings, and not only all weddings but all sanctifications of fertility" (126-7). Some of these spiritual depths are already present in the dramatic pageantry of the Anglican marriage ritual. But away from the jubilation and formal rite, Spenser allows his readers to witness a deeper level of communion, attended by "stil Silence," "sacred peace," and "tymely sleep" (353-55).⁴¹ Here the poem swells into a gorgeous strain of peaceful quietude. Even in these most intimate moments, however, Spenser

⁴⁰ See Edgar Wind's *Pagan Myths in the Renaissance* (53-80). See also Elizabethan Bieman, *Plato Baptized* (147-51).

⁴¹ Kathleen Williams comments on Spenser's marital symbolism in *The Faerie Queene*, which naturally shares metaphorical language with his *Epithalamion*: "In the symbolic atmosphere of Elizabethan literature human marriage stands for itself, but for more besides," including associations with cosmic myths of concord from the Neoplatonists and the peaceful resolution of opposites as modeled in the disparate forces within the individual human being (89-90).

imagines the careful ministrations of benevolent cosmic forces. In one example, the lover marshals the tiny winged Cupids (or Amoretti) that attend closely upon the couple in their wedding chamber:

The whiles an hundred little winged loves,
Like divers feathered doves,
Shall fly and flutter round about your bed,
And in the secret darke, that none reproveth,
Their pretie stealthes shal worke, and snares shal spread
To filch away sweet snatches of delight,
Conceald through covert night. (360-63)

Once more, Spenser's language in these lines suggests the mystical doctrine of the *via negativa*, for the darkness and night in the passage adumbrate the soul's commingling with its creator in its own innermost reaches, beyond the deluding influences of the sensible realm. This spiritual union represents intimacy at its utmost fulfillment of the urge to intimacy, although it remains "guiltless" not only through the natural propriety Spenser associates with the spiritual and physical coupling of the marriage bond but through its typological shadowing of that final state of unity toward which the poet's moral and spiritual universe gradually, yet inevitably, moves. Spenser's suggests these connotations by asking the blessings of various pagan deities: "And thou glad Genius, in whose gentle hand, / The bridale bowre and genial bed remaine, / Without blemish or staine..." (398-400). In addition to the symbolism borrowed from pagan and Neoplatonic writers, Spenser shadows the allegories surrounding marriage in the tradition of Christian mysticism. This interpretation has one of its peaks in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, who interpreted the Song of Solomon as a paean of rapturous love for the divine, but

the notion that every Christian marriage is to some extent allegorical made it into a number of popular sources as well.⁴²

Few would dispute that *The Fowre Hymnes* are the most explicitly Neoplatonist of Spenser's poems. As extensive philosophical reflections on love and beauty, *The Fowre Hymnes* divide both these ideals into two categories, the earthly and the heavenly, setting up a progression across the four poems that roughly approximates the spiritual ascent as conventionally figured in the Neoplatonic Ladder of Love. However, much of the critical conversation surrounding *The Fowre Hymnes* has centered on the nature of Spenser's "retractation" of the first two poems, as stated in the letter to the two "right honorable and most vertuous Ladies," which stands imposingly at the beginning of the volume, and what this statement means for the interpretation of *The Fowre Hymnes* as a more or less unified work. But first, we will take the poet at his own words, as he proceeds with great care in making the following case: "Having in the greener times of my youth, composed these former two Hymnes in the praise of Love and beautie, and finding that the same too much pleased those of like age and disposition, which being too vehemently carried with that kind of affection, do rather sucke

⁴²I can think of no better encapsulation of this interpretive tradition than the introductory gloss in the 1560 Geneva Bible: "In this Song, Salomon by moste swete and comfortable allegories and parables describeth the perfite love of Jesus Christ, the true Salomon and King of peace, and the faithful soule of his Church, which he hath sanctified and appointed to be his spouse, holy, chaste and without reprehension. So that here is declared the singular love of the bridegrome toward the bride, and his great and excellent benefits wherewith he doeth enriche her of his pure bountie and grace without anie of her deservings. Also the earnest affection of the Church which is inflamed with the love of Christ desiring to be more and more joynd to him in love, and not to be forsaken for anie spot or blemish that is in her (280)." In such a form would this mystical doctrine, favored by such formidably Catholic Doctors of the Church as Bernard of Clairvaux and John of the Cross, have been readily available to the vigilantly Protestant Spenser, enthusiastically mingling with the poet's elevation of marriage, Neoplatonist tendencies, and fiercely millenarian interpretation of the Book of Revelation to render the meeting of souls in the marriage ritual an event of enduring, cosmic significance.

out poyson to their strong passion, then hony to their honest delight, I was moved by the one of you two most excellent ladies to call in the same” (1-7). So Spenser carefully places himself at a mature distance from the content of the earlier set of poems, whose immature and “earthly” conceptions of love and beauty are placed in subordination to the more mature and morally conventional content of the “heavenly” pair. Spenser, however, was no stranger to such controversies, as readers of *The Faerie Queene* might recall a similar gesture in the Proem to Book IV, in which Spenser addresses the “rugged forehead” of a certain high-ranking detractor (P.1.1). In that instance, at least, Spenser provides sufficient reason for the reader to doubt the sincerity of his apology.⁴³ By comparison, Spenser’s address to the two ladies is painstakingly diplomatic, a learned exercise in courtly discourse.

Does the second set of hymns represent a progression beyond the first set, or is it intended as an outright refutation and replacement? As Spenser continues, “I resolved at least to amend, and by way of retractation to reforme them, making in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall” (8-11). Or still yet, do the two sets of hymns represent a communication between complementary visions, despite Spenser’s apparent attempt to disclaim the overtly erotic and unashamedly pagan atmosphere of the first pair of poems? Robert Ellrodt goes against the general grain of the old *Variorum* critics in arguing for a very late dating of the first two poems, in keeping with his insistence that Spenser’s knowledge of Renaissance Neoplatonism during his composition of *The Faerie*

⁴³In the true spirit of a poet, Spenser undercuts his own apology with an attack on his dour accuser’s credentials to read him correctly:

Such ones ill iudge of love, that cannot love,
Ne in their frosen hearts feele kindly flame:
For thy they ought not thing unknowne reprove,
Ne naturall affection faultlesse blame,
For fault of few that have abusd the same. (IV.P.2.1-5)

Queene was superficial at best and somewhat sloppily executed, a faint shadow to the poet's sophisticated theorizing in the *Fowre Hymnes*.⁴⁴ However, Kenneth Borris skillfully dispatches this argument by emphasizing Spenser's deference to the two noble ladies, who were presumably well aware of the content and timing of the earlier poems, as witnesses to his retraction, and demonstrating that Spenser's allegedly mistaken references to Platonic knowledge in *The Faerie Queene* may well suggest depths and shades of allegorical meaning of which the earlier Ellrodt was simply unaware at the time of his writing.⁴⁵ Whether the first two poems represent an authentic work by the younger Spenser, an extensive revision of such an earlier composition, or a later, self-conscious foray into a lower erotic mode, Spenser's prefatory letter places the two pairings at once into contrast and communication, suggesting a greater unity which holds the entire set together over and against their supposed disjunction. As with the other shorter poems and my forthcoming reading of *The Faerie Queene*, I will hold the human soul as the chief unifying principle in my examination of the *Fowre Hymnes*. Each of the poems meditates upon love as a movement of the soul, directed toward or prompted by a particular object. As we shall soon discover, however, the nature of the object and the origin of the lover's impulse towards it makes all the difference in the world.

The initiatory poem in the sequence, "An Hymne in Honour of Love" establishes the tone for the two earthly hymns as neo-pagan and enthusiastically erotic. As Enid Welsford notes, "In employing the seven-lined stanza known as rhyme-royal, Spenser was following the example of

⁴⁴ Ellrodt cites two instances in which Spenser references the character Critias from Plato's dialogues when the context suggests that characters from the *Phaedo* or the *Phaedrus* would have been more appropriate. For Ellrodt, the discrepancy is enough to suggest the poet's ignorance of these dialogues and, by extension, most of the Platonic corpus, which Spenser has not attempted to reference or even bothered to misremember (96n).

⁴⁵ See Borris's article in the Neoplatonism volume of *Spenser Studies*: "Reassessing Ellrodt: Critias and the *Fowre Hymnes* in *The Faerie Queene*" (45-80).

Chaucer; and, in the first two hymns, the poet's tongue does at times seem to be that of the troubadour rather than that of the Neo-Platonic philosopher" (38). Admittedly, the Petrarchan machinery of the two earthly hymns harmonizes quite awkwardly at times with the rarefied abstractions the poet draws from the Neoplatonic cosmologies of Plotinus and Ficino. As I have sought to demonstrate in the preceding interpretations of the *Amoretti*, however, Spenser has elsewhere placed these two modes into conflict and communication, with the higher Neoplatonic doctrines offering an implicit critique of the more vulgar eroticism characteristic of the popular Petrarchanism of his day. But nowhere else in his poetic corpus does Spenser use such precise, philosophical language as he does in the densely allusive stanzas of the *Fowre Hymnes*. For our purposes, we could do little better than to begin with the following richly suggestive lines from "An Hymne in Honour of Love," in which the poet addresses the mysterious nature of the human soul: "But man, that breathes a more immortall mynd, / Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie, / Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie" (103-5). From the context of these lines, Spenser makes it clear that this "immortall mynd" within humanity is but a localized remnant of the divine power that has pervaded the universe from the moment of creation and still holds it together through the "secret sparks of his infused fyre" (97). This universal, divine force corresponds to the World Soul, the third hypostasis in the Plotinian cosmological system, which directly interacts with the world of matter and ever shines out from beneath the sullen mesh of the material creation, invisible to all but the sufficiently purified eye. And going further, we find a defense of physical desire and the natural processes of procreation that draws heavily on the poet's knowledge of Neoplatonic cosmology:

For having yet in his deducted spright,
Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre,

He is enlumind with that goodly light,
Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre:
Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre
That seemes on earth most heavenly, to embrace,
That same is Beautie, borne of heavenly race. (HL 106-12)

These lines suggest the human embodiment of the transcendent values of goodness and beauty, which impel mortal beings toward the enjoyment of their source in “that heavenly fyre.” But there are resemblances here as well to Lucretius’s celebration of love as a cosmic creative force, manifested in the physical world as the irresistible impulse toward human sexual desire. For comparison, we might refer to the Lucretian hymn in *The Faerie Queene*’s Temple of Venus episode: “So all things else, that nourish vitall blood, / Soone as with fury thou doest them inspire, / In generation seeke to quench their inward fire” (IV.x.46.7-9). Despite the poem’s Neoplatonic echoes, such as the acknowledgment of beauty’s divine lineage, the whole passage comes across as more mechanistic than transcendent. This is but one of many cases in the earthly and allegedly less mature set of poems in which the speaker’s use of Neoplatonic ideals and other transcendent values appears suspect, strangely less passionate and bodily than the heavenly poems intended to temper any supposed erotic indiscretions of this earlier sequence.

For all the heroic zeal and visionary furor of the poem’s climax, “An Hymne in Honour of Love” ultimately offers the devoted lover little consolation beyond the fleeting enjoyment of fulfilled physical desire, despite its boasts to offer entrance to a paradise of never-ending enjoyment. Still, the fleeting pleasure of sexual release which both directs and delimits this poem’s highest aspirations leads to sensual experiences that closely resemble the ecstasies of mystical contemplation. This is all in keeping with the exaggerated mode of the courtly

“Religion of Love.”⁴⁶ By the poem’s end, the cult of Cupid even begins to resemble a legitimate path toward spiritual purification according to the worldly, Petrarchan perspective of the poem’s speaker, as we behold the blissful sacrilege of such lines as these: “So thou thy folke, through paines of Purgatorie, / Dost beare unto thy blisse, and heavens glorie” (HL 278-9). Of course, these “paines of Purgatorie” are little more than the exaggerated sufferings of a self-pitying, romantic lover, caught up in the vicissitudes of a perilous courtship. As such, this mock Purgatory of the Religion of Love does not penetrate to the soul with its corrosive fires, perhaps even placing it in existential peril, at least from the more sober perspective of the heavenly hymns, rather than improving it in any significant way. However, we have little reason to believe the poet himself upholds these cavalier attitudes as a legitimate and responsible position considering how close the Petrarchan speaker’s absurdly grandiose professions come to outright self-parody. We have all the more reason for suspicion if we approach these claims from the informed vantage of Spenser’s other expressions on the subject.

Moving on to the next poem, “An Hymne in Honour of Beautie,” we find the lover’s erotic impulses elevated to a higher, aesthetic strain, although they still fail to transcend the desire for the possession of the beloved as an earthly object. As the enamored speaker addresses the unidentified beloved lady in “An Hymne in Honour of Beauty,” the poet describes her as a divine being, descended from a higher sphere: “But mindfull still of your first countries sight, / Doe still preserve your first informed grace, / Whose shadow yet shynes in your beauteous face”

⁴⁶For a fuller account of “the Religion of Love” and other major characteristics of the courtly love phenomenon, see C.S. Lewis’s description in *The Allegory of Love* (1-43). I am more or less in agreement with Lewis’s assessment that courtly love appears throughout *The Faerie Queene* as a threatening presence, typically personified in Cupid, the armed and mocking God of Love. This observation is echoed and more extensively developed by Thomas Roche in *The Kindly Flame*.

(166-68). As noted above, similar echoes of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists appear throughout the *Amoretti*, although they are not laid out as systematically and extensively as in *The Fowre Hymnes*, with a particular emphasis on the first two poems. I would argue that this apparent development in the complexity of Spenser's Neoplatonic thought represents a deliberate move into an overtly philosophical mode as would presumably have been Virgil's intention if the poet had survived to accomplish it after the completion of *The Aeneid*. Conspicuously missing in these erotic hymns is the dynamic personality of the beloved lady which had bestowed such charm and vivacity upon certain of her more memorable appearances in the *Amoretti*, a possible indication that these first two hymns were indeed composed some time before the poet's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle. Like the *Amoretti*, however, "An Hymne in Honour of Beauty" elevates the lady into a figure of cultish devotion: "That may recure my hearts long pynning grieffe, / And shew what wondrous powre your beauty hath, / That can restore a damned wight from death" (HB 285-87). As things stand, the speaker has prepared himself for either a complete lapse into idolatry or for a deeper receptivity to redemptive grace. The difference may well depend on whether or not the reader continues the journey into the next set of poems.

In the second set of hymns, the rarefied abstractions of Neoplatonic theories of love are transmuted into the familiar idioms of Christian theology, although many of their essential principles remain the same. Essentially, the two pairs of hymns set out for the same goal upon different paths. Although the poet, in a typically Spenserian maneuver, has publicly distanced himself from the earlier poems in his "retractation," he appears to be able and willing to entertain both of these world conceptions within his capacious mind, ever true to the spirit of Ficinian syncretism. That is not to say, of course, that he places the two dispensations on completely equal footing, as the heavenly hymns make several direct efforts to dismantle and refute the

visions of love espoused in the earlier poems. The second sequence opens with a note of regret, echoing the sentiments of the poet's retractation:

Many lewd layes (ah woe is me the more)
In praise of that mad fit, which fooles call love,
I have in th'heat of youth made heretofore,
That in light wits did loose affection move. (HHL 8-11)

But while the heavenly hymns supplant their earthly counterparts, they also provide a lens for rereading the earlier poems from the sanctifying perspective of divine grace. The "mad fit" of erotic love adumbrates the visionary ecstasy of a spiritual practitioner in the mystical embrace of the divine presence, a phenomenon which the "light wits" of uninitiated and uncharitable readers might very well misinterpret in the literal terms of a sexually explicit experience. The crucial turning point has its advent in "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" with Spenser's meditations on the foundational Christian mystery of the incarnation, which the Patristic theologians invoked to resolve the conflicting conceptions of soul and body inherited from the Greek and Hebrew traditions. The treatise *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius stands as one of the central authorities in this tradition. In Athanasius's explanation, the Incarnation of Christ becomes a solution for the indelible corruption which has manifested within the body as a result of humanity's spiritual fall: "Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the image of God" (33). Likewise, Spenser imagines humanity's collective salvation through a bond of love with the uncorrupted person of Christ:

O huge and most unspeakable impression

Of loves deepe wound, that pierst the piteous hart
Of that deare Lord with so entyre affection,
And sharply launching every inner part,
Dolours of death into his soule did dart;
Doing him die, that never it deserved,
To free his foes, that from his heast had swerved. (HHL 155-61)

Here, Spenser transcends the love of his earlier hymns through his depiction of Christ as the archetypal cosmic lover, drawing all of his beloved into his purifying and redeeming presence, as they contemplate the perfected union of body and soul represented in his person.

In “An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie,” the fourth and final poem of the sequence, Spenser leads his reader to the highest aspirations of divine contemplation. Once again, the poet urges the reader to adopt the faculties of mind and spirit suitable for the rarefied atmosphere of this final composition: “Mount up aloft through heavenly contemplation, / From this darke world, whose dampes the soule do blynd” (HHB 136-37). Here, the beloved takes the form of a transcendent, heavenly maiden, against whom the earthly, Petrarchan mistress of the earlier hymns is but a dim and corrupted shadow. Much like the Virgin Queen of Spenser’s courtly devotion, this heavenly beloved appears all the more worthy of the lover’s heightened adoration insomuch as she remains permanently unattainable, ushering the contemplative speaker ever closer to her presence while never surrendering her person entirely. As with many a lesser, earthly beloved, the best boon to which the speaker can reasonably aspire is an opportunity to gaze fully into the features of the lady’s celebrated face:

Let Angels which her goodly face behold
And see at will, her soveraigne praises sing,

And those most sacred mysteries unfold,
Of that fair love of mightie heavens king. (HHB 232-35)

Here the lady Sapience stands as a heavenly intercessor between the enamored speaker and the rapturous splendor of the Divine Presence. Unattainable to some degree in her distance and purity, she is an apotheosis of the conventional courtly beloved. Although she transports the lover to the ethereal heights of spiritual experience, she does not herself condescend to his own level of embodied, earthly existence as does the goddess-like beloved of the *Amoretti*. As such, the “Hymn to Heavenly Beauty” appears somewhat at odds with the incarnational vision of the “Hymn to Heavenly Love,” which saw the human body elevated in the life of Christ. Through the combined effect of these two poems, however, Spenser introduces his readers to the paradoxical language of mystical theology, in which embodied and transcendent expressions of divinity both complement and glorify one another. The result is an elevation of the human body as a vessel for the divine essence within the soul in such a way that even the earthly desires of the first two poems become purified in retrospect.⁴⁷

As this final poem swells to the beatific vision of its climax, Spenser assures the reader of the permanence of this rapturous achievement, which will become a source of lasting certitude within an ever-shifting landscape of self-doubt and false appearances. Thus the final lines arrive with a great sense of promise: “With whose sweete pleasures being so possesst, / Thy straying thoughts henceforth for ever rest” (HHB 300-301). Apparently, the idea of rest had a deeply

⁴⁷ A similar negotiation between the spiritual and physical appears in the mystical intuition of the Syrian in William Butler Yeats’s “The Resurrection.” Familiar with the mystery cults of the Levant, the Syrian is the only onlooker who can comprehend that the risen Christ exists as both body and spirit. Finally realizing what the Syrian has known by instinct, the Greek laments, “O Athens, Alexandria, Rome, something has come to destroy you. The heart of a phantom is beating” (223).

spiritual appeal for the late career Spenser, as these lines echo the promise of an eternal sabbath for which the weary poet cries in the final lines of *The Faerie Queene* (7.8.2.7-9). Reading this passage with a careful eye on *The Faerie Queene*, however, we must call to mind the example of Redcrosse, whose private discipline of contemplation, practiced during his extended convalescence at the House of Holinesse, is followed by the pursuit of righteous action in the public sphere. If Redcrosse, Spenser's patron of Holinesse, inhabits the world of the second two hymns during the events of Book I's final three cantos, we must consider whether it is appropriate for him to reenter the lower world of the first two hymns, which Spenser has publicly renounced, to fight alongside the other patron knights of Gloriana's court, none of whom aspire to the transcendent spiritual achievements which led Redcrosse to scale the heights of the Mount of Contemplation.⁴⁸ Like Redcrosse, we as readers are invited to walk back through the first two hymns so that we may read them afresh through the purified sensitivities of heavenly discernment, as cultivated through an attentive and spiritually attuned reading of the heavenly hymns. This process by which the secular is rendered sacred will provide crucial insight as we move on to examine Spenser's "Legend of Holinesse" in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* as a necessary prelude and preparation for the books that follow, along with the comparatively secular virtues they essay to figure forth and embody. Even after Redcrosse's ultimate redemption has been secured, along with the right to his title as the Patron of Holinesse, his further progress in sanctification will depend on his perfection in the other virtues, following a humanistic program from private to public disciplines. In keeping with Spenser's Protestant moral sensibilities, however, Holinesse rightfully opens the narrow gate to all the other virtues,

⁴⁸ These opposed worlds of earthly and heavenly experience are explained in thorough detail by A.S.P. Woodhouse in "Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*," about which I will have much more to say in the following chapters.

as even the most heroic souls in conception of the universe will make only impotent and halting progress in the virtues in the absence of the divine grace sufficient to overcome their own state of human depravity, the dismal results of original sin. To arrange his virtues otherwise would have exposed the poet to many of the same charges of heresy and Pelagianism that certain orthodox and conservative detractors had once leveled against Pico, Ficino, and various other Christian Platonist predecessors. Spenser's positioning of Holinesse at the vanguard of the other virtues reveals his careful navigation of such longstanding ideological controversies as to the effects of original sin and the necessity of divine grace.

And lastly we turn to "Muipotmos," a short epic or epyllion which has been all too seldom discussed, considering its philosophical insight, not to mention its brilliant colors and ebullient charm. Beneath this simple story of a naive butterfly prince exploring his father's kingdom and running afoul of an ancient blood feud with the lineage of the spider, the poet suggests a moral allegory regarding the care and protection of the soul as it faces an array of sensual temptations during its dangerous passage through the physical world. The garden presents itself on initial prospect as an edenic *locus amoenus*, but much like the Bower of Bliss in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* or like Eden itself for that matter, all here is not in perfect order. Before the spider has so much as blotted the canvas of this landscape with its creeping presence, we may discern the latent causes of the butterfly's destruction lurking beneath the beautiful surfaces and intoxicating sensations of the garden:

To the gay gardins his unstaide desire
Him wholly caried, to refresh his sprights:
There lavish Nature in her best attire,
Powres forth sweete odors, and alluring sights;

And Arte with her contending, doth aspire
T'excell the naturall, with made delights:
And all that faire or pleasant may be found,
In riotous excess doth there abound. (161-68)

Herein arises the classic Spenserian dilemma of the interplay of art, nature, and the falsely seeming nature of artificiality. The soul which might rightly follow the promptings of the senses to an appreciation of beauty in a higher form, could just as well fall into the deadly entanglements of sensual stimulation by lower forms of beauty or by hollow displays that potentially conceal a corrupted and unsound core beneath an appealing surface. Before the spider has even appeared, we see that the soul has another enemy lurking within itself, as Clarion has been led into this testing ground by the dubious influence of his “unstaid desire.” Thus the alluring garden functions at once as a microcosm for all the delights and temptations of physical nature and a macrocosm for the ageless field of battle within the human soul.

As a mythological allegory “Muipotmos” employs physical metamorphoses to reveal conflict and inner change. The first of these changes features in Spenser’s explanation of the butterfly’s ancient origin, which suggests certain relations to the myth of Cupid and Psyche, although Spenser does not relate the story directly.⁴⁹ Despite no fault of her own in Spenser’s

⁴⁹In his rendition of the Cupid and Psyche myth, Thomas Bulfinch offers the following lively explication of the analogy between soul and butterfly: “There is no illustration of the immortality of the soul so striking and beautiful as the butterfly, bursting on brilliant wings from the tomb in which it has lain, after a dull groveling, caterpillar existence, to flutter in the blaze of day and feed on the most fragrant and delicate productions of the spring. Psyche, then, is the human soul, which is purified by sufferings and misfortunes, and is thus prepared for the enjoyment of true and pure happiness” (Bulfinch 89-90). Although the poem focuses on Astery rather than Psyche herself, their parallel situation in falling afoul of Venus would seem to imply that Astery and her progeny will endure a similar series of negotiations in order to restore a lapsed relationship with the divine.

rendition of the story, Astery, a young nymph in Venus's retinue, falls afoul of her divine mistress, who transforms the girl into a butterfly:

And all those flowres, with which so plenteouslie
Her lap she filled had, that bred her spight,
She placed in her wings, for memorie
Of her pretended crime, though crime none were:
Since which that flie them in her wings doth beare. (140-44)

Even in her punishment, the nymph takes on a beautiful form, as if to suggest the essential purity of the maiden's soul. And in the next metamorphosis, that of the spider, Aragnoll, Spenser adds a subtle moral gloss to the incident as he describes Arachne's transformation beginning not as a punishment from Athena but as the necessary and inevitable result of the foulness of her own inward nature: "Yet did she inly fret, and felly burne, / And all her blood to poysonous rancor turne" (343-44). According to the Plotinian conception, the state of the soul determines the form or nature of a creature's external characteristics, and such a remarkable change into a lower state of being would also suggest the possibility of a corresponding positive transformation in the opposite direction. An example of just such a positive spiritual evolution appears elsewhere in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* when Guyon, as the model of temperance, frees the captives in the Bower of Bliss from the influence of the witch Acrasia, who has transmuted her hapless victims into all manner of lower animal species, as their own appetites and inclinations have determined. Only the vulgar and complacent Grill, who has been reduced to the form of a pig to suit his all-consuming sensual appetite, refuses to learn from the knight's sobering example, ever satisfied to confine himself to a filthy and swinish state of existence. Such an intractable mind dwells ever within the closed circle of its own mistakes, as the Palmer, Book II's voice of reason concludes:

“Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and have his hoggish mind; / But let us hence depart, whilest wether serves and winde” (II.xii.87.8-9).

Thus, the spiritual fortunes of the sorrier victims in Spenser’s allegories are not strictly irreversible, pending the afflicted soul’s willingness to enact some modicum of positive change. But the poor butterfly will pay dearly for so recklessly indulging in the delights of his erring senses. By exposing himself to the sensuous perils of the garden, Clarion is playing a rigged game from the start. For the speaker sententiously informs us “That none, except a God, or God him guide, / May them avoyde, or remedie provide” (223-24). From the Neoplatonic perspective, this could just very well refer to the divine light of reason within the human soul. The final lines of the poem echo the tragic gravity of the death of Hector in the *Iliad* and the similar death of Turnus in Virgil’s *Aeneid* with their ghastly description of the spider Aragnoll’s mortal stroke:

Under the left wing stroke his weapon slie
Into his heart, that his deepe groning spright
In bloodie streames foorth fled into the aire,
His bodie left the spectacle of care. (437-40)

After giving in to the temptations of worldly pleasures ominously depicted in his father’s garden, the butterfly meets the same hopeless fate as a slain Homeric warrior, begrudgingly descending into an afterlife devoid of any future hope for rebirth, redemption, or continued consciousness in any significant or desirable form. A similarly grisly passing attends the death of Sansjoy in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, a somber indication of the heathen brothers’ existence on the level of corrupt and fallen nature. Drawing on this comparison, the downfall of Clarion in “Muipotmos” presents the plight of the soul that has found itself drawn wholly downward into the inhospitable mire of material existence, a descent tantamount to spiritual death in the shared symbolic

language of Spenser's allegorical poems. Even those souls eventually allowed to rise again from such a desperate condition must first endure a period of purgatorial cleansing in the bowels of the earth, often lasting the duration of many life cycles, as revealed in the repeating orbits in Plato's *Phaedo* or in the underworld depicted in the allegorical Myth of Er in the final book of the *Republic*.

So ends this picturesque, little tragedy, which can teach us a great deal despite its disarmingly comic style and the diminutive proportions of its action. It entangles the unsuspecting reader, perhaps caught off guard along with the joyously naive butterfly while settling in for an idle hour's entertainment, dragging him or her downward into the lowermost reaches of Spenser's imaginative universe. However, Spenser attests elsewhere to the possibility of a return from such spiritual depths, usually requiring a difficult period of cleansing and self-reflection that can only be initiated through the timely intervention of divine grace, which is welcomed, in turn, by the despairing protagonist in a moment of acute contrition. As discussed in the next two chapters, Book I of *The Faerie Queene* will turn upon the fulcrum of the hero's recovery from a similar spiritual fall. As the narrator of "Muipotmos" sententiously advises the reader to avoid the same fate that awaits Clarion:

For thousand perills lie in close awaite
About us daylie, to worke our decay;
That none, except a God, or God him guide,
May them avoyde, or remedie provide. (221-24)

This divine guidance can and should come from within, as suggested by the unfortunate butterfly's connection with Psyche. In the Neoplatonic lineage of Plotinus, one finds and communes with God by first becoming more Godlike through the exercise of the soul's higher

faculties in reasoning and contemplation. And so this quaint animal fable reveals itself as an allegory of a single soul's disastrously unsuccessful attempt to navigate the world of embodied experience without the guiding graces of reason and divine revelation.

What has not been made explicitly clear in each of these individual instances from Spenser's shorter poems, will perhaps become so once they are all compared to reveal a common pattern. Philosopher and popular theologian Dallas Willard describes the *Deus absconditus* or "hidden God," who draws his searching and inquiring creations ineluctably into the divine presence through the very mystery of his apparent withdrawal from the world. Thus, the direction of human behavior is determined by this divine absence, as Willard writes: "Man is an essentially challenged being, always on a path, *Homo Viator*. There is therefore some point (though also some danger) to Lessing's saying that if God offered him truth in one hand, and pursuit of truth in the other, he would take the pursuit of truth" (Willard 33). Likewise, in the works of Spenser surveyed thus far, we find such grand goals and consummations as truth, love, or virtue embodied in the very journeys that have nominally identified one or all of these transcendent values as their intended destination. As we have seen throughout Spenser's various symbolic narratives, the journey and its fulfillment are more often than not as interdependent as body and soul, with the soul as the form of the body and the journey likewise embodying the very revelation it sets out to fulfill. This is especially the case for Spenser's more dynamic characters, such as Colin Clout or the speaker of the *Amoretti*, whose very being is bound up into the scattered details of their complicated journeys. As such, only a synchronic reading of these figures, considering the whole of their past, present, and future mistakes and successes, can give a true and honest account of the soul these characters bear along within them, beneath any

number of emotional or circumstantial changes.⁵⁰ The truth is found along the course of the journey, which in turn allows the soul of the traveler to turn inward and find the truth hidden within herself.

As throughout the shorter poems, the wandering path of the pilgrim soul through the elegantly painted chambers and chaotic wilderness spaces of *The Faerie Queene* follows a similarly restless course, the ultimate consummation of which seems ever to recede into the distance, reserved for the experience of some as yet unrealized state of existence. And so we must return again to Blind Willie Johnson's pressing question that initially launched us along this course of inquiry, "What is the soul of a man?" Perhaps the operative question at this point is not so much "what" but "how?" For the soul in Spenser's cosmic vision manifests itself in a varied multitude of forms and permutations according to its present state of existence at any given moment in the narrative. And this is no less the case in the exponentially more complex and expansive narrative landscape of *The Faerie Queene*, populated by a great, swelling pageant of wandering souls, each of whose external features testify to their varying inward states of health and purity, disease and corruption, damnation and grace. Once the vital matter of salvation has been established, which is the crucial work of Holinesse in Book I, the full growth and flourishing of the reader's soul will depend on an appropriately positive or negative reaction to each of these portraits of humanity's rich and complicated internal universe.

⁵⁰ See Levi-Strauss's discussion of time in "The Structural Study of Myth": "On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (209).

3. THROUGH THE LAND OF SHAPES AND SHADOWS

Young man—
Smooth and easy is the road
That leads to hell and destruction.
Down grade all the way,
The further you travel, the faster you go.
No need to trudge and sweat and toil,
Just slip and slide and slip and slide
Till you bang up against hell's iron gate.

— James Wheldon Johnson, "The Prodigal Son"

In the opening lines of the Proem to Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser addresses "the rugged forehead" of a certain high-ranking detractor who had made known his grave displeasure with the alleged eroticism of the poem's earlier installment (IV.P.1.1). Likewise, a modern interpreter concerned with the topic of Neoplatonism in *The Faerie Queene*, cannot get very far without addressing or at least acknowledging the "rugged foreheads" of several noteworthy critics who have argued for a much more limited Neoplatonic influence in Spenser's poetry, particularly in *The Faerie Queene*. Their disapproval has cast a general atmosphere of gloom and doubt over the critical discussion of Neoplatonism in *The Faerie Queene*. Of course, this has not always been the case, for the poem's earliest interpreters, most notably Kenelm Digby, took for granted Spenser's full participation in the Neoplatonist tradition. And the Cambridge Platonist Henry More would even go so far as to credit *The Faerie Queene* with his earliest exposure to the fundamental tenets of Platonist thought. These comfortable assumptions, however, were shaken with the publication in 1960 of Robert Ellrod's *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, which closely scrutinized the various claims of Neoplatonic

influence in Spenser's poems. In the end, Ellrodt's conclusion that Spenser only came to a significant knowledge of Neoplatonist ideas very late in his career (sometime around 1596) leaves interpreters of Neoplatonism in *The Faerie Queene* in a difficult position. Responses to Ellrodt have been varied and numerous, including a few noteworthy attempts by Elizabeth Bieman in 1988 and John Quitslund in 2001 to restore Spenser more securely within the full concourse of the Neoplatonist tradition. And in 2009, the release of a special volume of *Spenser Studies* on "Spenser and Neoplatonism" also seemed for many to signal the triumphant return of a thoroughly Neoplatonist Spenser. Of particular note is the collection of short essays on *The Fowre Hymnes*, over which the legacy of Ellrodt still hangs like a looming specter, a lingering poltergeist to be wrestled with or exorcised.

However, toward the end of the volume, "The Lost Cause of Platonism in *The Faerie Queene*" raises a dissenting voice. Another rugged forehead wrought from the sage and sober mold of Ellrodt, Paul Suttie questions the "sustainability" of even such a "cautious return" of interest in a Neoplatonic Spenser, pointing out that it is one thing to acknowledge some little influence of a tradition and quite another to place the poet's works soundly within it (414). Respectfully, I disagree. In fact, I think that many of the defenders and elucidators of Neoplatonism in Spenser have been overly cautious, especially regarding *The Faerie Queene*. Far too rarely do these readings range beyond the poem's more explicitly Neoplatonic loci, such as the House of Alma, the Garden of Adonis, the Cambell-Triamond duel, or the grand, cosmological dialectics of the "Mutability Cantos." For my proposed reading, I will focus on Spenser's conception of the soul, which I have interpreted as particularly informed by the author's familiarity with Neoplatonism. To demonstrate this familiarity within the poet's shorter works has largely been the focus of the previous chapter, with the hopes of preparing us for the

interpretive demands of this greater testing ground. Rather than once again rehearsing these various metaphors for the soul, the catalog Robin Reid provides in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* should suffice:

Traditional images of the soul are manifold, and they abound in Spenser's poetry, though it is necessary in each instance to question whether the soul is being directly or only glancingly alluded to. These images include jewel (diamond, ruby, pearl), beautiful flower (rose, lily), light-giving heavenly body (sun, moon, morning star, constellation), life-giving stream (fountain or river, flowing to and from a springhead or ocean source), winged creature (eagle, phoenix, dove, swan, angel), pilot of a ship, rider of a horse or driver of a chariot, sacrificial victim (lamb, gored ox, fallen flower, bleeding heart), and most important for Spenser, 'virgin Queene' (*FQ* ii xi 2) at the center of a castle or paradisaal garden." (Reid 665)

Of course, some of these symbols and archetypes have already featured in the previous chapter's discussion (e.g., the lamb, the winged creature, and the semi-divine figure of the 'virgin Queene'), while others should appear quite new. Naturally, the present argument will focus on those representations that most clearly suggest the soul's divine origin and the process of purification and ascent by which it can make its return.

Read from such an inward looking vantage, *The Faerie Queene* opens itself up as a progress of the soul, in which Book I, Spenser's "Legend of Holinesse," plays an indispensable role as the only book concerned with the soul's immediate interaction with the divine. It is the most overtly Christian book of *The Faerie Queene* as well as the most mystically inclined, although its mysticism bears the heavy influence of Neoplatonist thinkers like Plotinus and

Pseudo-Dionysius. As Redcrosse nears his goal of embodying the virtue of Holinesse, we will note a heavier reliance on sources and conceptions drawn from the apophatic tradition of Christian mysticism, which unites Neoplatonic notions of the soul with Christian conceptions of sin, grace, and incarnational theology. Thus Spenser's Book of Holinesse addresses many of the aspects of Renaissance Neoplatonism which some would deem heretical, particularly concerning the question of original sin. The conflict of Book I addresses the life of the soul as it navigates the difficult passage through material existence, as it seeks to return to its heavenly home. As a virtue, Holinesse is primarily concerned with this reorientation towards a higher existence, along with the resistance of whatever dubious forces will try to delay or misguide the soul along its way. But Holinesse serves a structural as well as a spiritual function, appropriate to its primary position among the virtues. In a certain sense, the virtue of Holinesse encompasses all of the others within itself in imitation of the Plotinian "One," which Plotinus describes as the primary "hypostasis" or state of existence from which everything in the universe was derived and continues to receive its being. I would even suggest that the accomplishments of Redcrosse in Book I act as an atonement for the heroic knights of the other books so that each can pursue his or her comparatively secular quest for self-improvement without having to first address the fundamental question of original sin, which would otherwise threaten to bring all of their heroic labors in the service of each separate virtue to naught. In *Spenser's World of Glass*, Kathleen Williams argues for a similar inheritance between Spenser's virtuous patrons; however, I would take this suggestion much farther toward a reading of *The Faerie Queene* as the journey of a single soul, undergoing a series of developmental transformations, in an orderly and logical progression from virtue to virtue.

The Error episode at the beginning of Book I and the action leading up to it functions as a kind of infancy narrative for the individual human soul, newly descended into the alien landscape of the physical world and growing into a greater understanding of its own divine heritage and potential. As the first of *The Faerie Queene's* many representatives of the soul in its pilgrimage through this lower world of phenomenal existence, the Redcrosse Knight immediately cuts a striking image, the finer details of which have suggested several well-trodden paths of allegorical interpretation. Perhaps most significantly for our purposes, the knight's battered and dirty armor suggests a level of worldly experience that is not in agreement with the "clownish young man" who wears them. Although the youthful knight bears the weight of his own personal history, crucial details of which are as yet unknown to him, in matters of Holinesse (the first step in Spenser's progress of the soul), he is truly a neophyte. Much about Redcrosse's inner nature can be gleaned from the intriguing, pictographic details of his first appearance:

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many' a bloody fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he never wield... (I.i.1-5)

Critics have typically explained the apparent disjunction between the young man and his battered armor in Christian theological terms: they mark his inheritance of the Christian tradition (or more specifically the militant Protestantism represented by the Geneva Bible) while also bearing witness to the spiritual ravages of original sin and the historical burdens of holy wars and martyrdoms. To borrow an image from Spenser's most revered predecessor, it is as if Chaucer's immature and headstrong Squire had taken to gallivanting around the countryside in the weather-

beaten armor of his sage and experienced father. It seems there is certainly room for Redcrosse to grow into his equipment. As A.C. Hamilton notes in the Longman edition, "Unlike David, who doffs his armor to prove his God, Una's knight wears her armour to prove himself worthy of it" (*FQ* 31n). However, I would like to propose another line of interpretation, not as a refutation of the preceding but as a means of opening the poem up to the broader meta-reading I have described. After all, it is one of Spenser's strengths as a thinker that apparently conflicting interpretations can not only coexist but can perform a complementary role in the poem's philosophical and rhetorical framework.

Read from a Neoplatonic perspective, the dents on Redcrosse's armor might also represent the experience that the soul bears along with it from a previous existence—if not from previous lives, then at least from an existence in some spiritual realm prior to life on earth. There are additional indications throughout *The Faerie Queene* and in some of the shorter poems as well (most significantly *The Fowre Hymnes*) that Spenser has given serious consideration to Neoplatonic accounts of the soul's preexistence and even its transmigration. Of course, that is not to say whether he holds these doctrines as metaphysical actualities or, as seems more likely, he uses them as figurative representations of spiritual growth.⁵¹ It must be pointed out that these doctrines would have been considered heretical to many of Spenser's contemporaries, although this did not prevent Spenser from claiming to have personally embodied the soul of Chaucer within himself "through infusion sweete" (IV.ii.34.6). Still, the explicitly Christian markings on the knight's shield and doublet are reminders that the soul in Spenser's Christian Platonist conception of the universe is the work of a divine creator and bears an internal signature of this

⁵¹ As suggested in Chapter 1, this may have been the intention of Plato's own descriptions of transmigration in *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *The Republic*, although many of his late classical successors seem to have taken the notion much more seriously as a metaphysical possibility.

craftsmanship: “And on his brest a bloodie Crosse he bore, / The deare remembrance of his dying Lord” (I.i.2.1-2). How deeply does Redcrosse understand the spiritual significance of the emblem he bears, and on what conscious level does this act of “remembrance” taking place? As will become clear in the sad progress of Book I’s first half, he knows much less than he realizes. The crucial act of remembrance, however, will come only after the knight’s absolute failure to maintain the virtue of Holinesse according to his current knowledge. And this idea of the *imago dei*, imprinted on the human soul is echoed as well in the first of Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes*:

For when the soule, the which derived was
At first, out of that great immortall Spright,
By whom all live to love, whilome did pas
Downe from the top of purest heavens hight,
To be embodied here, it then tooke light
And lively spirits from that fayrest starre,
Which lights the world forth from his firie carre. (HB 106-12)

Spenser's language here strikes a graceful if delicate balance between the Christian and Neoplatonist notions of the soul's otherworldly derivation, implicitly endorsing both the doctrine of humanity's internal reflection of the *imago dei* and Plotinus's theory of the individual soul's emanation from the greater World Soul (and by extension from the primal One, by way of the Angelic Mind). And it is this same divine light within the soul that guides Redcrosse along after he has lost his way through the wandering wood and stumbled into the darkness of Error's den: "his glistring armor made / A litle glooming light, much like a shade, / By which he saw the ugly monster plaine" (I.i.14.4-6). Error's cave itself resembles similar locations in the allegorical myths of Plato and Porphyry, and in his movement from plain to woods to cave, Redcrosse

essentially represents the man of action retreating deeper within himself in a moment of contemplation. It is only through such introspection, communing with his own soul, that he is able to identify the errors in his thinking and resume the journey toward truth and eventual reunion with the One.

Spenser's vision does not, however, leave humanity to work through such spiritual matters completely on their own terms, as Redcrosse initially struggles when he relies strictly on his limited and underdeveloped resources. Una's timely words to the young knight at this crucial juncture strike a balance between mankind's spiritual agency and their inherent need for an intercessor: "Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee, / Add faith unto your force, and be not faint" (I.i.19.2-3). In a certain sense, the practice of "True Holinesse" (as Spenser calls the virtue in the Argument to Book I, Canto i) is a realization of latent powers already present within the depths of the soul (virtues in the proper, latinized sense of the word) that have been weakened and obscured upon its entrance into the physical world, but this very realization on the part of the individual spiritual seeker is predicated upon an act of grace, without which the entire project falls apart. The state of soul represented by Redcrosse here at the beginning of Spenser's progress through the virtues strikes a revealing contrast against the one we see portrayed in Prince Arthur, who has been thoroughly fashioned in all the virtues. As Lewis writes in *Spenser's Images of Life*, "Platonically considered, Arthur is the purged philosophical soul, smitten with a spiritual eros for the One, the First Fair, and trying like Plotinus to make the flight alone into the alone" (133-34). Redcrosse too seeks reunion with the One while journeying along within its very presence, as suggested by the veiled figure of Una. As J.S. Harrison pronounces in the *Variarum*, "Una stands for Platonic wisdom...and a sight of her in her native beauty constitutes the happy ending of many struggles and perplexities that the Red Cross Knight experiences in pursuit of

holiness” (1.501). Of course, the state of soul represented in the young knight is as yet unpurged and unperfected; however, it still contains all the same powers and potentialities revealed in the more fully realized Arthur and the successive patrons of the other virtues. To bring them out, Redcrosse need only persevere in his appointed quest, which continues beyond the realization of True Holinesse as the knight plies his newly realized spiritual virtue in the continued service of the Fairy Queen. For, as Plato reminds us in the *Meno*, all learning is remembering. The most sudden and unexpected epiphany is an old, familiar friend to the properly oriented soul. Likewise, the seed of all the virtues exists even within a soul as inexperienced as that of the Redcrosse Knight when we first meet him in the midst of his fledgling adventure. Spenser’s Holinesse, in its turn, provides the fertile ground in which all of the succeeding virtues will establish their roots, so that they will not be swept away by the sundry faults and foibles of human life, as was the seed that fell on rocky ground in the biblical parable.⁵²

And finally, we must contend with Error herself, the first great enemy of the soul to emerge from the netherworld of Spenser's imaginative universe. The warnings leading up to this episode are of a more subtle nature, as we find in Spenser’s description of the false refuge of these enchanted woods, “Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride, / Did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide, / Not perceable with power of any starr” (I.i.7.4-6). As the faint light of

⁵²In the Parable of the Sower, Christ describes a man spreading seeds in various types of ground, with differing success in germination and cultivation according to soil conditions in which they land: “But they that are on the stones, *are they* which when they have heard, receive the worde with joye: but they have no rootes, which for a while beleve, but in the time of tentation go away” (*Geneva Bible*, Luke 8:13). As Spenser’s patron of Holinesse is none other than St. George, the “man of earth,” plucked as an infant from an elfin farmer’s furrow, the comparison to this parable seems all the more appropriate. This stray seed cast into the strange soil of Fairy Land echoes the plight of the exiled human soul in its longing for reunion with its spiritual source.

Redcrosse's armor pierces into the gloom of Error's Cave, the young, untested knight becomes aware of this hideous apparition:

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
But forth unto the darksom hole he went,
And looked in: his glistring armor made
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine. (I.i.14.1-9)

As the poem's earliest embodiment of worldly evil, Error is defined by doubleness and multiplicity, both suggestive within a Neoplatonic cosmic order of a falling away from the primal unitive state of goodness, harmony, and beauty embodied in the One. As interpreters have often noted, Spenser's description of Error's feminine upper half suggests her symbolic derivation from Eve, here combined with the sinister, archetypal figure of the serpent in a touch of Dantean *contrapasso*, in which the punishment suits the crime in a brutally ironic manner. And like Eve, the first in a long line of suffering sinners, Error too has given birth to a race of miserable and misbegotten creatures: "Of her there bred, / A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed, / Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, eachone / Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill favored" (I.i.15.4-7). In Neoplatonic terms, Error's prolific breeding of these misshapen multitudes parodies the descent of the higher forms into the world from the Angelic Mind, the second of the

Plotinian hypostases, which in its turn has its own derivation from the originary One.⁵³ Like the forlorn souls of human beings and other creatures lost in the tangled web of materiality that comprises their accustomed level of existence, these pitiful creations long for nothing more than to reunite with their original source. Even in the divine sphere of the Angelic Mind, multiplicity is the result of a lapse in its contemplation of God or the One, just as the soul falls through its failure to fixate upon the Angelic Mind (*Discarded Image* 67). Likewise, the desire of even Errour's foul brood to return to a state of unity, suggests the spark of some higher goodness, however perverted.

And perhaps there is also something of Circe, the prototypical sorceress, within the figure of Errour, particularly as the Homeric witch has been interpreted by Porphyry, Plotinus's student and firstborn successor in the Neoplatonist tradition, who takes her transformations of men into animals as an allegorical figure for the cycles of transmigration experienced by souls after death. As Porphyry explains, "Homer, for his part, calls the cyclical progress and rotation of metempsychosis [or reincarnation] 'Circe,' making her a child of the sun, which is constantly linking destruction with birth and birth back again with destruction and stringing them together" (qtd. in Lamberton 116). In the Errour episode too—just as elsewhere throughout *The Faerie Queene*—we see the physical world portrayed as a place of potentially dangerous transformation, of evolution and devolution along an axis of moral and spiritual development. Whether led along by physical delights or simply distracted by any number of worldly expediencies, the soul that falls into Errour's serpentine coils faces the threat of becoming as one of her children: impotent,

⁵³Lewis's description in *The Discarded Image*: "In *Mens* [Mind], on the other hand, creation is almost a sort of infirmity. She becomes less like God by creating, declines into creation only because she turns her gaze away from her origin and looks back" (67). The feminine identification of the Angelic Mind is noteworthy, as are the sexual and reproductive connotations of her issuance of forms into the lower world.

blind, sucking on poison, and hating the light of truth. Essentially, these are creatures that despise existence itself to such a degree that they long to bring about their own oblivion, retreating whenever possible back into the bowels of the being who spawned them rather than contending against the threats and possibilities of the outside world. Their miserable state of existence, or near non-existence, the poet describes in shockingly graphic detail, as Error vomits the rancid contents of her belly into the face of the entangled Redcrosse in a desperate attempt to free herself from the hero's grasp:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has. (I.i.20.1-9)

These grotesque and impotent creatures are the original dropouts from the Spenserian school of soul fashioning, surely a poor crew for our hero to hang around. And in their writhing through the "weedy grass" one might discern an echo of Pico's diagnosis of human failings in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*: "If you see a man dedicated to his stomach, crawling on the ground, you see a plant and not a man" (Pico 10). Spenser warns of the same humiliating fate for any who are led downward by the potentially corrosive influence of the senses and appetites, which provide temporary pleasure and satisfaction while they degrade the soul. Zoological inaccuracy aside, the

aforementioned amphibians are next described as “serpents small, / Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke” (I.i.22.6-7). And their metaphorical transformation into annoying yet harmless insects in the next stanza is just as effortless, so unstable are the children of Error. Try as they might, however, to hinder the beleaguered knight’s efforts, these impotently struggling forms only injure themselves in the process.

Indeed, for Error’s brood, appetite has become the primary function in both body and soul, and they unthinkingly yield to their animal urges even up to the point of their own extinction. Finding themselves unable to slither back into the comforting depths of Error’s ghastly innards after her decapitation by a newly recollected Redcrosse, the creatures find another way to merge with her, following the behest of their all-consuming appetite: “but being there withstood / They flocked all about her bleeding wound, / And sucked up their dying mothers blood, / Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good” (I.i.25.6-9). But little good does this prove for them, as these hapless amphibians can only continue to feed until their bellies burst. For Spenser, this horrifying picture is surely the perversion of many good and holy things, foully distorting the eucharist, the process of procreation, and the very urge to love. And we need only recall various sobering examples from Spenser’s shorter poems, with Colin Clout and Clarion the unfortunate butterfly chief among them, to realize how seriously the poet considers the dehumanizing influence of such moral and spiritual misdirection. In order for a more positive transformation to occur, Redcrosse must destroy Error altogether, eradicate every fragment of her lingering, toxic presence within himself, and finally make his way outward through those same vaguely threatening, shadow dappled woods in which he made his original error of straying away from the one true path toward the ultimate fulfillment of his quest. As Hough suggests, however, “the forest is the *selva obscura* of man’s life,” and in some sense, we

will see that Redcrosse continues to wander through this gloom long after leaving the forest's physical borders (99).

However, this perilous forest, which appeared at first as a sinister microcosm of the physical world through which the soul makes its long sojourn as a solitary exile, no longer appears so dangerous or quite so alienating. Properly oriented, the soul even discerns a certain kinship with the order of things, an overriding and all-pervading intelligence hidden within the depths and hollows of nature, beneath the subtly sunlit surfaces of soil and rocks and trees, which provides the soul of the wandering pilgrim with the meaning and direction that is its own way out. Guided along by the internal light within his own soul—perhaps a little brighter after this first victory—and "with God to frend" Redcrosse continues his journey towards a more complete realization of True Holinesse (I.i.28.7). Meanwhile, the soul's gradual progress through *The Faerie Queene* will continue from book to book as one virtue emanates from another and their patron heroes arise in succession, each in their turn embodying and carrying forward the "fashioned" soul of Spenser's gentle reader, who switches between them as a post rider of old might change horses over the course of an arduous, cross-country journey. The grand sweep of the poem from the Errour episode at the beginning of Book I to the ultimate, transcendental vision of the Graces on Mount Acidale near the end of Book VI follows the growth of the soul from its own internal victories through its increasing ability to commune with other souls and to engage with the physical world in ways that both shape their environment and further contribute to their own interior transformations.

Having thoroughly dispatched Errour, Redcrosse and his company make their way out of the woods only to encounter a much more dangerous and deceptive threat in the sorcerer Archimago, who has taken up the guise and practices of a devout hermit in order to bring even

greater harm to the heroic knight by calculated subterfuge. On first appearance, the old sorcerer would seem a suitable ally for the young knight in his pursuit of True Holiness, as he presents himself as a fellow righteous soul who has made considerable progress along a similar path of spiritual development. Here Spenser presents another compelling and memorable character portrait, brimming with profound iconographical details:

At length they chaunst to meet upon the way
An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;
Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,
And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,
Simple in shew, and voide of malice bad,
And all the way he prayed as he went,
And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent. (I.i.29.1-9)

After the hard lessons we have experienced along with Redcrosse in the Errour episode, the careful reader should realize that the poet has already alerted us to the signs of subtle danger, lurking below the false monastic's disarmingly comforting facade. In his dramatic external displays of piety we may discern something of the suspicious English Protestants of Spenser's time still held against various elements of Catholic spirituality, especially the cloistered and solitary lifestyle of hermits and monastics. This is but one of many suggestions of Spenser's gothic fascination with the hoary, decaying remains of England's Catholic past. And perhaps we might speculate that Archimago's chapel resembled such medieval remnants as Spenser might have encountered in the English (or Irish) countryside, where the poet might have observed the

heavenly aspirations memorialized in the stonework, all the while condemning the thought of such impieties and improprieties as these presumably sacred spaces might have entertained to his Protestant mind. Likewise, Archimago's venerable, external form does not reliably convey the corrupt and twisted state of the wizard's soul, an exercise of malicious subterfuge evident enough in such subtly suggestive words as "seemde," "shew," and "as."

But Spenser's depiction of Archimago conjures up another figure popularly regarded with a certain degree of awe and suspicion: the enlightened magus promised by the teachings of Renaissance humanism, who has mastered the laws of nature through the awakening of the dormant powers lying hidden within the innermost depths of his own soul. One of his closest literary relatives is the sorcerer and statesman Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who has likewise acquired a command over the elements through the long and arduous application of his mental powers in the sphere of his private studies. As Harold Bloom notes, "Prospero seeks a kind of secularized spiritual authority, and he finally attains something like it, though at considerable expense to himself" (674). There is surprisingly little difference between the magicians, except for the crucial fact that Prospero has reason to receive our sympathies, gained through the vehicle of a tragic backstory which Archimago conspicuously lacks. Spenser offers little in the way of explanation for Archimago's motives beyond an elliptical comment on the ill will the sorcerer bears toward Una: "For her he hated as the hissing snake, / And in her many troubles did most pleasure take" (I.ii.9.8-9). The root of this hatred remains unclear, but the Satanic associations are unmistakable, as is Archimago's affinity with the serpentine Error. And more comes out as we examine their affiliations within the allegory, as Rosemund Tuve writes, "Archimago the shape-shifter (evil is multiple) hates Una, who is single in her nature (Truth's

nature) and in her devotion, because she is his exact opposite—one true to the Truth” (Tuve 307). And this leads us to other possible interpretations of the old sorcerer’s multi-faceted name.

For this Archimago is the prototypical Arch-Magus, as well as a contemplative recluse who has discovered in his profound solitude the divine nature of the human soul, revealed through the imprinting of the *imago dei*. Lacking suitable moral or spiritual instruction, however, he has taken this realization of his own cosmic significance as sufficient reason to become a god unto himself, inverting microcosm with macrocosm, and enthroning himself at the center of his own personal universe. Though his abilities proceed from a corrupted source, he makes several displays of great power. Most importantly, he is a master of transformations, both a shape shifter and a subtle manipulator of physical forms and images:

For by his mighty science he could take
As many formes and shapes in seeming wise,
As ever *Proteus* to himselfe could make:
Sometime a fowle, sometime a fish in lake,
Now like a foxe, now like a dragon fell,
That of himselfe he ofte for feare would quake,
And oft would flie away. (I.ii.10.2-8)

Fundamentally, Archimago is not who or what he presents himself to be, a truth that is applicable on multiple levels. No matter the shape he takes, or perhaps appears to take, his corrupted inward nature remains unchanged, manifesting itself in various, clandestine malefactions and the laughable cowardice that causes him to flee from the mere semblance of power that he has managed to feign. However, contrasted with the legitimately empowered magus, as this awakened individual is described in the interpretations of Pico, Ficino, and other Renaissance

Platonists, Archimago is a mere charlatan who charms with misleading appearances rather than imposing any substantial and lasting change on the external world. Despite his resemblance to the shape-shifting Proteus, Archimago's mastery of nature is mere pretense.⁵⁴ And while the final transformation in the passage above reminds us of Archimago's spiritual alignment with the dragon of Redcrosse's destined final combat, we must keep in mind that he is not the true dragon with which the present quest must end, but only a lesser distraction who is determined to lead Redcrosse ever farther afield and demoralize the inexperienced, future saint, in an attempt to prevent the fulfillment of his heroic destiny if he cannot be defeated outright. Archimago is devoted to this petty harassment as a kind of ideal, explained in Alastair Fowler's identification of him as "an implacable enemy of unity and individuation," and a defiler of the monadic principles represented in Una (8).

Indeed, this nefarious character is all the more compelling for his substantial creative powers, which are not limited to his work with natural magic and necromancy. For even these arcane abilities are linked to the written word, over which Archimago exercises a distinct command as he parses the arcane lore in the book of spells which we have likely mistaken for a prayer book on the wizard's first appearance: "Then choosing out few words most horrible, / (Let none them read), [he] thereof did verses frame..." (I.i.37.1-2). In this dubious exercise of literacy, Archimago joins the foul poetaster Busirane (Spenser's other scribbling sorcerer) among the ranks of those who would abuse the incantatory potential of poetic expression for selfish and

⁵⁴Proteus appears in the writings of the ancient Platonists as a figure for natural world, especially as a place of transformation and potential. Lamberton references Iamblichus's "Pythagoreanizing" interpretation of Proteus, "who contains the properties of all things just as the monad contains the combined energies of all the numbers" (qtd. in Lamberton 37). See also Wind, *Pagan Myths in the Renaissance* (191-217).

shameful purposes.⁵⁵ If we press the matter, Archimago's association with the arts only deepens. As the wizard regales his guests within the false comfort of his hermitage, he does so with the technique and charisma of a well-trained actor:

For that olde man of pleasing wordes had store,
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas,
He told of Saintes and Popes, and evermore
He strowd an *Ave-Mary* after and before. (I.i.35.6-9)

These lines present a recitation of the kind of romanticized material found in the *Golden Legend* and similar collections of saints' lives. We must note the incongruence here with some irony as the self-righteous charlatan directs these tales at St. George himself, whose own legend would become one of the enduring centerpieces in these hagiographical cycles. For Archimago, these accounts of virtuous actions are strictly literary compositions, offering little more than a tale to spin and a character to impersonate. And so the feigning imitation reveals its superficial character in the presence of the thing itself, an aspect of symbolic structuring that recurs throughout *The Faerie Queene*.⁵⁶ Of course, this is only evident if we are more discerning than

⁵⁵ Perhaps Spenser intends his portrayal of these wicked poets to reflect his criticism of the Irish bardic tradition in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*: "Yea truly, I have caused divers of them to be translated unto me, that I might understand them, and surely they savoured of sweet wit and good invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry; yet were they sprinkled with some pretty flowers of their naturall device, which gave good grace and comlinesse unto them, the which it is great pittie to see abused, to the gracing of wickednes and vice, which with good usage would serve to adorne and beautifie verse" (77).

⁵⁶ As Paul Alpers writes in *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene*, "It is not enough to say that Archimago and Sansloy are false and wicked knights. Knighthood itself is called into question by Archimago's entirely plausible imitation of the Red Cross Knight (3.28-29), which deceives Una, and by the heroic terms in which we are made to see Sansloy's battle with the lion (3.41-42)" (339).

the unfortunate Redcrosse, who witnesses the false hermit's theatrics with no apparent distaste or apprehension.

Like Spenser himself, Archimago is a poet, a storyteller, and a creator of worlds, though he remains ever determined to twist these powerful gifts according to his own vicious and self-serving machinations. As Archimago commands his airy familiars, assigning them physical bodies or the subtler forms that inhabit dreams, we might recall Sidney's earlier description of the visionary poet drawing down a transcendent Idea from the heavenly realm and embodying it in the most agreeable formal structures. Glorified thus, the poet communes with the originary forces of creation, although in Archimago's twisted interpretation this means conjuring up the unspeakable, chthonic forces of the classical netherworld, "Great *Gorgon*, prince of darknes and dead night" (I.i.37.8).⁵⁷ In *Spenser's Supreme Fiction*, John Quitslund examines Spenser's epic as a heterocosm, an alternate world that, for all its fantastical imagery, mirrors our own in insightful and instructive ways. As Quitslund writes, "Although Spenser gave his poem no structural centre, I will argue that he does lead us to a cumulative understanding of the principles unifying the world of its action, and a simultaneous understanding of the dynamics through which the individual 'little world of man' is linked to the macrocosm" (72). In such a world of unified meaning, Archimago operates as a usurping, disunifying agent, seizing the fire of Spenser's creative powers to rewrite what would have otherwise been a linear and predictable

⁵⁷ Demogorgon was a "mythological invention of Boccaccio" according to Roche's note in the Penguin edition (*FQ* 1078n). But there also seems to be a connection between Demogorgon and Demiurge, a creator deity first appearing in Plato's *Timaeus*, and recurring throughout the larger body of Platonist thought. David Ross describes the Platonic conception of "Demiourgos" as a creator who exists separately from the Forms and who simply arranges them rather than creating outright, possibly identifiable with the World Soul (127).

journey. After failing to exploit Redcrosse's lust for the false Una and attacking the knight with salacious dreams, the old sorcerer thrusts him into a crisis of his own making:

Forthwith he runnes with feigned faithfull hast
Unto his guest, who after troublous sights
And dreames gan now to take more sound repast,
Whom suddenly he wakes with fearful frights,
As one aghast with feends or damned sprights... (I.ii.4.1-5)

Of course, the diabolical spirits here are the sorcerer's own familiars, entangled in some degree of love making under the guise of Una and "a young Squire, in loves and lusty hed" (I.ii.3.4). Thus, Redcrosse awakens from the disordered, semi-conscious world of his unsettling dreams into a vision of Fairy Land that is essentially a nightmare reality shaped and determined according to the malevolent improvisations of Archimago.⁵⁸ As Redcrosse's journey is primarily spiritual in nature, the young knight will only find himself more desperately lost with every restless mile traversed, until he finally awakens from the influence of the evil beings that have reduced him to a chronic state of internal disorder and corruption. To the wary eye, however, the enemies of Holinesse fall into a formidable yet predictable pattern, as Kathleen Williams explains: "His battle is conducted not in pure light but in the half dark of fallen creation, and it is complicated by the tensions which surround a man living in the world and committed to heaven. It is this doubleness which makes the story human and touching. Without it we would have another theological tract, a map of the way and not the way itself" (Williams 6).

⁵⁸ On Spenser's Fairy Land as a dream, see Graham Hough, *A Preface to the Faerie Queene* (97-99).

Redcrosse flees from one illusion to another as he abandons the false Una only to pledge himself to Duessa, a wicked enchantress whose double nature is only too apparent from her name. The failure to read the whole situation derives to some extent from the knight's foolish arrogance. As Charles Osgood notes in the *Variorum*, "Clearly he misses not Una so much as he resents—with a touch of youthful selfishness perhaps—the reflection which her apparent infidelity casts upon his dignity" (1.443). Of course, the warning of Duessa's name is of little use to Redcrosse, who only knows the lady by her assumed name of Fidessa. Such are the difficulties of inhabiting an allegorical world rather than simply reading one.⁵⁹ However, even this name he fails to investigate sufficiently, as Williams suggests: "The evidence of his senses, which detached his faith from Una, now persuades him to attach it to Duessa, and he follows her eagerly, judging by his 'quick eyes' while his 'dull ears' scarcely hear the words upon which, if she is to be accepted as Fidessa, his reason should have been busy" (10). Duessa represents the second person in a diabolical trinity, coming after Archimago in the role of a false creator and primal One, and likewise retaining something of his power for false creation and manipulation. This places her as well in the position of the Angelic Mind, proceeding as she intrudes into the world of the poem as if conjured up by the dark forces of the insidious sorcerer. As we have seen in the *Amoretti*, there appears to be some affinity between the aspirations of the lover and the upward striving of the Platonic spiritual seeker toward the Forms in the Angelic Mind, and this is a similarity that Duessa manipulates. It is her presence as a potential consort and replacement for Una that plunges Redcrosse into the trials and misleading illusions of a haunted landscape. Much

⁵⁹In *Spenser's Images of Life*, C.S. Lewis makes the following observation: "to the characters participating in an allegory, nothing is allegorical. They live in a world compact of wonders, beauties, and terrors, which are mostly quite unintelligible to them" (29). This is apparent in Spenser's tendency to withhold crucial information, such as a character's name, until it has already exercised a dramatic influence over the narrative.

has been said about Duessa's provocative resemblance to the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation, particularly in the light of the Geneva scholars' gloss of this figure as a representation of the Catholic Church.⁶⁰ Likewise, another longstanding critical tradition has associated Duessa with the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, which would seem to be confirmed with Duessa's shallowly disguised trial and execution in *Faerie Queene*, Book V. As Fowler points out, multiplicity or "doubleness" for much of Book I, assumes a deceptive aspect, impersonating another, more benevolent figure, with the intent of projecting singularity, truth, and goodness: "Thus Duessa-Fidessa, impersonating true religion, forms with Una a pair of alternatives not previously open to the Red Cross Knight" (Fowler 7). Though the historical aspect will not feature heavily in the current reading, the existential threat of foreign powers provides a constant backdrop for the spiritual combat of Spenser's epic, and in such a context, the temptation to surrender the life of the soul to an unworthy physicality, must have resembled for Spenser the rendering of allegiance to a hostile foreign church, or queen.

In another sense, Duessa represents the effects of courtly dissemblance and superficiality on the human soul. As Spenser often reminds us, the court houses a great many moral dangers, and despite efforts to promote himself as a courtier poet, he remains ambivalent about the court environment throughout his oeuvre. In *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, for instance, Spenser imagines Colin's relief on reaching the safety of his Arcadian home country. The poet's own sentiments are likely close at hand as Colin calls the English court "that waste, where I was quite

⁶⁰ As the Geneva scholars explain this provocative biblical figure, "Antichrist is compared to an harlot because he seduceth the worlde with vaine wordes, doctrines of lies, and outward appearance." And as they continue, the resemblance to Duessa deepens: "This woman is the Antichrist, that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures, as is expounded, verse 18, whose beautie onely standeth in outwarde pompe and impudence and craft like a strumpet" (120n).

forgot” (183).⁶¹ Spenser often treats the court as a locus of dishonesty and artificiality, a setting in which an entire code of social conduct has been developed to obscure the truth. Very few human locations in Spenser’s world devote themselves so completely to continuing the deceptions of the cave in Plato’s allegory, and fewer still with a group of celebrants so blissfully complicit. Although Gloriana’s court, on the other hand, appears at least somewhat exempt to this rule, it is significant enough that both Redcrosse and Una have arrived at the court of Cleopolis as outsiders—Redcrosse from the local countryside and Una from her father’s distant kingdom. Nor does it sound as if Redcrosse remained at the glorious citadel of Cleopolis long enough to have learned much of their courtly graces (or deceptions). Absent Una’s sententious judgment, Redcrosse is quite unprepared when he meets Duessa, and her lover Sansfoy, who present such a sight as the rustic youth would never have encountered between the cabbages and onions at the local farmer’s market:

He had a faire companion of his way,
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,
The which her lavish lovers to her gave;
Her wanton palfrey all was overspred
With tinsell trappings, woven like a wave,

⁶¹ As McCabe notes with irony in his edition of *The Shorter Poems*, “[Colin’s] voyage abroad is Spenser’s homecoming, his homecoming is Spenser’s exile” (649n). Spenser’s use of the Colin persona reflects his ambivalent attitude as a poet of the distant, English court, along with a degree of wishful thinking, as Colin thrives and creates in the rural Irish landscape, where Spenser himself resides as an alien.

Whose bridle rung with golden bells and bosses brave. (I.ii.13.1-9)

Along with her color scheme of red, white, and gold, the jeweled miter with multiple crowns identifies the lady soundly with the Roman Catholic Church, and indirectly with Error. Even the term “goodly” takes on a deceptive connotation here, with the suggestion that Duessa takes on the appearance of the good rather than reflecting true goodness in her inward nature. Even the edifying counsel of Una has its foil in Duessa: “With faire disport and courting dalliaunce / She intertaine her lover all the way...” (I.ii.14.1-2). For all of our concern with the soul of Redcrosse and the danger the enchantress represents as a distraction away from his journey toward truth and the One, we should not ignore the fact that Duessa herself is a twisted, suffering being underneath all her silken finery and superficial social graces. As Redcrosse’s temporary paramour, Duessa is also a distorted reflection of the beloved lady in the sonnet tradition, who could be quite dangerous as noted in the previous chapter. Even the brilliant Elizabeth Boyle possesses something of this double nature in her appearances in the *Amoretti*, as the incarnate goddess figure who wounds and heals, invites and repels, discloses and dissembles. But, of course, the speaker in such poems retaliates with shows and weapons of his own. While many a young man at court has likely blamed the lady for his lovesick pains, Duessa is a reflection of the courtier’s own painstakingly cultivated practice of affectation in speech and appearance, which becomes a source of internal division separating the lady or the courtier not just from the people they fool, but from themselves. And perhaps Redcrosse intuits something of Duessa’s internal suffering, when he takes pity on her after taking the life of Sansfoy, her lover and protector: “Her humblesse low / In so ritch weedes and seeming glorious show, / Did much emmove his stout heroicke heart...” (I.ii.21.4-6). While much suffering would result in the aftermath of this moment, as Redcrosse submits himself to Duessa’s enchanting power, that does not completely

diminish the dignity of the scene. Redcrosse's empathy for the betrothed lover of a vanquished foe derives from the spirited part of the soul, housed within the knight's "stout heroicke heart."⁶² However, even the nobler motivations that might arise from this emotional center accept the critical guidance of the higher faculties, without which, the enterprising soul is liable to fall under the dubious influence of ever lower impulses, as the following episode gravely illustrates. Unfortunately for Redcrosse, Duessa proves quite skillful in manipulating even his better impulses.

The episode of Fradubio comes as a dire warning to the Redcrosse Knight, although he is not disposed to heed it. Riding some space from the site of his recent combat with Sansfoy, the defeated Saracen's shield in broad display, Redcrosse joins Duessa in the comforting shade of a grove (*too* comforting, we should rightly think after the Errour episode). And herein they find the gruesome spectacle of a tree that bleeds and cries out in pain to have its branches broken, a familiar image to readers of Virgil and Dante, but quite a shocking display for the unlettered knight.⁶³ Like Aeneas and Dante before him, Redcrosse has broken a branch from the sentient tree, in this case to weave a garland for his new idol, Duessa. After a moment of comic

⁶²This was the region of the soul which Plato associated with heroic greatness, sometimes represented by a raging lion. As such, the lion that befriends Una makes a suitable replacement as her rightful protector once Redcrosse's own "heroicke heart" has been compromised by the corrupting influence of Duessa.

⁶³The incident alludes to *Aeneid* 3, in which Aeneas discovers that his kinsman, Polydorus, has been murdered by a greedy Thracian king. From the bloodstained soil of the murder site, a tree grows, which bleeds when its limbs are broken and groans its sad tale in answer to Aeneas's inquiry. Polydorus's laments provides a grim moral: "To what extremes / Will you not drive the hearts of men, accurst / Hunger for gold!" (79-81). Likewise, the circle of the Suicides in *Inferno*, Canto 13 features a number of miserable souls who are encased in trees. The logic of Dante's underworld suggests this existence of vegetative physicality should reflect these sinners' abuse of their mortal bodies. As one of these weary souls explains, "Like the rest, we shall go for our husks on Judgment Day, / but not that we may wear them, for it is not just / that a man be given what he throws away" (13.103-5).

disruption, in which Redcrosse trembles and attempts to voice an appropriate response, Fradubio recounts the matter of his tragic past:

Then groning deep, Nor damned Ghost, (quoth he,)
Nor guileful sprite to thee these wordes doth speake,
But once a man *Fradubio*, now a tree,
Wretched man, wretched tree... (I.ii.33.1-4)

Like Redcrosse, Fradubio has betrayed his own lover, the true and honest Fralissa, for the false beauty of Duessa. Even with Duessa and his own noble lady standing side by side, Fradubio recalls his inability to see the witch's inner nature, wholly beguiled by her display of physical voluptuousness: "*Fralissa* was as faire, as faire mote bee, / And ever false *Duessa* seemde as faire as shee" (I.ii.37.6-9). The entire incident has reduced Fradubio to a form suited to the faculties of the soul which he has allowed to rule his judgment and actions. Acting wholly on his physical desires, ignoring reason and the appeal of the heart, he has given himself wholly over to the systems of growth and appetite associated with the vegetative soul. Thus, to quote Pico once again, the misguided lover has painfully devolved into "a plant and not a man" (10).

Unbeknownst to Redcrosse, he has now pledged himself to the Circe-like worker of this very change, and even embarks enthusiastically toward the same sad destination.⁶⁴ The symbolism of the cure is as potent as the curse, as Fradubio explains, "We may not chaunge (quoth he) this evil plight, / Till we be bathed in a living well; / That is the terme prescribed by the spell" (I.ii.43.3-5). For all of our discussion of the soul's latent potential, as evidenced in the Error episode, the

⁶⁴It is worth noting Redcrosse's comical reaction to the sentient tree: "Astond he stood, and up his hair did hove, / And with that sudein horror could no member move" (I.ii.31.8-9). As Mark Rose cleverly points out, Redcrosse has become rather treelike in this moment of stupefied terror (35). This is an unfortunate sign, it seems, that Redcrosse's own spiritual degeneration has already begun.

case of Fradubio presents an unsettling dilemma. All of Fradubio's contrition and willingness to warn others against following the same self-destructive path can do nothing to restore the poor, mutated soul to his proper place in the hierarchy of being. Nothing short of a consecrating ablution from the "living well" can cleanse Fradubio from his vegetative mire and free his soul to pursue the upward evolution of its spiritual destiny. Likewise, Redcrosse's own attempts to purify his soul and manifest its hidden virtues will only take him lower until experience of grace in the House of Holinesse.

The third person (or rather persons) in Book One's diabolical trinity, the Sans brothers take the role of the Holy Spirit or comforter, although of comfort these cruel yet stoic Saracens offer precious little. And following the trend established with Archimago and Duessa, these three brothers might also correspond to the Soul in Neoplatonic cosmology, likewise depicting a numerological parody of the three divisions within the human soul.⁶⁵ Like the aforementioned villains, as sons of Aveugle or "blindness," these brothers also maintain ties to the darker and more grotesque elements of the classical pagan pantheon. They are nephews of Night as well, the eldest of the pagan deities according to Hesiod's accounting and ever a dreaded presence as her sable pineons and suffocating vapors foul the pages of Spenser's allegory. As Roche notes, the three Saracens "represent the progressive deterioration of the human soul through spiritual blindness" (1081n). Each of them represents a foil for Redcrosse as he moves farther away from

⁶⁵ A comparable trio appears with the three brothers in Book IV: Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond. They are the Saracens' positive antithesis as children of Agape, that is the "charity" or "perfect love" of the New Testament: "And now abideth faith, hope and love, even these three: but the chiefest of these is love" (*Geneva Bible*, 1 Cor. 13:13). Of course, these virtues also appear in the form of the three venerable sisters in the House of Holinesse, to be discussed in full in the next chapter. See also the interpretations of the brothers by Roche in *The Kindly Flame* (15-31) and Carol Kaske in "Hallmarks of Platonism and the Sons of Agape" (15-71).

the light of divine revelation, which came to his aid in the encounter with Errour, and gives himself over to the confounding muddle of the land of shapes and shadows.

These three brothers in arms are spirited in the Platonic sense and certainly not lacking in heroism, having much in common with the worldview of the Homeric epics and the grim resolution that a life of accomplishment in such an unforgiving universe demands. Of course, the Saracen brothers, as enemies of Holinesse, are primarily defined by their abrasive, negative qualities, on down to their baldly allegorical names: *Sansfoy*, *Sansloy*, and *Sansjoy*. That is to say, *faithlessness*, *lawlessness*, and *joylessness*, appropriately in the French given their derivation from the Saracen enemies of Charlemagne in the poems, songs, and chronicles of the Roncesvalles Cycle. As such, they appear both alien and familiar, and despite their antithetical spiritual allegiances to Redcrosse, they reflect his own values in surprising ways. Although foreigners, they are still knights, after all. As Graham Hough notes, “We might add that neither in Ariosto nor in Tasso do the exigencies of the faith exclude chivalry and courtesy to those outside its bounds” (Hough 18). While the Saracens certainly represent a set of tangible evils in the narrative, their highest virtue is honor, which they are determined to defend to the uttermost extremes of both courage and cruelty. Even in death, Sansfoy maintains the Homeric warrior’s defiant stance against a brutal, unsympathetic universe:

He tumbling downe alive,
With bloody mouth his mother earth did kis,
Greeting his grave: his grudging ghost did strive
With the fraile flesh; at last it flitted is,
Whither the soules doe fly of men, that live amis. (I.ii.19.5-9)

Even in this grotesque display of a pagan enemy dispatched to a hopeless afterlife, connections appear between the Saracen and the Christian knight. The phrase “mother earth” implies the Saracen’s vulgar physicality, as his miserable soul slips away to a destination so grim that the poet avoids speaking of it directly. All the while, Redcrosse wrestles with the problems of existence as an embodied soul, moving toward a failure already modeled in the horrifying metamorphosis of Fradubio.

Like the mournful, departed souls in the underworld of the classical epics, the fallen Sansfoy’s ability to find peace in the afterlife depends upon his surviving kindred’s performance of certain concrete actions in his memory, specifically by fulfilling the requirement of vengeance, nearly always a cruel and vicious drive in Spenser’s depiction.⁶⁶ Duessa reminds Sansjoy of this grave and binding responsibility as he suffers from insomnia on the eve of his duel with Redcrosse at the House of Pride:

Dead is *Sansfoy*, his vitall paines are past,
Though greeved ghost for vengeance deepe do grone:
He lives, that shall him pay his dewties last,
And guiltie Elfin blood shall sacrifice in hast. (I.iv.49.6-9)

Also noteworthy is the need for a blood sacrifice to please the miserable spirit of Sansjoy’s departed brother, possibly an indirect reference to the sacrifice of Christ’s atonement, although

⁶⁶Regardless of its prominence in the warrior code of the classical epics, for Spenser, vengeance itself is not a heroic or praiseworthy quality. As Medina, whose name means “balance,” advises a warring trio of knights in Book II: “Ne ought the prayse of prowesse more doth marre, / Then fowle revenging rage, and base contentious iarre” (II.ii.30.8-9). The inverse of vengeance in Spenser’s moral system is love, the proper motivation for deeds of arms, whether familial, romantic, or friendly. This becomes all the more evident in the incident from Book II, as the knights, potential friends and allies according to the code of chivalry, each fight for a female beloved, who, in their turn, are feuding sisters.

only the blood of the slayer, Redcrosse, will serve in the brothers' vengeful belief system. They are Nephews to Night herself, and their entire mythological system suggests a sort of "pagan darkness," comparable to the Homeric age. Likewise, they are representatives of heroic "spiritedness," although misdirected. And it is in this capacity in particular that the lion serves as their foil, as it instinctively pledges itself to Una's protection.⁶⁷ Lewis's remark on the lion in *Spenser's Images of Life*, conveys the simple animal's embodiment of the rightly directed spiritedness that the brothers lack: "The lion is a type of the natural, the ingenuous, the untaught: the humble creature that goes right without knowing, or hardly knowing, what it does. It licked Una's hands *as if* it knew her wronged innocence" (83). To complicate the picture we might note an appearance of heroism in Sansloy's fight against the lion. Although an awful action for the sake of capturing Una, Alpers characterizes it as a "genuine heroic combat, not the pitting of good against evil" (313). Even while fighting a beast that has gained our sympathies, Sansloy begins to resemble several iconographic figures of heroism: Samson and the lion, Hercules and the Lion of Nemea, or even the markedly unheroic encounters between lions and Christian martyrs in the colosseum. Redcrosse's journey intersects with that of the Saracens to such a degree that their destinies and even their causes seem to merge together, culminating in the ultimate inversion as Sansloy lays claim to Una and Redcrosse becomes the sole defender of Duessa after the mortal wounding of Sansjoy. The similarity betrays a hidden danger, as Redcrosse and the Saracens operate by many of the same rules of chivalric behavior, as when

⁶⁷The spirited or emotional soul provides a crucial intermediary between the monstrous appetites and the rational soul that is the true mark of humanity. In *The Republic*, Plato describes its proper orientation within humanity's internal hierarchy: "Then fashion one other form of a lion and one of a man and let the first be far the largest and the second second in size" (588d). In turn, each of these stands above the chimerical monster of the appetitive soul. Although Havelock cautions against interpreting these divisions too literally, suggesting that Plato offers them as modes or functions of the soul rather than clearly defined parts (203).

Redcrosse displays Sansfoy's inverted shield, pitifully unaware that he has claimed the *faithlessness* emblazoned thereon as his own.

Led along by Duessa, who knows the way all too well, Redcrosse comes upon the House of Pride, the first great architectural set piece in Spenser's allegory. Even for the unseasoned Redcrosse, the place seems questionable enough with its fawning courtiers and the haughtiness of Lucifera. Most of all, the newly arrived knight takes offense at his tepid welcome from the mistress of the place, thinking "that great Princesse too exceeding proud, / That to strange knight no better countenance allowd" (I.iv.15.8-9). While Redcrosse's unspoken condemnation has the appearance of a moral judgment—courtesy is the sixth and most refined of Spenser's virtues, after all—it hides the reality of his wounded honor. After his victories against Error and Sansfoy, Redcrosse has begun to take too much pride in himself to bear his lack of notoriety in Lucifera's court, where Duessa, on the other hand, receives a great deal of notoriety and attention. And perhaps this slight still pains Redcrosse as he lies awake on the eve of his battle against Sansjoy, continually stirred with notions of glory and honor:

The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,
And is with childe of glorious great intent,
Can never rest, untill it forth have brought
Th'eternall brood of glorie excellent... (I.v.1.1-4)

These lines present an apparent contrast between heroic actions as the offspring of a virtuous heart with the vile and impotent creatures of Error's brood, though perhaps Redcrosse is more like his first foe at this point than he would care to realize. This fecundity is customary of the virtuous Spenserian hero, who both conceives noble thoughts and actions and bears them forth into the world with great labor. For instance, the Proem to Book IV: "The Legend of Friendship"

associates heroic action with and procreation and productive action: “For it of honor and all vertue is / The roote, and brings forth glorious flowres of fame...” (IV.P.2.6-7). This fertile notion is confirmed and illustrated toward the close of the same book with the marriage myth of Florimell and Marinell, where land and sea are metaphorically united at the triumphal culmination of a long-interrupted courtship. For Spenser, even an ordinary courtship and marriage can be a heroic undertaking if faithfully and successfully conducted, as demonstrated in the discussion of the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* in the previous chapter. Such a fiery, passionate emotion as *eros* quite often inspires Spenser’s heroic knights to the pursuit of noteworthy but dangerous undertakings, a conception the poet shares with Ficino, who expresses his view of love as an ennobling impulse in his expositions on the Platonic Dialogues.⁶⁸ But without a suitable beloved, whose inner virtue impels the soul of the lover into higher thoughts and actions, the impulse devolves into mere appetite. And, as Cicero writes in his treatise *On Friendship*, “without virtue friendship cannot exist at all” (55). For Spenser, romantic love at its best becomes a specialized form of friendship, expressed in companionate language suggestive of the perfected love of *agape*.

Carelessly directed, however, this same powerful impulse might just as well propel the one so afflicted headlong towards his or her own destruction. Employed in the service of such an unworthy object as Duessa, Redcrosse’s nobler inclinations toward honor and chivalry provide the fuel to his amorous desire for the false lady, which in turn sets his heroic heart ablaze in the

⁶⁸Ficino theorized at great length on matters of love, expressed most often in his own life in the male friendships he honored with cultish devotion and an ambiguous eroticism (Kristeller 282-84). Much of Ficino’s interpretation passed into the Renaissance understanding of “Platonic love,” perhaps even including the use of the phrase itself (286). The companionate love of Spenser likely takes some strong influence as well from Castiglione’s rendition of the Ladder of Love, which switches the homoerotic love typical of the Platonic tradition for a male lover and female beloved.

pursuit of misguided action. And with the haughty Lucifera lies the temptation of placing one's loyalty in the thankless service of an unworthy sovereign, a usurper whose entire kingdom is established upon a false foundation. The moral sentiment throughout the episode takes on a Boethian character, as Lucifera, her ministers, and every counterfeit character in her glittering hall have thrust themselves with great energy toward the upper rim of Fortune's Wheel. Already, the axle creaks, and the Wheel prepares to turn. The impending crash is apparent from the structural instability of her noble house: "For on a sandie hill, that still did flitt, / And fall away, it mounted was full hie, / That every breath of heaven shaketh itt..." (I.iv.5.5-7). Like the house foolishly built upon the sand in the biblical parable, Lucifera's House of Pride stands on a foundation of so many lies and false appearances.⁶⁹ As Mark Rose interprets the episode, "The House of Pride represents Duessa's solution to the human problem, and the point of the episode is the total inadequacy of that way of life to satisfy authentic human needs" (50). What the isolated, wilderness hermitage of Archimago is to the contemplative life, the House of Pride is to the active life of worldly affairs and honors at court, each of which are representative of a potentially fruitful sphere of human action, pursued out of dubious motivations and driven toward destructive ends.

The grotesque and hellish imagery of Lucifera's six chief courtiers reveals one of the universal truths of Spenser's created world: a corruption in the soul produces a corresponding effect of illness or deformity in the body. For all of their apparent evil, they are still a tortured

⁶⁹ As the parable states, "But whosoever heareth these my wordes, and doeth them not, shalbe lickened unto a foolish man, which hath buylded his house upon the sand: / And the raine fell, and the floods came, and the windes blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and the fall thereof was great" (*Geneva Bible*, Matt. 7:26-27). Spenser's allusion to this parable prepares us to identify the other great house of Book I, the House of Holinesse, as that other sturdy house, built on the solid foundation of Christ's moral and spiritual instructions in the Sermon on the Mount and the biblical wisdom tradition from which these teachings derive.

and pathetic lot, as are most of the standard bearers of wickedness in Spenser's poetry. This is once again a reflection of that timeless moral and spiritual law from Augustine: "For you have imposed order, and so it is that the punishment of every disordered mind is its own disorder" (*Confessions* 1.19). Clearly the tortured forms of Lucifera's chief courtiers provide the external manifestation of a spiritual state in absolute disarray, the sobering result of a pattern of unchecked impulses. Likewise, each of them rides upon a steed of one strange sort or another, "With like conditions to their kindes applyde," calling to mind the various animal metaphors used by Plato for the taming of the unruly soul (I.iv.18.4). As the seven deadly sins—pride with her six wicked attendants—this whole company is bound together in empty pleasure and shared misery. Finally, Spenser ends the set-piece with a tour-de-force stanza demonstrating the interdependence of these seven vices, each of which encompasses a miniature hell in its own right:

How mortgaging their lives to *Covetise*,
Through wastfull Pride, and wanton Riotise,
They were by law of that proud Tyrannesse
Provokt with *Wrath*, and *Envyes* false surmise,
Condemned to that Dongeon mercillesse,
Where they should live in wo, and dye in wretchednesse. (I.v.46.4-9)

None of these vices stands alone, selfish and dysfunctional as they are. Significantly enough, these self-absorbed apparitions are yoked together as a team, and in these lines Spenser demonstrates how each of the vices leads inevitably to another with ruthlessly diabolical logic and efficiency, a mocking reflection of the poet's own progression of the virtues and the

chivalric fraternity (*pace* Britomart) among the patron knights of the poem, at least on the few occasions they come together along their far-flung and isolated quests.

Against the worldliness of Lucifera's court, Spenser composes the contrasting picture of the elemental world occupied by the mythological creatures of the pastoral realm. Though the fauns and satyrs of Sylvanus's wilderness court deliver Una from the immediate threat posed by the vicious Sansloy, they are at best morally ambiguous, holding the maiden against her will as an object of veneration as well as temporarily restrained sexual desire.⁷⁰ As a friend and ally of these quasi-human savages, Sir Satyrane appears an unlikely player in the providential design to lead Una out of her wilderness exile toward her long awaited reunion with the Redcrosse Knight. Satyrane's history and upbringing reveals him as the quintessential natural man, who has arrived at some limited understanding of universal ideals of beauty, goodness, and truth in the absence of the Christian revelation. We may contrast him with the pagan Sans brothers, who profess their grim and vengeful warrior ideal as a response to an unsympathetic, fatalistic cosmos. Likewise, he stands over and against the morally corrupt glory-seeking of Lucifera's court, representative of the worst ambitions of the City of Man as inveighed against and systematically pathologized in the thought of Augustine.⁷¹ Though not in perfect alignment with the otherworldly City of God, Redcrosse's preordained destination as we discover in Canto x, Satyrane takes his place among those enlightened pagans who improvised their own solutions to the universal problems of human existence by seeking out voluntary exile in the internal wilderness of contemplation.

⁷⁰ Northrop Frye explains the role of nature in "The Structure of Imagery in *The Faerie Queene*": "Ordinary experience, the morally neutral world of physical nature, never appears as such in *The Faerie Queene*, but its place in Spenser's scheme is symbolized by nymphs and other elemental spirits, or by the satyrs, who may be tamed and awed by the sight of Una or more habitually stimulated by the sight of Hellenore" (281).

⁷¹ See Åke Bergvall for an extensive comparison of the House of Pride to Augustine's *City of Man* (21-42).

And so his own studies of natural law, prompted by the essential goodness discoverable within his own soul, lead Satyrane to a basic understanding of those same universal truths represented in Una, as depicted in his submission to her tutelage:

He wondred at her wisdom heavenly rare,
Whose like in womens witt he never knew;
And when her curteous deeds he did compare,
Gan her admire, and her sad sorrowes rew,
Blaming of Fortune, which such troubles threw,
And ioyd to make prooffe of her cruelty
On gentle Dame, so hurtlesse, and so trew:
Thenceforth he kept her goodly company,
And learnd her discipline of faith and verity. (I.vi.31.1-9)

Thus instructed by Una, Satyrane for a moment becomes more a patron of Holinesse than the lady's rightful champion, who at the same time is nearing the shameful end of his illicit dalliance with Duessa. This captivating moment would seem to suggest that the goodness of a righteous pagan ultimately outweighs the false displays of the superficial Christian. As Thomas a Kempis writes in *The Imitation of Christ*, "Happy is he whom truth itself teaches, not by figures and words that pass away, but by an immediate communication of itself" (1.3.1). So Satyrane approaches the divine source not by logical chains or dialectical scaffolding but through something resembling the divine gift of pure intellection, that is, direct and unimpeded knowing as the angels experience it. Like the worthiest among the pagans—Plato and Plotinus, Homer and Virgil—Satyrane receives the gift of knowing some significant aspects of the Christian revelation, although he does not quite understand it in full. Spenser quite conspicuously prevents

Satyrane from meeting and befriending Redcrosse and Arthur, the two Christian knights who are bound together in friendship and shared spiritual purpose as with a golden chain.

But however much of the Platonic teachings the poet has incorporated into his own worldview, Spenser still maintains that the revelation contained therein is insufficient in itself to remedy the inherent fallenness embedded within human nature.⁷² Thus even Satyrane, this most worthy of pagans within *The Faerie Queene*, fails to wholly vanquish his opponent, left, as it were, in limbo against the criticism of human nature embodied in the lawless Saracen, Sansloy. And so Spenser presents this gruesome stalemate in terms that make these embattled foes sound remarkably alike:

So fiersly, when these knights had breathed once,
They gan to fight retourne, increasing more
Their puissant force, and cruell rage attonce,
With heaped strokes more hugely, then before,
That with their drery wounds and bloody gore
They both deformed, scarsely could bee known. (I.vi.45.1-6)

From the perspective of divine grace, it seems the difference between them is more or less negligible, despite the valor and ferocity with which Satyrane comes to Una's defense. But this display of heroism ends in a moment of bitter irony. Though the rustic knight delivers his newly pledged lady from the bodily harm that Sansloy might have caused her, she makes her escape

⁷²F.M. Padelford found Spenser's moral significations in this episode particularly condemnatory: "In this canto the poet reveals much Calvinistic severity and something of the intolerance of an intellectual aristocrat" (*Variorum* 1.437). The worthiness of Satyrane appears to offer no exception to the imprecation, perhaps because the rustic knight requires direct instruction by the noble Una before he can be deemed suitable to bear the weight of the narrative as a surrogate patron of Holinesse.

with Archimago following close behind. Despite the valor and good intentions of this noblest of savages, there is nothing Satyrane can do to protect Una from the spiritual danger of this far more clever and insidious foe. At this juncture, even Redcrosse has fallen under Archimago's influence through the enchantments of Duessa. We must remember that although the patron of Holinesse professes Christian ideals through the emblem of the cross emblazoned on his shield and doublet, he is as yet unrepentant and uncatechized, still suffering the spiritual ravages of his mortal flaw. Like the aimless young man addressed in James Wheldon Johnson's lyrical sermon on "The Prodigal Son," Redcrosse has squandered his otherworldly birthright and found himself carried far from his appointed course of action long before he ever so much as suspected he was going astray. All of this takes us back to Redcrosse's difficulty in restraining his horse during his first appearance—all the more relevant now that the struggling patron has overshot the mark and must now go back to the beginning. This return journey, however, will require strength and effort far beyond the capacity of his own fading abilities, and ultimately dependent on the intervention of a higher spiritual authority.

In a certain sense, the quickest route to the completion of Redcrosse's quest will carry the disgraced patron back to the very beginning of his spiritual journey, to begin again along a more worthy path. Now that the first half of Book I has reached its sobering, twilit conclusion, Redcrosse will begin to learn a hard lesson that the careful reader has probably gleaned from the first two cantos: the journey of this archetypal Christian pilgrim is primarily spiritual rather than physical or geographical. Therefore he will always remain no closer to his intended goal unless he has first addressed the conflicts raging within his own soul, though his physical route take him through any number of woods, fields, or mysterious castles across the dreamy, amorphous

geography of Fairy Land. As St. Augustine writes of his journey across a similar spiritual landscape:

It is one thing from a wooded summit to catch a glimpse of the homeland of peace and not to find the way to it, but vainly to attempt the journey along an impracticable route surrounded by the ambushes and assaults of fugitive deserters with their chief, 'the lion and the dragon' (Ps. 90:13). It is another thing to hold on to the way that leads there, defended by the protection of the heavenly emperor. There no deserters from the heavenly army lie waiting to attack. For this way they hate like a torture. (*Confessions* 7.27)

Once initiated into the life of this higher, inward path, Redcrosse will find himself beyond the reach of such lesser foes and distractions as have heretofore plagued every hard-won segment of the knight's protracted quest. To make proper progress along this narrow way, Redcrosse will have to become a more skillful reader of the very allegory in which he lives and moves, a process of education and spiritual reorientation which can only begin after he has abandoned any notion of succeeding solely on his own merits. In some sense, Redcrosse's moments of complete and utter spiritual desolation in the dungeon of Orgoglio and near self-destruction under the influence of Despayre represent the world-weary knight's first, unsteady movements towards the commencement of a new quest, along with a new way of being in the world. But before this downtrodden prodigal can undertake the journey back toward his true spiritual home, he will have to experience an irresistible encounter with divine grace, embodied here in the timely intervention of Prince Arthur, who might even be characterized as the over-arching protagonist of the entire poem.

4. THAT YONDER CITY

And now we ask again, What is this New Being? The New Being is not something that simply takes the place of the Old Being. But it is a renewal of the Old, which has been corrupted, distorted, split and almost destroyed. Salvation does not destroy creation; but it transforms the Old Creation into a New one. Therefore, we can speak of the New in terms of a *re*-newal: The threefold “*re*,” namely, *re*-conciliation, *re*-union, *re*-surrection.

– Paul Tillich, “The New Being”

The structural and allegorical similarities between *Faerie Queene* Books I and II have led many critics to discuss them as a unit; however, the exact nature of their relationship has inspired an ongoing debate. Central to this debate is A.S.P. Woodhouse’s position that the two books are concerned with the separate cosmic orders of nature and grace. On this distinction, Woodhouse writes “that whereas what touches the Redcross Knight bears primarily upon revealed religion, or belongs to the order of grace, whatever touches Guyon bears upon natural ethics, or belongs to the order of nature” (Woodhouse 204). While Woodhouse’s basic premise has generally proved a useful means of interpreting Books I and II, critics have been more reluctant to accept the conclusions he draws from it. For Woodhouse, the distinction between the orders of nature and grace applies not only between Books I and II but also between Book I and the rest of the poem. As a result, Woodhouse leaves Guyon and the knights of the remaining books to develop their virtues, deprived of the fruits of Holinesse and the intervention of grace. This is a troubling outlook on Spenser’s epic, especially since Woodhouse looks to the unwritten Book XII for Spenser’s synthesis of the two orders. Though we may question some of Woodhouse’s ideas, we cannot help but to acknowledge them in our discussion of Books I and II. As Kathleen Williams

writes, “Professor Woodhouse’s insight into the nature of the contrast between the quest of Red Crosse, the future saint, and that of Sir Guyon, must colour all our views upon the first two books, whether we agree with, or qualify it” (Williams 5). Before moving on to the subject of the soul’s contemplation in Book I with which this chapter is chiefly concerned, I will briefly survey several notable responses to Woodhouse’s claims. This discussion retains its relevance if we intend to read the books of *The Faerie Queene* as an orderly sequence rather than a somewhat arbitrary list of loosely connected but essentially independent virtues.

A.C. Hamilton builds on Woodhouse’s basic explanation of the two orders in Books I and II, but he discovers new relationships where Woodhouse had only admitted sharp distinctions. Hamilton writes, “At times, [Woodhouse] insists more strongly than Spenser upon an absolute separation of the two orders” (Hamilton 327). Rather than deferring Spenser’s synthesis of nature and grace to a nonexistent Book XII, Hamilton uses certain correspondences between Books I and II to reveal that the orders of nature and grace are satisfactorily resolved within the pair. In Hamilton’s explanation of the two books, Redcrosse and Guyon direct their journeys toward distinct but ultimately compatible consummations: Redcrosse toward his spiritual home in the New Jerusalem, the safe haven at the end of the path of Holinesse, and Guyon toward the regeneration of the fallen body through the exercise of temperance. The heroes’ complementary achievements on the levels of nature and grace represent the human effort to reestablish harmony with the divine will in both time and eternity. Kathleen Williams offers a similar interpretation of the first two books, but she emphasizes the foundational role of Redcrosse’s quest in setting a precedent for Guyon and enabling him to proceed within his own sphere. For Williams, Redcrosse’s accomplishments on the level of grace lend legitimacy to the quests of later knights, and this goes especially for Guyon, whose alliance with Redcrosse provides difficulties for any

critic who would sharply divide the interests of the two cosmic orders. For the repentant and holy Redcrosse, poised to reenter the world after a spiritual recovery in the House of Holinesse, “the earthly kingdom is changed from a place of spiritual danger to one of spiritual opportunity” (Williams 32). And Guyon is the inheritor of this grace: the freedom to struggle through the world in the pursuit of virtue without the debilitating fear of damnation. Although complete restoration of humanity’s prelapsarian nature remains ever unattainable within the fallen universe of Spenser’s epic, human happiness ultimately depends on the attempt to bring about this restoration. As the heroic patron of temperance, “Guyon comes to restore man, not to his rightful place as a citizen of heaven as does Arthur, but to its counterpart, his rightful place upon earth” (Hamilton 334). For the purposes of this chapter, I will accept Woodhouse’s basic premise that the chief operations of Books I and II take place on the levels of grace and nature, respectively. However, Woodhouse’s argument that the orders of nature and grace are not resolved in any extant portion of *The Faerie Queene* does not stand against the weight of opposing critical views. Hamilton has effectively argued for the compatibility of Redcrosse and Guyon’s efforts within the spheres of grace and nature, as well as the probability that Spenser brings the two orders into resolution as early as Book I. In this chapter and the next, I will take the preceding arguments farther in demonstrating a unifying continuity that guides *The Faerie Queene*’s progression from virtue to virtue. Beginning with the virtue of Holinesse, which breaks the bonds of original sin, each book follows the upward evolution of a single soul as it takes the form, or incarnation even, of a new heroic patron for every virtue.

Now that I have surveyed the critical debate surrounding the relationship between *Faerie Queene* Books I and II, I will proceed to explore this relationship as it relates to the role contemplation plays in both books. The *Spenser Encyclopedia* explains contemplation as the

practice of the “intellectual virtues” of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, which are “theoretical or ‘pure’ wisdom” and “intuitive knowledge” (Bernard 190). While Aristotle explains the intellectual virtues as inherent potentialities in the “intellectual compartment of the soul,” the intellectual virtues of Aquinas are “sometimes incorporated into the mystical tradition as the last gifts of the Holy Spirit, granted chiefly to contemplatives in the stages of illumination and perfection.” (Bernard 190). These Thomist and Aristotelian conceptions are not incommensurable with the apophatic tradition of mystical theology as we have discussed it, with its strong influences of Neoplatonism. The distinction between contemplation as the realization of human potential and as a transcendental experience of divine qualities is crucial to our understanding of contemplation as it operates on both the levels of nature and grace. The basic association of Books I and II with the orders of nature and grace offers a suitable framework to discuss the different types of contemplation and the faculties of the soul exercised therein, for “This difference [between nature and grace] leaves its mark upon the whole character of the education which the two knights receive” (Woodhouse 205). Books I and II both contain forms of contemplation that are appropriate to the orders of grace and nature, respectively. In Book I, contemplation plays a crucial role in the moral development of the Red Cross Knight. It is the allegorical figure of *Contemplation* who leads the knight to his transcendent vision of the New Jerusalem. On more broad terms, the entirety of Redcrosse’s tenure in the House of Holinesse represents a period of withdrawal from the world in order to reflect on the soul’s relationship to the eternal, a type of contemplation fitting for progress on the level of grace. Although Book II operates on a lower level, the Legend of Temperance also has its moments of contemplation, which appear specifically aimed at the realignment of the human mind and body within the natural order. The chief contemplative moments of Book II show the elfin knight Guyon

wrestling with his own nature on the levels of mind and body. As I will demonstrate in the course of this chapter, the act of contemplation, consisting of both spiritual and rational elements within the soul, offers a possible solution to the problem posed by the separate orders of nature and grace, as irreconcilable as their demands may sometimes seem. We will find the resolution of soul and body, divine and secular in the alliance of Redcrosse and Guyon, and to some extent in the knightly bond established between Redcrosse and Arthur. Moreover, these stand as the first in a web of relationships formed amongst the poem's representatives of virtue, which brings together the individual quests and scattered episodes of *The Faerie Queene* beneath a unified thematic vision.

Returning to our discussion of Redcrosse's journey, we have come to a fulcrum in the narrative. The encounter with Orgoglio reveals just how lost to himself the Redcrosse Knight has become, as he has simultaneously estranged himself from the true path to spiritual virtue, represented in Una, and pledged his loyalty to the false Duessa. The enormity of his mistake could not be more apparent as the enchantress escorts the wounded Sansjoy into a nightmarish pagan underworld, a sequence which demonstrates her kinship to an alternative pantheon of demonic beings. Returning to find that Redcrosse has fled the House of Pride, Duessa imitates her better original and rides to find him: "she would no lenger byde, / But forth she went, to seeke him far and wide" (I.vii.2.4-5). Quite unlike Una, however, Duessa seeks out Redcrosse not to restore his loyalty to "Truth," which she imitates under the assumed name of Fidessa, but as a predator pursues its prey. Redcrosse has suffered a series of spiritual defeats, inheriting the flaws of each of the Saracen brothers as they have entered the text. After winning his two skirmishes with the Saracens and barely escaping the House of Pride, Redcrosse foolishly assumes he is safe from spiritual peril, just as Duessa closes in. Now reunited, and resting by a

fountain's side their demeanor together is excessively casual, especially as compared to the measured conversation Redcrosse once shared with the veiled and modest Una: "Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame, / Poured out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd, / Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame" (I.vii.7.1-3). Now become complacent, Redcrosse forgets the dangers of Fairy Land's enchanted countryside. The fountain, as Spenser reveals in a mythic interlude, is inhabited by an unfortunate nymph of Diana's retinue, who "Satt downe to rest in middest of the race," sheltering from the heat while she attended her mistress on the hunt (I.vii.5.4). Once again, a character's spiritual failings manifest in an external, physical change, as Diana places the fountain under a perpetual curse: "Thenceforth her waters waxed dull and slow, / And all that drinke thereof, do faint and feeble grow" (I.vii.5.8-9). Perhaps if Redcrosse were more perceptive he would discern the qualities of the fountain with some tinge of familiarity, for the mistakes of the nymph reflect his own. In this sense, the incident contains possible echoes of the Narcissus myth, although Redcrosse fails to see his reflection in the water. For that matter, Redcrosse has begun to resemble the sad state of Colin Clout in the "December Eclogue," as he languishes like Narcissus at a fountain's side, having surrendered to a cycle of self-defeating anguish and despair. As Redcrosse lounges by the fountain, intoxicated by the water's curse and the false lady by his side, the phrase "Poured out in loosnesse" indicates the diminution of his powers, along with a suggestion of sexual climax. The would-be Knight of Holinesse is now complete in his failure, trading his loyalty to Una, or "Truth," for a momentary dalliance with Duessa. It is no accident that the area of the fountain and the surrounding bower resembles a miniature Eden. A. Bartlett Giamatti identifies "the lure to rest" as a characteristic temptation of the many false Edens that dot Spenser's fictional landscape (246). If mutability is a constant

source of spiritual and physical danger in *The Faerie Queene*, so is the foolish desire to rest “in midst of the race,” that is, to expect any sort of lasting fulfillment before the appointed time.

Up until now, Spenser has taken great care to establish the extent and nature of Redcrosse’s personal failings, which in turn are reflected in the adversaries that rise against him. The reader knew well enough the folly and spiritual danger in Redcrosse’s abandonment of Una, the enormity of which grows ever deeper with each encounter of the Saracen brothers, *Sansfoy*, *Sansloy*, and *Sansjoy*. Likewise, when the hideous giant Orgoglio parts the forest with a thunderous crash, we should realize that the threat derives from an internal source. Having cast aside both arms and armor—an act of foolishness for any knight but here faithlessness as well—Redcrosse puts up a pathetic resistance. The ferocious giant moves like a force of nature, using an uprooted tree as his club, and when he brings it down, the mere wind from the blow is enough to bring Redcrosse to the ground. But this is not a battle won by sheer brute strength so much as the qualities Orgoglio represents to the knight’s psychology. This becomes all the more clear when we look into the giant’s background and motivations:

So grown great through arrogant delight
Of th’high descent, whereof he was yborne,
And through presumption of his matchlesse might,
All other powres and knighthood he did scorne. (I.vii.10.1-4)

This is pride, raw, unadorned, and aggressive, without the elegant presumption of *Lucifera* and her court. Like that arrogant princess, Orgoglio’s estimation of himself exceeds his origins, as the son of the Earth and Aeolus, the king of the winds in classical myth. Hardly a “high descent,” his conception recalls the subterranean origins of earthquakes in classical thought, as Aeolus’s winds swell into a hollow of the earth: “and trebling the dew time, / In which the wombes of

wemen do expyre, / Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slyme, / Puft up with emptie wynd, and fild with sinfull cryme” (I.vii.9.6-9). This account also parodies the biblical narrative of humanity’s creation as presented in the second Chapter of Genesis, in which God forms the first man from the dust of the earth and the animating force of the divine breath. Orgoglio’s base origin renders him into a figure of human presumption, the lowly clay railing against its creator. He has his model in various giants in classical mythology, as well as Dante’s account of the biblical Nimrod, architect of the Tower of Babel: “His very babbling testifies the wrong / he did on earth: he is Nimrod, through whose evil / mankind no longer speaks a common tongue” (*Inferno* 31.76-79). The notions of rebellious pride have sexual connotations for Redcrosse as well, with Orgoglio’s sudden onset and strangely inflated appearance suggesting for some a representation of the male libido (Rose 92). In surrendering to temptation, Redcrosse has placed his bodily desires over the call to Holinesse, effectively elevating the order of nature over the order of grace. This spiritual inversion becomes an inescapable hell as Redcrosse becomes the giant’s captive. As Williams writes, “The horror of Orgoglio’s dungeon is made much more real to us than the captivity of the ancients in the House of Pride, for it is the recognition of spiritual nothingness, an experience one may suppose closed to the pre-Christian world and more terrible, more truly deathlike, than any desolation known to it” (21). The conditions leave Redcrosse hopeless to succeed by his own strength and open to an experience of grace.

Prince Arthur first appears in the capacity that will occupy his many appearances throughout the poem: the perfect image of a knight, clad in flawless plate armor and astride an impressive charger. The Ekphrastic detail of Arthur’s shining armaments recalls the description of Redcrosse at the beginning of the book. However, the contrasts are all the more striking for these similarities:

His haughtie Helmet, horrid all with gold,
Both glorious brightnesse, and great terrour bredd;
For all the crest a Dragon did enfold
With greedie pawes, and over all did spredd
His golden wings... (I.vii.31.1-5)

No disjunction appears here between the knight and his armor, and the prince's entire appearance gives him an air of authority befitting his progress in the virtues. According to the "Letter of the Authours," Prince Arthur fits into the narrative as a model of the combined perfection of the virtues, which Spenser terms Magnificence. Significantly, Arthur has only recently ventured into the world after completing an ethical education under his guardian Timon. For his final perfection in the virtues, Arthur has departed from this womb of contemplation on the quest that will eventually lead the prince to the discovery of his royal lineage and his destiny of heroic national pursuits. Of all Arthur's armaments, none quite compare with the prince's shield, as gorgeously ornate or indispensably practical as the others may be. The powers of this wondrous item surpass anything in the armory of Spenser's other heroes, a fitting enough adornment for the patron of Magnificence:

But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,
Before that shield did fade, and suddeine fall:
And when him list the raskall routes appall,
Men into stones therewith he could transmew,
And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all;
And when him list the prouder lookes subdew,
He would them gazing blind, or turne to other hew. (I.vii.35.3-9)

In a sense, such an item that destroys falsehood and lays bare the truth could provide the “skeleton key” to all of Fairy Land, where meanings lie hidden below an ever-shifting surface of shapes and shadows. One of Arthur’s primary functions of the poem will be to aid the other knights in their quests, embodying certain aspects of each book’s virtue and resolving problems which the patron knights find intractable. In the context of the other knight’s quests, Arthur becomes a vehicle for divine grace, as well as modeling the potential each knight may achieve if he or she perseveres in the current quest. As Redcrosse represents the beginning of Spenser’s progression of the virtues, his relationship to Arthur is particularly interesting, representing the beginning and the culmination of the same process.

The poem presents the quest of Arthur piecemeal, as he moves in and out of each book like the working of a golden thread through the larger pattern of a tapestry. His own quest will be to find Gloriana, the Fairy Queen, whose court the other knights have left. As Arthur explains to Una and Redcrosse, he has fallen in love with the appearance of her in a dream:

And slombring soft my hart did steale away
Me seemed, by my side a royall Mayd
Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:
So fayre a creature yet saw never sunny day. (I.ix.13.6-9)

On awaking, Prince Arthur realizes that his encounter with the Fairy Queen has taken place in his dreams. However, one detail lends the apparition a certain reality: an impression left in the grass beside the spot where the prince had slept. On the placement of this episode here rather than at Arthur’s earlier appearance, Rose writes, “The answer lies in the story itself, a tale of heroic faith” (Rose 109). The significance of Prince Arthur’s visionary experience should not be lost on us when compared to similar moments of heightened rapture across the shorter poems,

particularly in the contemplative vision of Sapience in “The Hymne of Heavenly Beautie” or of the absent but arguably more substantial lady in the *Amoretti*. And so we learn of the aim and nature of Arthur’s quest, which weaves throughout the other narratives and, presumably, exceeds them in scope. Likewise, he outstrips them all in virtue, as suits his royal destiny. For, as Aristotle suggests, the king should rightfully rise above his subjects as a model of virtue: “...the tyrant looks to his own advantage, the king to that of his subjects. For a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects; for a king who is not like that would be a mere titular king” (Aristotle 1160b). While Arthur surely outstrips the other patrons in strength of arm and virtue, it does appear that there is some final state of polish or perfection that he has yet to reach. Unfortunately, the available information concerning Spenser’s conception “Magnificence” is limited, as Arthur’s quest remains unfinished. Any possibility of Prince Arthur becoming the patron of virtue for an entire book remains a question for the imagination.

Although Arthur himself still has something to learn, he clearly represents a force greater than any individual virtue on the occasions when his own quest intersects with the narrative. Appearing just in time to aid Una in the wilderness and free Redcrosse from his imprisonment, Arthur appears not just as an authority figure but as a guardian appointed by heaven:

Ay me, how many perils doe enfold
The righteous man, to make him daily fall?
Were not that heavenly grace doth him uphold,
And stedfast truth acquite him out of all... (I.viii.1.1-4)

We need not delve too deeply into the historical allegory to appreciate Arthur's narrative function as a liberator and a means of grace for the fallen Redcrosse's troubled soul. The troubled knight's spiritual state could hardly take on a more hellish appearance, as we find him starved and hopeless in the horrid depths of Orgoglio's Castle. Rose suggests "that Spenser probably intends the castle, guarded by ignorance and dominated by the giant of fleshly delight, as an image of the Church on the eve of the Reformation" (105). Be that as it may, Arthur's actions in this episode enact the intervention of grace in the life of the soul as a monumental disruption of the status quo:

Which shaking off, he rent that yron dore,
With furious force, and indignation fell;
Where entred in, his foot could find no flore,
But all a deepe descent, as darke as hell,
That breathed ever forth a filthie banefull smell. (I.viii.39.5-9)

We might once again recall the violent upheavals that accompanied the Dissolution of the Monasteries, as Arthur violently tears the door from its hinges and ushers Redcrosse out of darkness and into the light. But delving into the spiritual level, Arthur becomes a Christ figure, reenacting the Harrowing of Hell, a sort of cosmic revolution during which Christ was believed to have liberated certain righteous souls, such as those of the old testament patriarchs, from their imprisonment among the damned. The great violence with which Arthur rends the iron door—possibly the greatest display of physical force from any of the poem's heroes—suggest the prince's typological identification with strongman figures like Hercules and Samson, both widely regarded in the symbolic language of Spenser's time as prototypes of Christ. Arthur's quest is not complete, of course, as he still chases after the distant Platonic ideals represented in Gloriana.

Yet perhaps it seems strange that a figure still toward a vision of Platonic perfection becomes a Christ figure and emblem of salvation in the quests of his fellow knights, a potentially inappropriate conflation from a Christian perspective. As Lewis writes in *Spenser's Images of Life*, "the Platonic level provided a meeting-ground between. It was unobjectionable to present an Arthur with philosophical overtones, and the Platonic Arthur was in turn easily syncretized with the Christian" (135). Why, then, does Redcrosse nearly succumb to the malicious influence of Despayre after what amounts to an encounter with divine grace, if only reflected in the "perfect mirror" of Prince Arthur? The discrepancy lies not in any limitation in the power of grace to influence the life of the soul, but in Redcrosse's ability to receive it.

Why then does Redcrosse's encounter with Despayre fall as it does after the knight's liberation from the dungeon of Orgoglio? As Alpers notes, "The Red Cross Knight encounters Despair not as the inevitable result of his weakened condition, but because he seeks him out to test his strength and to avenge what Despair has done to Sir Terwin" (350). While these motivations may appear admirable enough, they are intertwined with certain courtly notions of chivalric honor suspiciously similar to the self-aggrandizing social codes which held their questionable sway in the House of Pride. As we have seen already, Redcrosse's own language often invoked much the same terms of honor and vengeance that determined the warrior code of the Saracens. Despayre, however, is a foe that Redcrosse is quite unready to face, as he will not be defeated by any degree of strength or courage. This unsettling villain, resembling Redcrosse's own captivity with ragged clothes and greasy, unkempt hair, speaks to the knight's heart, with uncanny understanding of his weariness and fears:

The lenger life, I wote the greater sin,

The greater sin, the greater punishment:

All those great battels, which thou boasts to win,
Through strife, and blood-shed, and avengement,
Now praysd, hereafter deare thou shalt repent:
For life must life, and blood must blood repay.
Is not enough thy evill life forespent?
For he, that once hath missed the right way,
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray. (I.ix.43.1-9)

At this solemn juncture, Redcrosse's success depends not only on whether or not he will continue his quest, but whether or not he will choose to persist in the struggle of living. Couched in Despayr's wicked syllogisms, the knight's own instincts are twisted into a horrible but strangely familiar form. Redcrosse cannot help but to agree, as Despayre croons, "For what hath life, that may it loved make, / And gives not rather cause it to forsake?" (I.ix.44.4-5). Despayre is the spiritual state in which we first find Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. In his case, of course, this low point offers Boethius the opportunity to understand his downcast circumstances from the higher perspective of philosophy. And the attitude appears in certain devotional works as a spur to a holy life, as in the *Imitation of Christ*: "What is it that the infernal fire feeds upon but your sins? The more you spare yourself now, and follow the flesh, so much the more hereafter shall be your punishment, and you stow up greater fuel for the flame. In what thing a man has sinned, in the same shall he be punished" (1.18.2; 1.24.3). This proposition, intended as an impetus toward repentance and amendment of life, becomes a horrifying promise in the cynical perspective of Despair. The villain demonstrates a remarkable ability to undo the young knight's moral progress thus far, merely through his powers of speech. And he succeeds to such an extent "That all his manly powres it did disperse, / As he were charmed with

inchaunted rimes, / That oftentimes he quakt, and fainted oftentimes” (I.ix.48.7-9). The apparition of Despayre has a certain unsettling power beyond even some of the more deformed and vicious monsters in Spenser’s bestiary. His power derives from a certain quality of Spenser’s imagination, noted by Lewis in *The Allegory of Love*: “We have long looked for the origins of *The Faerie Queene* in Renaissance palaces and Platonic academies, and forgotten that it has humbler origins of at least equal importance in the Lord Mayor’s show, the chap-book, the bedtime story, the family Bible, and the village church. What lies next beneath the surface in Spenser’s poem is the world of popular imagination: almost, a popular mythology” (312). Despayre is a fairy tale creature of Redcrosse’s worst imagining, as he represents the worst that Redcrosse can conceive about himself. Tragically, Redcrosse succumbs, and would have plunged a dagger into his own breast were it not for Una’s intervention. This is an indication of Redcrosse’s moral weakness and that even his redemption from damnation in Orgoglio’s dungeon has not been sufficient to reform his soul. Spiritually however, this moment represents the necessity for the old self to die so that the new self can be born.

Redcrosse’s experiences leading up to his contemplative moment in the House of Holinesse emphasize the futility of human efforts to make significant progress in the virtues without the aid of grace. Even with the divine potential within the human soul, Spenser time and again reflects upon the human ability to succeed wholly on one’s own efforts, as we have seen in *The Shepheardes Calender*, *Muipotmos*, and, implicitly, in the earthly pairing of *The Fowre Hymnes*. Spenser’s depiction of contemplation in Book I is appropriate to the order of grace, as it employs the traditional language and concepts of medieval Christian mysticism, in which the contemplative wishes to transcend the natural world and experience the divine. Redcrosse’s spiritual progress within the House of Holinesse, from grief to charity and then to the

otherworldly vision of the New Jerusalem, follows the spiritual principles that St. Gregory the Great describes as “the two compunctions.” Gregory uses the term “compunction” to refer to the piercing emotions that draw the soul of the contemplative toward God. In the third book of his *Dialogues*, Gregory explains the operation of the two crucial forms of compunction:

There are two main types of compunction, however. The penitent thirsting for God feels the compunction of fear at first; later on, he experiences the compunction of love. When he considers his sins he is overcome with fear because he fears eternal punishment. Then when this fear subsides through prolonged sorrow and penance, a feeling of security emerges from an assurance of forgiveness, and the soul begins to burn with a love for heavenly joys. (*Dialogues* 173)

One discerns strong signs of the Neoplatonic influence, particularly that of the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition. Plotinus’s dissatisfaction with bodily existence and longing for integration with the hypostatic world glimpsed in his own transitory moments of spiritual rapture. But the progress of Redcrosse in Canto ix may be summed up with the following words from Gregory: “Thus the compunction of fear, when perfect, leads the soul to the compunction of love” (173). Taken thus, spiritual fear becomes a revelation of the insufficiency of the material universe, limited within the order of nature, which depends on its subordination to grace for its appropriate orientation in human life. This is a running theme in *The Faerie Queene*, although most of the epic unfolds within the testing ground of the lower order.

Led along now by Una, who knows the way as well as Duessa knew the way to the House of Pride, Redcrosse reaches the House of Holinesse to recover under the care of Celia and her three daughters. Here the allegory reaches a new clarity. The first sister, Fidelia, is

characterized by the brilliance of “her Christall face,” which dazzles the sight of any observer (I.x.12.7). This along with her “lilly white” robes recalls the appearance of Christ at the Transfiguration, along with the image of the disciples hiding their faces from the resplendent apparition before them (I.x.13.1).⁷³ The complexity of the figure deepens with a compounding of biblical symbols: in her right hand, a chalice filled with water and wine, and a serpent also coiled within it. The water and wine recall the famous miracle at Cana, with Christ’s first miracle of transmuting water into wine, juxtaposed in turn with the image of blood and water issuing from the wound in Christ’s side at the moment of his death. Both of these symbolic moments converge in the mystery of the Christian Eucharist, as the chalice itself suggests. The serpent hardly requires an introduction, for we have seen its like punctuated throughout the narrative, and the creature’s progenitor within the Genesis account persists as an all too familiar image. Mingled within all of these elements are intimations of fecundity, death, transformation, and rebirth. In *The Mythic Image*, Joseph Campbell identifies certain powers—indeed, one might say *virtues*—that have coalesced around the figure of the serpent in a surprising number of the world’s ancient mythologies: “For as the reader must by now have realized, the usual mythological association of the serpent is not, as in the Bible, with corruption, but with physical and spiritual health, as in the Greek caduceus” (286). This goes just as well for the staff of Aesculapius, for which the Greek caduceus has often been mistaken. Although in the case of Lucifera, the dragon seemed a

⁷³ The description in Matthew’s Gospel appears as follows: “And after six dayes, Jesus toke Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brought them up into an hie mountaine aparte, / And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sunne, and his clothes were as white as the light” (*Geneva Bible*, 17:1-2). The comparison might be made to the glorified Christ in the Book of Revelation as well: “And when I sawe him, I fell at his fete as dead: then he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Feare not: I am the first and the last” (*Geneva Bible*, 1:17).

sleeping threat, poised to awaken and devour the closest unfortunate bystander or, just as likely, the arrogant princess herself.

As it is often customary for an allegory to comment upon itself, the contents of Fidelia's right hand complete the portrait: "And in her other hand she fast did hold / A booke that was both signd and seald with blood, / Wherin darke things were writt, hard to be understood" (I.x.13.7-9). This is, of course, the Bible, or at least a book of the Gospels, which many of Spenser's readers would have been quite accustomed to interpreting on both a literal and allegorical level. It seems quite the irony that Redcrosse's spiritual regeneration involves his careful reading and instruction from a copy of the very book that he has previously offered as a gift to Arthur. Like too many readers, Redcrosse's understanding has not yet penetrated to the level of the "darke things" that underlie the level of the literal word and the static image. Surely poor Redcrosse is neither the first nor last to give someone a book he has not yet bothered to read. In the regenerative environment of the House of Holinesse, the flat and familiar figures from the emblem books and biblical woodcuts of Spenser's day have taken on a full-blooded existence to act out the shadowy abstractions hidden in the sacred text.

As Redcrosse continues to meditate on the teachings of Fidelia (Faith), he is filled with remorse and self-loathing at the recognition of his own internal corruption, which pains him even as he grows beyond it:

The faithful knight now grew in litle space,
By hearing her, and by her sisters lore,
To such perfection of all hevenly grace;
That wretched world he gan for to abhore,
And mortall life gan loath, as thing forlore,

Greevd with remembrance of his wicked wayes,
And prickt with anguish of his sinnes so sore,
That he desirde, to end his wretched dayes:
So much the dart of sinfull guilt the soule dismayes. (I.x.21.1-9)

In this passage Redcrosse has been pierced by the compunction of fear, which causes the soul to hunger for God at the recognition of its own insufficiency. The knight's growth in spiritual knowledge and progress toward "all heavenly grace" are accompanied by a realization that his actions and his own fallen nature are out of harmony with the order of grace. Redcrosse's spiritual missteps and failures up to this point have illustrated "man's impotence to rise above himself, and thus his utter dependence upon the grace of God" (Woodhouse 208).⁷⁴ The penitent knight's desire to bring an end to his own life is alarmingly similar to the state of mind that had previously brought about his near suicide in the Cave of Despayre. That gruesome figure, of course, is quite unlike Fidelity, who only wishes to hasten her student's repentance and initiate his spiritual recovery. Rather, he uses the compunction of fear as a weapon against the vulnerable Redcrosse: "Despair's backward-looking strategies blind the knight to his future, and, most importantly to a redeemed future" (Goeglein 4). Despayre is a brilliant yet twisted theologian, who speaks only enough of the truth to confirm the knight's darkest suspicions about his spiritual failures and resulting damnation. The malicious figure eloquently discourses on the just punishment of sins, but he neglects to say anything of grace or forgiveness. As a result, Redcrosse improperly experiences the compunction of fear, which should rightfully hasten his spiritual progress. In the appropriate context, this compunction serves its purpose and passes

⁷⁴This realization is crucial to Woodhouse's understanding of the order of grace, placing it in contrast to the ambition and self-reliance espoused by those who operate solely within the order of nature.

away once “a feeling of security emerges from an assurance of forgiveness, and the soul begins to burn with a love for heavenly joys” (*Dialogues* 173-4). This transition is aided by Speranza (Hope), who tempers Fidelia’s teachings with the firm assurance of grace. Instead of despairing for his life, Redcrosse faithfully serves his penance and is then ushered on by Charissa (Love) to the next phase of his spiritual progress. Speranza plays a crucial role in the Redcrosse Knight’s upward progress, keeping him focused on what is to come rather than on the severities of his shortcomings:

Upon her arme a silver anchor lay,
Whereon she leaned ever, as befell:
And ever up to heven, as she did pray,
Her stedfast eyes were bent, ne swarved other way. (I.x.14.6-9)

The second sister, Speranza, evokes the image of the *anchora spei* or “anchor of hope,” which appears as the frontispiece for the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, as well as *The Fowre Hymnes*, both printed by William Ponsonby in the same year. In the engraving, a divine hand, appearing from a cloud, clasps the anchor, establishing a celestial stronghold in the lower world of embodied human action. Other details further reinforce its appeal as an emblem of salvation: twin olive branches wreath around the center and the horizontal piece adds a strong suggestion of the cross motif. As Faith awakens Redcrosse to the hidden realities of the spiritual world, the depths of grace along with the yawning abyss of sin, Hope braces the weary pilgrim against the misery of the current life, and Love impels his rejuvenated spirit toward eternity.

Under Charissa’s kindly instruction, Redcrosse begins to feel the earliest stirrings of the compunction of love. As Spenser describes her, Charissa is a young woman of surpassing beauty

and social graces. However, the portrayal reveals a surprising contrast to the modestly veiled Una:

She was a woman in her freshest age,
Of wondrous beauty, and of bounty rare,
With goodly grace and comely personage,
That was on earth not easie to compare;
Full of great love, but *Cupids* wanton snare
As hell she hated, chaste in worke and will;
Her necke and brests were ever open bare,
That ay thereof her babes might sucke their fill;
The rest was all in yellow robes arayed still. (I.x.30.1-9)

To read this image as immodest would be to grossly misunderstand the character of Spenser's symbolic language. He draws here on the familiar image of the Madonna and Child, rendering Charissa's exposed breasts as legitimate an emblem of salvation as the book and anchor of her sisters. But she also has something in common with the Heavenly Venus of Renaissance Neoplatonism, whose very nakedness was a sign of her modest purity. Just such a paradox appears in Titian's famous allegorical painting of *Sacred and Profane Love*, as Edgar Wind interprets it: "Since furthermore, according to a well-established tradition, the absence of adornment is a sign of virtue and candour ('naked Truth', 'intrinsic Beauty'), there would seem to be an excellent case for ascribing a nobler character to the naked figure, and a more worldly nature to the figure that is clothed" (142-43). Her avoidance of "*Cupids* wanton snare" is also significant, for Cupid appears throughout *The Faerie Queene* as a patron of urbane, courtly love,

which has no place in the balanced and productive relationships Spenser imagines between the sexes. If Cupid is to come along at all, he must lay aside his arms and take on a purer aspect.

Under Charissa, Redcrosse begins to heal and experience true wholeness after the famishing severities of the doctrines he has learned thus far. Whereas Fidelia taught the knight about the horrors of sin, judgment, and eternal torment, leading him to the preliminary act of repentance, Spenser tells us that Charissa, her milder sister,

Gan him instruct in everie good behest,
Of love, and righteousnes, and well to donne,
And wrath, and hatred warely to shonne,
That drew on men Gods hatred, and his wrath,
and many soules in dolours had fordonne... (I.x.33.3-5)

Fortunately enough, this spirit of beneficence extends to Redcrosse's hatred for himself, experienced under Fidelia's stern tutelage. At the behest of Charissa, Mercy leads Redcrosse to the holy hospital, "In which seven Bead-men that had vowed all / Their life to service of high heavens king / Did spend their daies in doing godly thing" (I.x.36.3-5). The beadsmen are contemplatives, but they neither loathe humanity for the marks of their fallen condition nor do they wish to depart from the world altogether. Instead, the beadsmen engage in charitable intercessions for every stage of human life, viewing everyone they help as "The images of God in earthly clay" (I.x.39.7). This is a repetition of the theme we have seen with Orgoglio, who scorns his terrestrial origins, and the brood of Errour, born as a brood of amphibians from the fertile banks of the Nile. However, the beadsmen see these humble origins as no indignity but as a sign of divine love regarding the fragility of embodied beings. Amongst the beadsmen, we even see a miniature progression of the virtues, comparable to the larger development that takes

place across the poem as a whole. According to Rose, their acts of charity derive from the traditional scheme of the “*opera misericordiae*, the seven corporal works of mercy,” and that these joyfully selfless acts illustrate the “antithesis to the diseased, solipsistic deadly sins of the House of Pride” (126). Here Redcrosse observes a unity of spirit and action unheard of at Lucifera’s court and directly opposed by figures such as Archimago and Duessa. Redcrosse stays at the hospital with Mercy and the beadsmen, witnessing their ministrations to the poor, sick, dying, dead, and bereaved until he finally learns to conduct his life “In holy righteousness, without rebuke or blame” (I.x.45.9). After learning to love the world and its inhabitants properly, Redcrosse follows the compunction of love to its triumphal culmination in the grand, contemplative vision of the New Jerusalem, perhaps the closest *The Faerie Queene* offers to a beatific vision.

The dark, narrow path up the steep hillside suggests the spiritual difficulties which will precede and accompany contemplation. Much of Spenser’s meaning here remains below the surface, but the process he models bears a strong resemblance to the purgative “dark night of the spirit” within the mystical vision of St. John of the Cross: “Only one attachment or one particular object to which the spirit is actually or habitually bound is enough to hinder the experience or reception of the delicate and intimate delight of the spirit of love that contains eminently in itself all delights” (2.9.1).⁷⁵ Following Mercy up a perilous hillside path, Redcrosse encounters his final spiritual guide, the sage *Contemplation*. Unlike the beadsmen, *Contemplation* has completely withdrawn from the world of human affairs to immerse himself in perpetual rumination upon the divine. Dwelling alone on a hillside, he is a feeble, old hermit “That day and

⁷⁵ This spiritual phase follows after the “dark night of the senses” already experienced with Redcrosse’s mortification of the body under Fidelia, which prompted the soul to retreat from the pleasures and pains of the body to focus on eternity.

night said his devotion, / Ne other worldly busines did apply” (I.x.46.6-7). But this is no easy retirement or carefree Epicurean existence. *Contemplation*’s wholesale abandonment of worldly affairs has even caused him to neglect the care, perhaps even the reality, of his own withered body:

Each bone might through his body well be red,
And every sinew seene through his long fast:
For nought he car’d his carcas long unfed;
His mind was full of spirituall repast,
And pyn’d his flesh, to keepe his body low and chast. (I.x.48.5-9)

Contemplation’s denial of nature is evident in his own emaciated body. Rather than rely on the fruits of the physical creation to sustain himself, he feeds on the “spirituall repast” within his own mind. We may put *Contemplation*’s efforts to transcend the order of nature into perspective by comparing it to Philo’s account of the contemplative sect he calls the Therapeutae: “For the mistresses nature has set over mortal kind, hunger and thirst, these they appease, though adding nothing by way of fawning except what is useful and without which life is impossible” (*Contemplative Life* 48).⁷⁶ The severe appearance of Spenser’s *Contemplation* presents us at once with the sustaining powers of grace and the fragility of mortal existence. Yet while the old

⁷⁶In *The Contemplative Life*, Philo also notes a similar notion of sustenance provided by contact with the divine: “Some, in whom there is a more deep-seated longing for knowledge, remember to take food even after only every third day. Others so revel and delight in being banqueted by wisdom, which richly and lavishly supplies her teachings, that they hold out double that time and scarcely after every sixth day partake of necessary sustenance” (47). In their approach to diet, the Therapeutae are chiefly concerned with practicing temperance and avoiding distractions. The contemplatives satisfy themselves “in being banqueted by wisdom.” However, they do not intentionally abuse or neglect the body as does Spenser’s *Contemplation*, who “pynd his flesh, to keepe his body low and chast” (I.x.48.9).

sage's spiritual accomplishments are self-evident, one cannot help but to find such intentional self-neglect somewhat unnatural, if not downright suspect. Compared to the couple of *The Epithalamion*, whose marital bond celebrates the consummation of physical desire within the greater context of a benign cosmic order, the old sage has rejected the full richness of human experience. Time and again across the poet's oeuvre, Spenser elevates the responsible appreciation of the natural world, including human relationships, as a legitimate pathway for approaching the divine. Considering the allegory, we should remember that the character of *Contemplation* represents only one element in the framework of spiritual principles comprising Spenser's virtue of Holinesse. Paul's famous encomium to the spiritual virtues in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "When I was a childe, I spake as a childe, I understode as a child, I thoght as a childe: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. / For now we se through a glasse darkely: but then shal we se face to face. Now I know in parte: but then shal I knowe even as I am knowen. / And now abideth faith, hope and love, even these thre: but the chiefest of these is love" (*Geneva Bible*, 1 Cor. 13:11-13). As the gloss in the Geneva Bible explains, Love serves humanity both in embodied, time bound existence and eternity, while Faith and Hope serve but a temporary function in the present life (81). We finally arrive at contemplation at the end of a progress of love that begins with the very worldly and concrete acts of charity, which Redcrosse has practiced for some undetermined period in the holy hospital. For all its withdrawn mysticism, this sequence falls under the teachings of Charissa, the most nurturing and affable of the embodied virtues that populate the canto. Clearly, individual contemplation has its appropriate orientation within a larger social vision, which both facilitates and profits from the transformative experiences of a single soul in solitude, reflecting upon itself and searching out the presence of the divine.

Spenser's *Contemplation* is more than a simplistic representation of the contemplative life, for he also embodies the negative spiritual qualities that are often associated with complete withdrawal from the world: coldness, selfishness, and stagnation. The episode reflects much of the tension between contemplation and action that persists as a constant theme throughout Spenser's poem. The way toward the old sage's hermitage lies along the narrow path of love. Presumably, *Contemplation* has walked this same path himself. However, when Redcrosse and Mercy approach the wizened sage to request his spiritual instruction, it is only with irritated reluctance that he even acknowledges their presence:

Who when these two approaching he aspide,
At their first presence grew agrieved sore,
That forst him lay his heavenly thoughts aside;
And had he not that Dame respected more,
Whom highly he did reverence and adore,
He would not once have moved for the knight. (I.x.49.1-6)

The figure of *Contemplation* represents the impulse toward withdrawal and meditation at its utmost extremity. We do not have the impression of a balanced and wholistic portrayal of the spiritual life when we read Spenser's description of the holy man who ignores a pilgrim in need of spiritual instruction. *Contemplation*, wasting away on his hilltop, certainly presents a more severe image of the spiritual life than the personable beadsman aiding travelers in their wayside station, and beside Philo's temperate Therapeutae, the old hermit's dietary strictures appear utterly morbid. The grim spectacle of the sage's withered carcass brings to mind some of the more uncompromising ascetics of the Middle Ages. We might consider St. Simeon Stylites, for example, who lived strapped to the top of a pillar and spoke lovingly to the maggots who

consumed his flesh: “He bound himself to the pillar by a rope; the rope became embedded in his flesh, which putrefied around it, stank, and teemed with worms; Simeon picked up the worms that fell from his sores, and replaced them there, saying to them, ‘Eat what God has given you’” (Durant 60). Such tales of intentional deprivation are understandably repulsive to the modern mind, especially when the extremity of these cases is treated as all the more praiseworthy. To aid our understanding of *Contemplation* we will compare him to a completely negative representation of the contemplative life, and for this we may look to Idleness, one of the Seven Deadly Sins on parade at the House of Pride. Spenser’s description of this unhealthy figure is much like that of *Contemplation*: “From worldly cares himselfe he did esloyne, / And greatly shunned manly exercise, / From everie worke he chaledged essoynne, / For contemplation sake...” (I.iv.20.1-4). The lines suggest some implicit criticism of monastic excesses, in which Idleness resembles the stereotypical cloistered and comfortable monk of medieval satire. However, Idleness’s diseased physical condition—narcoleptic and dressed in a monk’s threadbare habit—stems from the courtier’s carelessness rather than the ascetic bodily deprivation to which *Contemplation* has become accustomed. But with this comparison, one cannot help but think that *Contemplation* has abandoned one grotesque extreme for another. If *Contemplation* goes too far, it is in his devotion to the order of grace at the expense of leaving unfulfilled his obligations to the demands of nature and perhaps also to the rest of humanity. From his pitifully emaciated body to his utter rejection of human relationships, *Contemplation* presents the reader with an extreme of devotional zeal that is ill suited to the present needs of Redcrosse, who still has a kingdom to liberate and a princess to wed. And this is to say nothing of the very solemn debt he still owes to the Fairy Queen herself, who has commanded six years of service from him, to end with the defense of Fairy Land against the impending threat of invasion from “that proud Paynim

king, that works her teene...” (I.xii.18.8). After winning the apocalyptic struggle for his own soul, Redcrosse must patiently await the final apocalypse that will determine the fate of the miniaturized universe of Fairy Land. All of this, of course, is projected for the unwritten conclusion in Spenser’s original conception of *The Faerie Queene*.⁷⁷

Although *Contemplation* represents complete withdrawal from earthly affairs, the old sage knows well enough his role in the balanced spiritual life delineated in the House of Holinesse. Redcrosse is overwhelmed by his spiritual vision of the New Jerusalem, the brightness of which outshines the highest of earthly achievements as represented by Gloriana’s capital at Cleopolis. *Contemplation* assures Redcrosse that his service to Gloriana is a worthy endeavor, “For she is heavenly borne, and heaven may iustly vaunt” (I.x.59.9). Thus, the text excuses the spiritual contemplation of an earthly subject, such as Elizabeth I’s representation in Gloriana or perhaps a humbler but no less worthy figure like Elizabeth Boyle in the *Amoretti*, so long as the observer finds there a sufficient reflection of heavenly ideals. By its very nature, the swelling of Redcrosse’s soul in contemplation has prepared him for this sort of discernment. J.S. Harrison’s comments in the *Variorum* provide a clue as to why: “But the emphasis laid by Platonism upon the loveliness of that wisdom which is the object of contemplation results in quickening the imagination and in stirring the soul to realize the principle in love” (1.504). Thus strengthened by direct contemplation of the heavenly ideal, this force of love that Redcrosse now feels drawing him away from earthly existence, might just as well manifest itself in righteous actions, fueled then by an intensified love for humanity and the creation.

⁷⁷ In the “Letter of the Authours,” which Spenser addresses to Sir Walter Raleigh, the original scheme consists of twelve for the twelve “private moral virtues,” along with the possibility of a continuation focused on “political virtues.” The order of the virtues in the six unwritten books remains something of a mystery, although some critics have attempted to reconstruct this sequence. For one such model, see *Renaissance Psychologies* by Robert Reid (37-40).

When *Contemplation* instructs Redcrosse to seek the New Jerusalem only after the achievement of his final victory, the knight initially voices his regret at the notion of one day leaving behind martial glory and the potential for loving relationships. But once *Contemplation* has clearly demonstrated the subordination of worldly affairs to the eternal, Redcrosse begins to loathe the earthly life and he desires to spend the remainder of his days in contemplative ecstasy.⁷⁸ *Contemplation*, however, reminds the knight of his former pledge to Una and of the battle she has chosen him to fight. With this reminder, *Contemplation* shows Redcrosse and the reader the place of contemplative practice within the complete and balanced spiritual life. A.C. Hamilton offers enlightening commentary on this critical moment in Redcrosse's journey: "What faith has revealed to [Redcrosse], and he holds in present hope, must now be perfected in charity" (*FQ* 135n). *Contemplation* has given Redcrosse insight into higher realities on the level of grace, the vision of which offers profound and lasting consolation, but it is within the order of nature—that is, the realm of active life—that the Knight of Holinesse must struggle.

Rather than feasting on the contemplative vision of the New Jerusalem, Redcrosse realizes a higher calling in the renewed embrace of the active life with the continuation of his worldly journey. However, we know now that he goes forward in the light of grace. Here we have returned to the lesson of the beadsmen, those men of prayer who devote themselves to lives

⁷⁸ Gregory the Great describes the sorrow that often accompanies the compunction of love: "Now the same person, who wept out of fear of punishment, sheds abundant tears because his entrance into the kingdom of heaven is being delayed. Once we envision the choirs of angels, and fix our gaze on the company of the saints and the majesty of an endless vision of God, the thought of having no part in these joys makes us weep more bitterly than the fear of hell and the prospect of eternal misery did before" (*Dialogues* 174). Of course, the visionary moments throughout Spenser tend to have a similar transient quality, which leaves the speaker yearning for a world he has only but glimpsed. As the speaker of "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" instructs his soul to flee the world and remain ever fixed on God, one can only speculate with some doubt as to his success (295-301).

of charity, in their hermitage that is both within the world and outside it.⁷⁹ This combination of contemplative and active lifestyles is supported by Gregory the Great, whose description of the two compunctions has already helped to shed much light on Redcrosse's development in contemplation, for "[Gregory] holds up the ideal of the "mixed life" as the higher way of serving God, higher even than that of the purely contemplative life" (Clark 273). Likewise, *The Cloud of Unknowing* admonishes that true contemplation should be punctuated with righteous actions: "Not that he should ever abandon contemplation entirely—for this could not be done without great sin—but sometimes charity will demand that he descend from the heights of this work to do something for his fellow man" (81). Like the beadsmen, Redcrosse must remember that the divine presence breathes even in the humble clay of the human frame, which is therefore no less worthy of his service. During their interactions, *Contemplation* identifies Redcrosse as both "thou man of earth" (I.x.52.2) and "*Saint George* of mery England, the signe of victoree" (61.9). But only after vowing to return to Una and "Abett that virgins cause disconsolate" (64.2) does Redcrosse learn the conjunction of both of these titles in his given name: "*Georgos*" (66.6). In keeping with an old romance convention, the knight learns the secret of his own origin—he is no elf, as the male citizens of Fairy Land are called, but the prince of a royal Saxon house, stolen by a mischevious fairy while still an infant. Abandoned in the furrow of an elfin farmer, the child was discovered and given the name George in reference to his earthly origin. Of course,

⁷⁹This is also *agape*, which Hamilton defines as "charity or love, the 'bonde of perfectnes' (Col. 3.14); specifically that expressed in brotherly love" (*FQ* 425n). This is the "perfect love" in which Spenser binds his Knights of Friendship (IV.iii.52.2), which corresponds with the principle of concord as a cosmic, unifying force. And a similar sentiment appears in the mystical terms of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "For the work of perfect love which begins here on earth is the same as that love which is eternal life; they are but one" (75). It seems for Spenser, the establishment of harmonious human relationships, whether between friends, family, and lovers, or on the grander scale of community and state, represents a gradual reworking of creation back toward a universal state of love or concord.

Redcrosse shares this terrestrial derivation with Orgoglio and the Saracens, all of whom represented some aspect of the knight's own fallen nature. But this state of having risen from the dust also connects him to Adam and, by extension, to Christ as "the Second Adam."

Contemplation has taught Redcrosse his true nature and readied him for a descent back into the world, but Redcrosse must wait until the apocalypse and the establishment of the New Jerusalem upon the earth before he can achieve a final spiritual victory with the reward of lasting peace. Until that time, he must once again take up the active life within the order of nature, with all his future efforts now blessed and sanctioned by the realizations of his contemplative moments in the House of Holinesse.

After his purification in the House of Holinesse and reconciliation to divine grace, Redcrosse follows Una to her father's besieged kingdom for the long-delayed fulfillment of his quest. And he arrives just at the right time, regardless of having wandered through so much territory, suffering months of imprisonment and a lengthy convalescence in the care of Celia's daughters. It appears that Una's native land was never so distant that the properly prepared soul could not venture there almost instantaneously, being a question not of maps and routes but of the heart. Time likewise makes little difference in this matter now that Redcrosse's soul has been conditioned to look toward eternity. As in the legends of the Grail Quest, the knight arrives neither too early nor too late, but his spiritual preparation transports him directly to the appointed time and place. For the battle of the book's climax, evil has assumed a different nature in the great dragon as a representation of evil in both its worldly and cosmic dimensions. It seems, for once at least, that the conflict does not originate in the struggles of the hero's own heart, but in an ancient conflict that Redcrosse has inherited by virtue of the armor he wears. Of course, it also belongs to the heritage of his human existence, as the dragon embodies the old threat of

original sin, uniting the subtly serpentine evil of figures like Errour and Archimago into a final vision of indomitable satanic power. In the return to this ancient evil, however, we also find the elements of its remedy.

For Redcrosse, the journey to this distant kingdom, which doubles as a journey back in time, presents a spiritual homecoming: the ground he treads is Eden, and the Redcrosse Knight has finally arrived to claim his birthright in the restoration of a spiritual unity that has been denied to humanity since the fall. Even behind the visceral, militant action of Redcrosse's battle with the dragon, there are shades of a profound mysticism, as the lessons of the House of Holinesse receive their application. Certain details of the struggle reveal Redcrosse's typological imitation of the life of Christ, such as the two falls that reenact Christ's two falls on the road to Golgotha, just as the three days of the battle reflect the three days leading up to the Resurrection. In all of this, Redcrosse receives the aid of divine grace, particularly as he succumbs to the dragon's might, by all appearances dead to Una who watches from afar. In the first of these mortal encounters, Redcrosse succumbs to the heat of the dragon fire, now broiling him in his own armor. By happy circumstance (or rather an act of grace), he falls backward into the source of his salvation: "Of auncient time there was a springing well, / From which fast trickled forth a silver flood, / Full of great vertues, and for med'cine good" (I.xi.29.3-5). The scalded knight recovers in a physical manifestation of the cleansing rite of baptism, the "living water" of salvation that purifies the soul from the inherited curse of original sin. Now a new man, Redcrosse resumes the fight until overwhelmed once more by a combination of dragon fire and the effects of the dragon's "sting," which has pierced his shoulder. Yet once more, a benevolent feature of Eden's landscape provides a source of aid in this moment of extremity, as Redcrosse falls at the roots of the Tree of Life: "Life and long health that gracious ointment gave,

/ and deadly wounds could heale and reare againe / The senceless corse appointed for the grave” (I.xi.48.6-8). The tree itself points toward the cross of Christ as an emblem of salvation, along with the rite of extreme unction, which prepares the soul for death. Once more, Redcrosse arises as if from his grave and delivers a death wound straight into the dragon’s maw, which had previously resembled the very mouth of hell. From a spiritual perspective, Redcrosse’s battle against the dragon points toward the life of Christ as an object for imitation and contemplation, circumscribing the human life span with references to baptism and extreme unction at the point of death, and pointing toward an eternal victory. Paradoxically, Redcrosse will continue as a denizen of two worlds: that belonging to the order of grace, where his victory has been sealed and has, in some sense, been taken up into the eternal mysteries; over against the lower world of nature, where there is still work to be done in a world bound by the limits of time and space.

Redcrosse’s victory brings the knight into the court of the king, whom we learn is Adam, ruling over the blighted land of Eden. The place holds great promise for Redcrosse’s future, as we know he will return to fulfill his vows to Una, a figure of the soul’s ultimate return to a heavenly paradise, where it will see the face of Truth unveiled, after a life of weary searching. Just so, the dream of reclaiming paradise on earth persists throughout *The Faerie Queene*, and the careful reader will recognize its various reflections and grotesque distortions in the fecund gardens and the treacherous spaces which sometimes imitate them. We might wonder then, how this desire applies to the lessons Redcrosse has learned in the House of Holinesse, where he has learned to set his gaze towards eternity. Perhaps even Eden itself will appear insignificant compared to the internal paradise within the soul, which Redcrosse has glimpsed briefly during his vision of the New Jerusalem. Among the lessons the House of Holinesse has taught is the notion that it will not do to withdraw from the world into perpetual communion with one’s soul,

or worse, to idly wait for the cosmic reckoning which will bring the New Jerusalem down to earth. One might very well pursue perfect Temperance or perfect Chastity, virtues of the forthcoming books, with much more success than perfect Holinesse, at least within the present life. However, the essence of the virtue lies within the attempt itself, the unending task of working to establish the reign of heaven in the intractable material of our limited, time bounded world. While the larger universe moves towards its own apocalyptic reckoning, which will finally resolve the disparity between nature and grace and restore all things to a state of primal unity, each soul must reckon with its own apocalypse. Like so many of the metamorphoses and transformations we have observed, the personal apocalypse of salvation works an essential change in the soul of the individual, which can move on unburdened toward the creation of a new world. Eliade describes this same principle as he notes that “Christianity translates the periodic regeneration of the world into a regeneration of the human individual” (*Cosmos* 129). Building on the accomplishments of Holinesse, which represent a new foundation and a new life, the succeeding books of *The Faerie Queene* will follow the soul as it continues through a series of positive transformations from virtue to virtue, all with the hope of restoring some portion of the order that has been lost to the universe.

5. AFTERLIVES AND EMANATIONS

Men the most diverse, the most opposite, sometimes will adhere by unexpected parts; and in these adherences will burst forth the imperious logic of progress, Orpheus, Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Moses, Manou, Mahomet, with many more, will be the links of the same chain. A Gutenberg discovering the method for the sowing of civilization and the means for the ubiquity of thought, will be followed by a Christopher Columbus discovering a new field. A Christopher Columbus discovering a world will be followed by a Luther discovering liberty. After Luther, innovator in the dogma, will come Shakespeare, innovator in art. One genius completes the other.

– Victor Hugo, “The Souls”

Like Hugo, one might conceive of history as an ongoing collaboration between great souls, through which human themes have been forwarded and enlarged. And if we can excuse the romance of the notion, certain individuals seem to stand out for qualities one might call “greatness of soul,” defined by contributions to our collective human consciousness that have since become irreplaceable. To project Hugo’s list into the twentieth century, one might consider the ethical courage of Gandhi, the cosmic abstractions of Einstein, or even, if I may, the haunting recordings of blues men like Blind Willie Johnson or Robert Johnson, both artists who would never know the extent of their influence, inseparably associated with the two sides of the spiritual and metaphysical divide that pervades the genre.⁸⁰ Each of these great personalities

⁸⁰Robert Johnson has become synonymous in the folklore of American popular music with the blues man whose uncanny talent derives from a compact with dark and mysterious forces. As music journalist Robert Palmer writes in *Deep Blues*, “Robert Johnson wasn’t *physically* menacing: he was slender, small-boned, brown-skinned, and handsome enough, with his delicate features and wavy hair, to attract legions of female admirers, but he started more fights than he finished. He was considered dangerous because he was in league with the Devil” (111-12).

presents some great crucial human quality, some essential virtue, to our own souls. From book to book through the *Faerie Queene*, we find a comparable chain of influence, as one soul succeeds in the accomplishment of the appointed virtue and passes some quality on to the following patron. As Kathleen Williams writes, “Guyon or Arthur or Britomart, trying to make sense of the persons and situations they encounter (for in this their quests consist) are our representatives, for they are not in themselves virtues but specialized versions of ourselves, acting out through their stories that aspect of the imitation of human nature with which their own area of the poem is concerned” (xiii-xiv). In the interpretation of Alistair Fowler, the virtues of the poem build upon one another, as the whole scheme of the poem unfolds according to a self-consistent set of metaphysical ideals: “As I hope will become clear, its symbolic structure is not merely an external scheme determining distribution of topics, but an organic morphosis, expressing Spenser’s vision of cosmic order and of the generation of the microcosmic soul” (Fowler 63). Much of Fowler’s focus concerns numerological and astrological associations with certain movements and qualities within the individual soul. In moving from our discussion of Book I to Book II, I will invoke Kathleen Williams’ explanation of the relationship between Redcrosse and Guyon: the Knight of Holinesse signifies the victory of Christ over the world in his own conquest of the dragon, and he passes on this victory to Guyon in the form of spiritual reassurance. Woodhouse is familiar with this line of argument and he identifies it as one of several models that rival his own: “that Guyon, for example, achieves his virtues of temperance and continence, and is able to discharge his task, because he starts from the vantage point of Holinesse achieved by the Redcrosse Knight” (198). However, Woodhouse rejects this view from his typical position of sharply dividing the concerns of the orders of nature and grace: “while the motivation and sanctions of the [Redcrosse Knight’s] virtue are specifically religious,

those of Guyon's, just as clearly, are not" (198-99). However, in examining the character of the Palmer along with Redcrosse and Guyon's interactions—two subjects that Woodhouse addresses unsatisfactorily—we will see the unique relationship between contemplation and the two orders in the adventures of Spenser's Knight of Temperance. Then moving through each book in turn, I will briefly demonstrate the projected progress of the soul through *The Faerie Queene*, as one virtue leads to the next and each hero after Redcrosse inherits the accomplishments of the former.

Before we glimpse Redcrosse in Book II, we are introduced to Guyon, who is traveling with his guide, "A comely Palmer, clad in black attyre, / Of rypest yeares, and heares all hoarie gray" (II.i.7.2-3). Guyon's guide offers one of our first indications as to the nature of the allegory in Book II. He is generally understood to represent reason, considered the highest mental faculty in Neoplatonism and, in some Christian traditions, the light of God within humanity. As a palmer, Guyon's guide has presumably visited the Holy Land on pilgrimage, and we might note the appropriateness for a visitor to the earthly Jerusalem to guide our hero on his own journey within the order of nature. After receiving such assurances of grace, it is the task of Redcrosse, Guyon, and the other patron knights who are their successors in working toward the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

When we first meet Guyon, he is duped by Archimago into attacking Redcrosse, but on seeing Redcrosse's Christian armor and the cross on his shield, Guyon reigns in his anger and expresses his shame at having almost harmed "The sacred badge of my Redeemers death" (II.i.27.6). In the meeting of the two knights, we see the orders of nature and grace allied to one another. This is most clear in their act of honoring the iconography emblazoned on one another's shields. Guyon honors the cross, acknowledging the primacy of grace before engaging in his own

combat on the level of nature, and Redcrosse admires the image of Gloriana on Guyon's shield. In honoring the image of Gloriana, whom *Contemplation* himself has associated with worthy deeds, Redcrosse bestows legitimacy upon Guyon's quest. Throughout Book II, we follow Guyon as he struggles "among the detailed difficulties of that world whose biggest issues have been mapped out for us by the victorious saint" (Williams 34). While Redcrosse's contemplative moments draw his mind upward to the macrocosmic realities of the order of grace, Guyon's analogous experience directs his reason inward to better understand his own composition as a created being and to subdue his lower nature. A. Bartlett Giamatti draws a greater distinction between the internal faculties represented in the two knights: "In Book I, the greatest temptation was to Despair, to sin against the spirit, for Book I was ultimately concerned with the contemplative life of the soul. In Book II, the great temptation is to indulge in goods of this world, in the material joys of wealth and possessions (Mammon's Cave, vii) or sexual pleasure (Acrasia's Bower, xii or its adumbration, Phaedria's island, vi)" (Giamatti 247). However, Book II deals just as well with the soul, although it approaches such issues from a quite different orientation.

Although Guyon's journey toward self-improvement has received the sanction of Holinesse at its inception, the sources and concepts Spenser draws on in his Legend of Temperance are suited to the theme of worldly pursuits: "Guyon's reliance upon the Palmer, right reason, and the preponderance of references to classical writers, especially Aristotle and Virgil, in the Book of Temperance suggest the domain of natural ethics" (Horton 66). In the Cave of Mammon episode, Spenser draws heavily on Virgil's *Aeneid*, widely considered a beneficent and inspired work by Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In his descent into the Cave of Mammon, Guyon imitates Aeneas' descent in *Aeneid* Book VI, an

episode which Bernardus Silvestris recognizes as a moment of moral testing and philosophical inquiry. In the *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid*, Bernardus identifies the underworld with the physical creation and chiefly with the corrupt human body, which he considers the lowest object in the universe. Bernardus offers four basic categories of descent into the underworld: “the first is natural, the second is virtuous, the third is sinful, the fourth is artificial” (32). Bernardus’ description of the “second descent” is most important to his conception of *Aeneid* VI as a philosophical journey:

The second descent is through virtue, and it occurs when any wise person descends to mundane things through meditation, not so that he may put his desire in them, but so that, having recognized their frailty, he may thoroughly turn from the rejected things to the invisible things and acknowledge more clearly in thought the Creator of creatures. (*Commentary* 32)

This description is suited as much to Guyon’s journey as it is to Aeneas’, and the comparison strengthens when we consider that Guyon is the only titular knight in *The Faerie Queene* to journey into the underworld. Both Guyon and Bernardus’ Aeneas direct their reason downward into the physical world and into the lower parts of themselves. Mammon, who embodies the negative impulses against which Guyon vies, also embodies physical creation at its most degenerate.

The greatest danger Guyon faces in his inward journey is of losing sight of the just proportions of creation. Acting almost exclusively on the level of nature, Guyon must be careful that he does not lose sight of the realization he has inherited from Redcrosse: human efforts on the level of nature are futile unless they are first purified by one’s progress on the superior level of grace. Several times, Mammon tempts Guyon to acknowledge the lower world as inherently

good and sufficient in itself to provide for human happiness. Such an acknowledgment from the patron of Temperance would be a slight to the order of grace and to Redcrosse's achievements within that sphere. Mammon, the Prince of Plunder, identifies himself as "Great *Mammon*, greatest god below the skye, / That of my plenty poure out unto all, / And unto none my graces do envye" (II.vii.8.2-3). But the Knight of Temperance is unmoved by Mammon's inversions. Drawing Guyon's attention to his refinery, Mammon applies to riches a title fitting the divine: "Here is the fountaine of the worldes good" (II.vii.38.6). With this temptation to worship worldly riches, Guyon recognizes Mammon's true nature, and the knight promptly refuses his crudely forged world view:

Suffise it then, thou Money God (quoth hee)

That all thine ydle offers I refuse.

All that I need I have; what needeth mee

To covet more, then I have cause to use? (II.vii.39.1-4)

While Mammon presents himself as a universal benefactor and a bestower of grace on humanity, Guyon contemptuously designates him "thou Money God," a much weaker title than the grasping Mammon had solicited. Throughout this sequence, Guyon "ignores Mammon's false metaphysics and confusion of signs with reality" (Prescott 451). To further understand the significance of Guyon's resistance to Mammon, we may apply Bernardus' description of the hero's descent into the underworld in search of virtue. Guyon's entrance into the Cave of Mammon represents the turning of reason downward to the world of nature. During this period of contemplative exile, reason deems worldly materials (Mammon's filthy and corroded riches) inconsequential and void of any inherent worth. For all the moral reward of such a process, it is not without peril, as contemplation of the order of nature places one at the risk of accepting the

immediacy of the temporal and natural over the subtlety of the eternal and divine. As Bernardus writes, the contemplative should move “from the rejected things to the invisible things,” using the natural world as a means toward a greater understanding of the divine. In resisting Mammon, Guyon affirms the primacy of the order of grace over the order of nature and of rightly directed reason over the physical concerns of the body.

Guyon’s second contemplative moment in the House of Alma emphasizes the healthy interdependence of body and soul. Spenser’s description of the house takes the form of an extended allegory of the human anatomy. Each chamber of the house fulfills the function of a particular body part, and the entire house is governed by Alma, who “represents the immortal, God-given, rational soul” (Davis 24). The entire episode within the House of Alma shows us Guyon turning his gaze inward, exploring the parts of the body and observing the soul’s interactions with them. The three main divisions of the house correspond with the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual souls contained within the platonic conception of the tri-partite soul (Davis 25). Guyon and Prince Arthur move, as in the contemplative thought of Bernardus, from the physical and visible to the invisible; that is, they proceed from observation of the parts of the body to knowledge of the soul that makes them function. In the House of Alma, Guyon completes his contemplation of the order of nature by learning the means by which the divine sustains the human body and the world. In his description of Alma, Spenser tells us that “even heven reioyced her sweete face to see” (II.ix.18.9). This is more than an encomium on the lady’s beauty or her virtue, for Neoplatonist thinkers often celebrate the divine attributes of the human soul as manifested in the features of the human body. In the House of Alma, we see operations of the divine on the natural level as part of the ideal state of temperance: “harmony among parts of the body, among parts of the soul, between body and soul, and between human and divine”

(Davis 25). To receive their final lessons on this properly ordered relationship, Guyon and Arthur must ascend to the highest reaches of the House of Alma, leaving behind the seat of the emotions in the heart, here represented as a chamber filled with gaily dressed ladies, for the tower that stands in for the mental faculties.

Guyon and Arthur both prepare for their climactic battles against the enemies of temperance in the House of Alma's upper chambers, representing the intellectual soul in the house's allegorical scheme. This section of the house contains three allegorical figures who embody three separate mental faculties. The first is the young Phantastes (Imagination), whose mind ranges wildly through images of people, beasts, and a variety of objects both real and fictional. The second figure is an unnamed councilor, whose judgment both Guyon and Arthur admire. The third and last figure, however, is most important for discussion. This is the old Eumnestes (Memory),⁸¹ whose lifestyle and appearance are somewhat similar to Spenser's description of *Contemplation* in Book I:

And therein sat an old oldman, halfe blind,

And all decrepit in his feeble corse,

Yet lively vigour rested in his mind,

And recompenst him with a better score:

Weake body well is chang'd for minds redoubled forse. (II.ix.55.5-9)

Of the three sages in this section of the House of Alma, Eumnestes is the one who most clearly represents contemplative practices. The old man's body is withered and he remains ever at his incessant reading, not even moving to retrieve or replace a book (the chore of his page, Anamnestes). Here with Eumnestes, the two knights meditate on the history of Britain and Fairy

⁸¹ "Well-remembering," according to Hamilton's note (*FQ* 244n).

Land for their final preparation as representatives of temperance.⁸² In the chronicles, the struggle to maintain temperance is projected outward from the body and onto a national scale. The two chronicles are of a distinctly different character. While Arthur's book of *Briton monuments* is filled with civil wars, rebellions, usurpations, and truncated dynasties, Guyon's *Antiquitee of Faery lond* sets forth the stability and lasting peace that accompany temperate government. Even the Elfin creation story encompasses a sense of balance: "Prometheus did create / A man, of many parts from beasts deryv'd / And then stole fire from heven, to animate / His worke" (II.x.70.5-8). The successful rule of the Elfin kings is derived from their ability to keep the disparate parts of the body (and state) beneath the rule of reason. Perhaps the most astonishing display of temperate affairs within the Elfin kingdom comes with the death of Elfinor: "He left three sonnes, the which in order raynd, / And all their Ofspring, in their dew descents, / Even seven hundred Princes" (II.x.74.1-3). Against the Elfin chronicle, the history of Britain stands as a testament to human weakness. While Guyon may take the Elfin chronicle as an example of temperance achieved, Arthur must put aside the British chronicle with a sense of his duty to establish temperate rule over a turbulent kingdom. For both knights, the contemplation of the past, with all its moral failures and successes, may inform their struggles to uphold virtue in the midst of fallen nature.

The act of contemplation plays a significant role in uniting the concerns of nature and grace. In the House of Holinesse, Redcrosse feels the compunction of fear, which causes him to

⁸²I name Arthur a representative of Temperance here in keeping with the cumulative scheme of the prince's quest, which Ronald Horton describes in *The Unity of the Faerie Queene*: "As magnificence Arthur displays that steadiness of purpose and tenacity of application necessary to overcome the vices one by one and replace them with their opposing virtues. Arthur's perfection is a process of perfecting, and his cumulative acquisition of the virtues of the books is represented in his identification with the patron knights in their quests" (20).

forsake the thought that he could achieve his quest by his own natural abilities. When the compunction of fear recedes, compunction of love bears Redcrosse toward his vision of the New Jerusalem. After Redcrosse has been made holy through grace, he may confidently struggle in the world toward his own perfection. Guyon is also freed from spiritual fear. We see him practice this freedom through contemplation on the level of nature. He is led toward spiritual knowledge by observing the natural world and rising above it. First he examines the riches contained within the material creation (Mammon), then directs his gaze within the bounds of his own body and soul. Lastly, Guyon learns from contemplating Elfin history to impose the ordering principle of temperance on the outside world through virtuous actions. Thus both Redcrosse and Guyon will work themselves and the world at large toward the ever distant goal of ultimate perfection. And, all the while, they will struggle with the assurance that grace will provide the means for the final victory.

With Book III, the focus shifts from the miseries surrounding the central human conundrum of embodied existence to the subjects of sexuality and reproduction, with all the private anxiety and social theater particularly pertaining thereto. The last of the private moral virtues, chastity uniquely looks toward the second set of public virtues, as the chaste soul navigates the difficult terrain of marriage and courtship on the one hand or perpetual virginity on the other. Spenser identifies both of these sexual expressions as legitimate paths to chaste virtue, and they have their respective representatives in the twins Amoret and Belphoebe. Along with the shift to a somewhat more outward looking virtue, comes a strikingly different patron in the Knight of Chastity: Britomart, a Cornish princess in plate armor, who rides into the narrative as an eminently competent “lady-knight,” and who time and again proves herself an equal to her fellow patrons as well as the various lesser knights she confounds along her way. Along with her

rides an equally unlikely squire, the elderly nurse, Glauce, a source of solace and wisdom in matters of love and courtship. Britomart's unconventional character enables her to inhabit romantic roles traditionally assigned to either gender, both lover and beloved, as befits a healthy and reciprocal relationship according to Spenser's vision. Of course, we have also seen this to some extent in the *Amoretti*, in which both partners play the victor and vanquished, pursuer and pursued, until the two settle into a balance of power that will prove mutually beneficial. Unlike Redcrosse or Guyon, Britomart has received no mission from the Fairy Queen and has taken up her quest on a private matter, driven on by her love for the mysterious man she has glimpsed in Merlin's mirror. Once more, Spenser explores the emotional shadings and permutations which inundate the soul through the various stages of a lengthy courtship:

With such selfe-pleasing thoughts her wound she fedd,
And thought so to beguile her grievous smart;
But so her smart was much more grievous bredd,
And the deepe wound more deep engord her hart,
That nought but death her dolour mote depart.
So forth she rode without repose or rest,
Searching all lands and each remotest part,
Following the guydaunce of her blinded guest,
Till that to the seacoast at length she her adrest. (III.iv.6.1-9)

Here, Britomart would appear to follow the pattern of Una, searching through the wilderness for Redcrosse after their separation toward the beginning of Book I. But the Knight of Chastity wanders the deeps and delves of Fairy Land searching for the missing piece of her own soul, lodged now within the breast of Sir Arthegall, the only man who is in some sense her fitting mate

and equal. As if to emphasize the insufficiency of all other potential suitors, she carries a spear with an enchanted point that no man can withstand. Despite the social dimension of identifying the most worthy suitor and repelling all others, there is a level of profound introspection in Book III, as we have little difficulty in realizing that crucial actions over the course of Britomart's desperate quest take place within "each remotest part" of the heroine's own heart. Britomart's tale will continue through Book IV, suggesting the close affinity between the purified erotic love championed under the title of chastity and the mutually supportive friendships that should ideally form between the virtuous.

Situated in the center of the book, the Garden of Adonis exemplifies and comments upon the virtue of chastity in much the same way as the House of Holinesse and the Castle of Alma have set forth their own virtues. To make any sense of the place, however, we must first come to terms with the sexual implications in Spenser's conception of chastity. The Garden presents a perspective that is neither sterile nor prudish, and it becomes clear that the most complete fulfillment of chastity in Spenser's vision will involve participation in the ongoing cycle of sexuality and reproduction, properly experienced within the context of Spenser's idealized conception of marriage. For the poet, this is quite a serious matter, and not merely as a concession to the sexual ethics of reactionary Protestantism. The Anglican Marriage Rite speaks quite seriously of this union between two complete "selves," consisting of soul and body. But the Platonic union of souls in love bears even more relevance for this canto. Of course, the Platonic tradition often advocates for other, more abstract methods of uniting one's soul to another—for Ficino, a mere glance carried some essential transmission from heart to heart through the conduit of the body—and these less physical methods tend to be treated as the ideal. But these beliefs do not negate the possibility for the union of two souls through the conduit of the physical body, a

notion which lends the action of sexual coupling a great deal of power in Spenser's conception, along with a profound danger. Suitably, the Garden is not the home of the celibate Belphoebe, an analogue for the Virgin Queen, but of Amoret, who shares her destiny of married love with Britomart, though her road to this fulfillment will be equally perilous. As A. Bartlett Giamatti notes, the Garden of Adonis presents a vision of human sexuality in balance with the flux of time, encompassing the entire process of birth, growth, death, and decay. And this quality places the Garden at odds with the Bower of Bliss at the end of Book II, which allured its victims with the self-destructive illusion of an eternal present (Giamatti 285-87). As though to reflect the decay which has crept into their souls, these unhappy beings are rendered into numerous animal forms by the witch Acrasia, who feeds like a vampire upon the short-sighted pleasures of the intemperate. Previously, the idealized allegorical locations have served the double function of completing a patron knight's education in the book's respective virtue and of patterning it for the sake of the reader. Undoubtedly Britomart could learn much from this nexus of natural growth and fertility. Oddly enough, however, she never sets foot in her own virtue's idealized locale. Rather than servicing the plot with an account of our heroine's education, the Garden of Adonis sequence stands quite alone as a portion of the backstory for Amoret, who has lived in the Garden under Venus's tutelage until her coming of age. Britomart's own association with the Garden of Adonis remains indirect, through her ongoing association with Amoret and simply through her espousal of the same balanced and productive vision of human sexuality.

The Garden of Adonis equates sexuality with the creation of new life, and contemplates the related mystery of the soul's descent from another realm to join with a specific body at the time of birth. It presents a pure and uncorrupted vision of nature and the human place within it. Indeed, the sheer lack of artifice in this fertile paradise features prominently in Lewis's

interpretation as a signification of the Garden's honesty and natural goodness, especially as it contrasts with Book II's Bower of Bliss: "The one is artifice, sterility, death: the other, nature, fecundity, life" (*Allegory* 326). In keeping with this, we find abundant indications of life: an astounding mass of vegetation, trees and flowers of every variety, and human infants, growing like eggplants or cabbages from the same fertile ground. Birth and growth, however, do not hold exclusive sway in this vision of life's process, for death has its place here too, as Quitslund explains, "In the Garden of Adonis, death is not avoided, but is treated as subject to recuperation, involved in a complementary relationship with love and its fruition, childbearing and other creative activity" (213). Death remains part of the same natural process, preceding birth and mysteriously suggesting the possibility of another birth across its threshold. And here we find one of the more surprising features of the Garden of Adonis episode, in its explanations of the mysterious interplay between soul and matter for the souls that leave the Garden at the beginning of life and reenter it after death, all under the guidance of the mysterious Genius:

Some thousand yeares so doen they there remayne;

And then of him are clad with other hew,

Or sent into the chaungefull world againe;

Till thether they retourne, where first they grew:

So like a wheele arownd they ronne from old to new. (III.vi.33.5-9)

As discussed in the first two chapters, reincarnation or transmigration would not have been an unfamiliar concept to any of Spenser's readers who were acquainted with the basic doctrines of Neoplatonism, although the nature of its use could spell the difference between a creative conceit and outright heresy. Perhaps even this original audience would not find it so troubling as a critic like Ellrodt, whose interpretations of the episode have the strange inventiveness of a man forced

to defend his preferred orthodoxy, in this case, the conception of a Spenser too piously Christian (or specifically Calvinistic) to have ever embraced the teachings of Neoplatonism as a serious metaphysical possibility.⁸³ Despite Ellrodt's disapproval, the canto presents fertile ground for Neoplatonist interpretations, as it suggests such doctrines as the soul's preexistence before birth and a vision of the afterlife that includes the possibility bodily transmigration. Through all of this, the Garden canto supports a notion of continuity within change, which will grow increasingly potent through the *Faerie Queene's* second half. After all, these are the forces that determine so much of the strange double nature of human existence, as an eternal soul within a fragile, aging body:

All things from thence doe their first being fetch,
And borrow matter, whereof they are made,
Which when as forme and feature it does ketch,
Becomes a bodie, and doth then invade
The state of life, out of the griesly shade.
That substance is eterne, and bideth so,
Ne when the life decayes, and forme does fade,
Doth it consume, and into nothing goe,
But chaunged is, and often altred to and froe. (III.vi.37.1-9)

All of this seems to enter into the mystery at the center of the Garden: Venus and her lover Adonis, wrapped in a perpetual embrace—the unfortunate mortal ever caught within the moment of transformation from mortally wounded hunter, gored by the tusk of a boar, to the flower that

⁸³ For the claim that the transmigration of souls in the Garden of Adonis is irreconcilable with Spenser's Christianity, see Ellrodt (74-5).

bears his name. The image suggests something of Spenser's great hope for human sexuality, as well as its essential tragedy, a reflection of eternity expressed within the physical world of birth and death.

Britomart's quest in Book III culminates in another significant allegorical location: the House of Busirane, a sumptuous hall in which all the natural wholesomeness of the Garden of Adonis is subverted beneath layers of courtly artifice and dissemblance. Sir Scudamour enters the poem as a representative of Courtly Love, indicated by the emblem of the armed Cupid displayed upon his shield. His own heroic quest focuses on the redemption of Amoret, his intended bride, from the wizard Busirane, at whose hand the maiden suffers daily torture. Scudamour's inability to pass through the wall of fire at the entrance suggests something of their problem: to some extent, Busirane represents Scudamour himself, or rather Amoret's fears of his aggressive male sexuality, suggested by the wizard's sudden appearance on the couple's wedding night. Some impropriety on Scudamour's part seems to have led Amoret to the pain and despair of her captivity, where she marches in a pageant ruled by the mocking God of Love and endures the wizard's advances on her raw and exposed heart. All of Amoret's miseries point to the same courtly tradition signified by the figure on her lover's shield, and she clearly fears the indignity of becoming another conquest. Only Britomart, as representative of a chaste and responsible courtship, can pass through the fire of the lady's defenses and bring her out into the light. Readers of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* would have had the pleasure of ending the volume with Scudamour and Amoret's touching reunion, portrayed in the following arresting image:

Had ye them seene, ye would have surely thought,
That they had beene that faire *Hermaphrodite*,
Which that rich *Romane* of white marble wrought,

And in his costly Bath causd to bee site:

So seemd those two, as growne together quite... (III.xii.46*.1-5)

Amoret as a suggestion of Britomart's future, that the lady-knight cannot help but to look on "halfe envying their blesse" (46*.6). In the more familiar 1595 ending, however, Britomart returns to the house's entrance to find no sign of Scudamour, who has left with Britomart's squire, Glauce, to acquire help. The change to a less conclusive ending opens up new narrative possibilities for Britomart, Amoret, and Scudamour, while opening the next book with a greater sense of continuity. Perhaps more significantly for the current discussion, this porous division between Books III and IV, bridging the two halves of *The Faerie Queene*, suggests a definite progression toward the more socially aligned virtues. And so the soul that has gracefully opened itself up to the complete self of another human being (both body and soul), may now enter into an increasingly complex set of relationships in order to increase in virtue and general well-being, as well as to help others to do the same.

With Book IV, Spenser makes an even greater departure from the established pattern by naming not one, but two patrons in "The Legend of Cambel and Telamond, Or of Friendship."⁸⁴ Strangely enough, these characters only appear in the two cantos dealing with Spenser's continuation of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*. For the authority and inspiration needed in such an undertaking, Spenser invokes guiding presence of "Dan *Chaucer*, well of English undefyled" (IV.ii.32.8), whose spirit now mysteriously resides in Spenser "through infusion sweete" (34.6). By suggesting a spiritual brotherhood with his great predecessor, Spenser reintroduces the theme of bonds between souls that resist the passing of time. Although Spenser supposes a finished

⁸⁴ The section on Book IV draws on material from my master's thesis: "*The Pillars of Eternity*": *Friendship and the Redemption of Man in Spenser's Faerie Queene*.

version of the *Squire's Tale* has fallen victim to “cursed Eld the cankerworme of writs,” Chaucer’s spirit lives on in his disciple and in the shared poetic vision that will outlive them both (33.6). In Spenser’s imaginative reconstruction, the abortive *Squire's Tale* continues with the tournament Cambell declares for the prize of his sister’s hand, in which he is opposed by three triplets: Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond. These three brothers in themselves form a symbol of unity and concord in the universe, and are so alike that Spenser’s fine detailing of their slight differences in skill and preference only renders them all the more similar. They are the sons of the nymph Agape, whose name refers to Christian love, or “Charity.” As Roche explains in *The Kindly Flame*, “the names of [Agape’s] sons mean first, second, and third world” (16), while Telamond, the name substituted for Triamond in the book’s title, might be construed to mean “Perfect World” (17). This suggests that in the three brothers’ affinity for one another as friends, we see the perfect harmony of earth, heaven, and empyrean associated with the prelapsarian universe. Another possibility, Roche suggests, is that “the three brothers could become the three worlds of man’s soul, in which the defeat of Priamond and Diamond figure the defeat of the vegetative and sensitive souls and the eventual harmony of man with the angelic mind” (30). Thus, Cambell’s duel with the three brothers becomes a progression similar to the ladder of love in Plato and Castiglione. Traditional Platonists sources have typically dealt with friendship in its purest form as a phenomenon existing between two individuals, but in the case of Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond, we might do well to keep in mind the famous precept from Ecclesiastes: “a threfolde coard is not easely broken” (4.12). Most fascinating is the brothers’ unique gift of staying together even after death, which brings to mind Cicero’s reflections about his deceased friend Scipio: “As far as I am concerned, although Scipio was taken away from me unexpectedly, he is still living and will live forever, for it was the man’s virtue that I loved, and

this has not been destroyed” (Cicero 29). Just so, the union of the brothers’ souls in life and death is based on the lasting presence of the qualities that defy mortality, such as virtue and their transcendent love for one another. All of this Spenser illustrates quite dramatically as Cambell, protected by his sister Canacee’s magic ring, kills Priamond, and Diamond, only to have their souls rally together for a final stand in the body of Triamond. Only then does Triamond prove Cambell’s equal and the two are successfully united in friendship.

When the triplets’ sister Cambina enters the lists and bids the combatants cease, she shows both familial affection toward Triamond as well as another newly budding love for Cambell, “whose sad ruefull cheare / Made her to change her hew, and hidden love t’appeare” (IV.iii.46.8-9). With the friendship of the men, Cambina and Canacee follow suit, befriending one another and becoming the wives of Cambell and Triamond. In this group’s coming together, various loves operate in conjunction, with representation for all three types of love, as they are listed by Spenser. All of the loves intertwine to the point that the similarities between the relationships overshadow the differences and it is as if they are all “married” to one another. This is the point when distinctions between the different types of love become irrelevant. They are now bound up “in perfect love, devoide of hatefull strife” (IV.iii.52.2) and they “all alike did love, and loved were” (52.8). The group has become an embodiment of the perfect bond of love or charity, represented by Agape, mother to half of the group. The love represented by this ideal group is the love by which God bound up the elements as with a golden chain. By casting out discord and coming together in concord and perfect love, the group has established a bond that defies mortality. For Spenser, friendship not only links individual souls together, but lifts them up through a shared ethos of virtue, mutuality, and equality. And the bond is only strengthened by the soul’s longing for permanence, as friendship creates the hope for a shared, ideal world.

All of these qualities are united in the tetrad formed by Cambell, Triamond, Canacee, and Cambina. And their unique bond allows even greater depth and stability through the inclusion of friendship, romantic love, and familial affection as inter-personal manifestations of concord.

Throughout *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser uses the image of a golden chain to represent concord, a cosmic law in Spenser's universe which manifests in human affairs through the virtue of friendship. We first see the image of the golden chain in Book I when Arthur befriends Redcrosse, whom he has just saved from the giant, Orgoglio; we see it again in Book III when Britomart and Guyon cease their conflict and make peace: "In which accord the Prince was also plaste, / And with the golden chaine of concord tyde" (III.i.12.7-8). The image of the golden chain gives us a sense of the bond's durability as well as its otherworldly perfection. Often in the "Legend of Friendship," objects and images are associated with concord because of their golden qualities or binding powers, an example being Belpheobe's locket: "Shap'd like a heart, yet bleeding of the wound, / And with a litle golden chaine about it bound" (IV.viii.6.8-9); however, we also see that the forces of evil are capable of mimicking these indicators of concord, such as the reference to Amoret's imprisonment in the House of Busirane as "*Amorets* hart-binding chaine" (IV.i.1.4). The similarity of the two images shows that the bands of love, usually a source of permanence and stability, can become shackles and instruments of torture if they are abused. We have seen this just as well in the *Amoretti's* recurring image of "loves soft bands," which bind and heal just as well as they torture and constrain. Potentially loving relationships become a pathetic parody of themselves when the spirit of discord spreads its perverse influence within the bonds of family, friendship, or, perhaps most tragically of all, within those of love and marriage. Concord appears throughout *The Faerie Queene* as one of the greatest sources of good, especially in those books concerned with the more social virtues, although greater difficulties

will accompany the attempt to spread its influence from a group of friends, united by their commonalities, to society at large.

In Book V, this process expands outward in a meditation on the difficult task of gathering a multitude of individual souls, with all their differences of capabilities, class, and material needs, into a peaceful and prosperous society. Arthegall appears once again, now as the patron Knight of Justice, and his previous association with Britomart situates the scope of his quest within that expansion of social relations begun in Book III with the virtue of chastity. As necessitated by the subject matter, the Legend of Justice lacks something of the sublimity and depth of introspection in the previous books. Perhaps there is little room left for these embellishments with a main plot involving contemporary matters of political importance for Spenser and his audience, namely the liberation of the kingdoms of Belgium and Ireland. This is not mere topicality for its own sake, however, as Spenser envisions the great scope of history as an appropriate field for righteous action in the exercise of law, statecraft and, when necessary, force of arms. And Spenser applies this logic equally to the agons of his own age. As Harry Berger notes, the poet was deeply engaged with the question of “how to re-form poetically the corrupt spectacle of modern life in the ideal images of antiquity. The poet sees that the world around him is out of joint, and he feels that if he would discharge his obligation as man and citizen he must try to set it right” (264). Again, we are set to strive toward a distant ideal, which bears the markings of another world. Now, however, the concerns of the book will split between the decay of justice within institutions and within the human soul, both of which must be reformed for the general welfare of society. At the opening of the book, Spenser looks for his model in the mythic Golden Age, “When as mans age was in his freshest prime, / And the first blossome of faire vertue bare” (V.P.1.3-4). For all the poet can discern, not just the world of

man, but the cosmos itself has fallen away from this primal order, as he notes that even the constellations—the so called “fixed stars”—have gradually declined from their ancient positions, signaling a universal decline in order and virtue alike:

Most sacred vertue she of all the rest,
Resembling God in his imperiall might;
Whose souveraine powre is herein most exprest,
That both to good and bad he dealeth right,
And all his workes with Iustice hath bedight. (V.P.10.1-5)

This is the goddess Astraea, identified with the constellation Virgo, who left earth for the heavens to flee the wickedness of humanity.⁸⁵ While civilization awaits the return of Astraea to inaugurate a new Golden Age, she has assigned a surrogate in Arthegall, trained in justice by the goddess herself, to bring order back into the world. As in the other proems, Spenser brings the subject to bear on Elizabeth I, who is doubly reflected here in the virgin goddess and the lesser figure of Arthegall, whose union will produce the legendary bloodline of the Tudor Dynasty.

But how do the actions of Book V, so concerned as they seem to be with externals, contribute to our understanding of justice as a virtue that nurtures and improves the soul? Perhaps the book is all surface, as it appears in Graham Hough’s interpretation: “Justice might be conceived as an internal constituent and governor of the soul, or in the Platonic way as the harmony of the soul resulting from the right balance of its elements. This cluster of ideas is dealt with if anywhere under the head of Temperance in Book II, and there is no trace of it here” (192). Indeed, for much of the book Arthegall performs rather mundane actions which one might reasonably assign to the duties of a country constable. While Arthegall and his interpretation of

⁸⁵ See Roche’s note to the Penguin edition (*FQ* 1188n).

justice will shock the sensibilities of many a modern reader, his squire Talus, the iron man, proves more than his match in brutality. Something resembling the early modern conception of a robot, Talus dispenses swift and devastating justice at the end of a biting flail. But for all of his strength of arm and mechanical efficiency, Talus is woefully deficient in restraint. “The first six episodes of Book V, from Sir Sanglier through Terpine, seem clearly to have been selected and arranged as exempla illustrating Justice Absolute, the execution of the letter of the law in a variety of areas” (Phillips 474). We find in passages such as his merciless whipping of the peasants, an already questionable action which continues much longer than is reasonable. It is clear that Talus punishes offenders with little regard to human suffering, perhaps to possibility of their redemption. Indeed, it seems the iron man is a rather soulless creation, and for much of the book, Arthegall does not distinguish himself as sufficiently fairer or gentler than his squire so as to merit our admiration.

The tempering of these hard qualities, in which Sir Arthegall resembles the soulless iron man, depends upon his relationship to Britomart, which also suggests the key to his own interior development as the Knight of Justice. Last seen at her parting with Arthegall in Book IV, Britomart reenters the narrative after receiving word from Talus of Arthegall’s capture by the wicked Amazon, Radigund, who has compelled this proud enforcer of conventional social hierarchies to dress and act like a woman. Needless to say, all parties treat this inversion as a great indignity to be redressed post haste, and it becomes the will of justice for Britomart to subdue this female usurper, bringing the Amazon down to earth with a skull splitting blow of her sword. Even as she restores a conventional relationship between the genders, Britomart cannot hide her embarrassed reaction to Arthegall’s plight: “At sight thereof abasht with secrete shame, / She turnd her head aside, as nothing glad, / To have beheld a spectacle so bad...” (V.vii.38.3-5).

The Amazon has disrupted the tenuous balance of power between two souls in love, and justice in this case depends on the restoration of their former proportions, which were defined by a degree of equality and hardly won, mutual respect. In fact, their relationship says a great deal about Spenser's conception of justice, which receives its ideal allegorical expression in the Temple of Isis. Oddly enough, the Knight of Justice himself never sets foot here. Following Spenser's logic, however, it is just as well for Britomart to visit the Temple of Isis, as Arthegall's proper embodiment of justice will depend upon her influence. Moreover, her presence in this episode does great honor to their bond, with the implication that they have truly become united as soul to soul and share even the interior developments necessitated by their allegorical quests as common among them. At the center of the Temple, Britomart finds the statue of the goddess herself, crowned with gold and holding a slender wand. But the crocodile at her feet appears to threaten the goddess power, wrapping its tail around her waist, while Isis does what she can to subdue it: "One foote was set uppon the Crocodile, / And on the ground the other fast did stand, / So meaning to suppress both forged guile, / And open force..." (V.vii.7.1-4). This surprising mythological image represents Britomart as Isis and Arthegall as the crocodile, associated with Isis's husband, the god Osiris. Their successful union, as well as Arthegall's full embodiment of justice, depends on the suppression of the cruel and ferocious tendencies he has already displayed in upholding the hard letter of the law. And this will likely accompany Arthegall's growing ability to model this relationship in his own soul, subjecting the bestial to the angelic and rational as the Platonist tradition has taught.

And so the rigid matter of the "Legend of Justice" gives way to the gentler, bucolic quest of Sir Calidore, whose quest as the patron of Courtesy has sent him in pursuit of the Blatant Beast, a rumor mongering chimera devastating court and countryside alike. By "Courtesy,"

Spenser does not intend to simply comment upon the finer points of courtly etiquette. Such a book would make for rather drab reading, although the precedent of Book V might understandably have led one to expect such a thing. After establishing a society of many souls, bound together with common laws and hierarchies, the final step in this progress involves the softening of the very qualities that have made the practice of justice so distasteful and, to some extent, even inhuman. As we have followed the order of the virtues from Holinesse to Courtesy, we have marked the various stages in a gradual effort to work the world back toward a state of perfection. This was the state of the world before a great falling away, as Christian and Platonic sources have both told us, and in a universe ruled by either of these conceptions it is only natural to long for this great return. While their effort is commendable, however, the enactors of these virtues must ever wrestle against the intractable substances of earthly objects, earthly institutions, earthly people, the mud and loam of the material universe. If, then, the world of human interactions cannot be perfected, it can at least be polished, and to such a degree that it finally gleams with the light of a world we have left behind. Spenser warns us, however, against the dazzling glare of false reflections, which distort the truth and “can blynd / The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras” (VI.P.5.6-7). Much of what Spenser has to teach us about courtesy can be derived from this charming metaphor of “the bloosme of comely courtesie, / Which though it on a lowly stalke doe bowre, / Yet brancheth forth in brave nobilitie, / And spreads it selfe through all civilitie...” (VI.P.4.2-5). And the rest of the book will focus on the search for the enchanted soil that will produce this “flower on a lowly stalk.” Quite suitably then, the narrative moves through some of the most fertile and green spaces of the entire epic.

Such is the business of Spenser’s Courtesy, and the quest for this ideal leads Sir Calidore through distant fields and wilds, far from the sophisticated courts and parlors where one would

typically expect to encounter human life in its most perfected modes. The Blatant Beast is essentially a courtly problem, though it has spread its foul influence far and wide. Perhaps the oddest feature of the book is the substitution of the hero, with Sir Calepine doubling for Calidore through a large section of the book's middle portion. But Calidore finally finds courtesy in its truest form when the course of his quest leads him to the rustic home of the Arcadian shepherds. Their humble yet dignified manner of living brings to mind a maxim from the book's proem: "But vertues seat is deepe within the mynd, / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (VI.P.5.8-9). Calidore certainly makes a great display of courtesy while dwelling among them, but rather than resenting the knight's courtly ways, the rustics recognize the spirit of true courtesy and love him for it. And by this mean, Calidore inspires the love of Pastorella: "So it surely wrought / With this faire Mayd, and in her mynde the seeds / Of perfect love did sow, that last forth brought / The fruite of ioy and blisse, though long time dearely bought" (VI.ix.45.6-9). While quite courteous herself, Pastorella embodies the ideal of a beautiful and civil world, the remembrance of which inspires human beings to treat one another well.

While this promise of a better world leads some to influence the world through virtuous actions, it compels other to create. Now that Spenser, late in his career, has returned once more to the Arcadian landscape of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, he cannot help but to conjure up the old figure of Colin Clout, through whom he once voiced his early career ambitions, wearing a rustic mask as he voiced his soul's deepest hopes and frustrations. Spenser now grants his old persona the honor of leading a dance of the Graces all their gorgeous retinue, who move in rhythmic circles to the sound of his piping. And in the midst of these cosmic beings stands an earthly maiden, made one of their company through Colin's imagining. This could be none other than

the glorified Elizabeth Boyle of the *Amoretti*, now entering the poem beneath the mask of a shepherd girl. And now Spenser speaks for himself, as he calls out to Colin,

Pype iolly shepheard, pype thou now apace

Unto thy love, that made thee low to lout;

Thy love is present there with thee in place,

Thy love is there advaunst to be another Grace. (VI.x.16.6-9)

In this fleeting moment, Colin has penetrated to the realm of the Ideas themselves, or perhaps rather, they have come down to dwell with him on earth and dance along to his piping. The distinction is unimportant, for we have been given a glimpse of true beauty as heaven and earth moved together as with a single will atop Mount Acidale. Once again, however, poor Colin loses the object of his desire, as the comparatively boorish Calidore interrupts this moment of transcendental vision with his unwelcome presence. As Lewis states it beautifully, “The meaning of the Graces, in their relation to Colin Clout, is perfectly clear: they are ‘inspiration’, the fugitive thing that enables a man to write one day and leaves him dry as a stone the next, the mysterious source of beauty” (*Allegory* 351). For so much of the present study, we have discussed the soul’s innate desire to return to the source of that beauty—a distant ideal but worthy of the pursuit. And Spenser has laid out one arduous path by which the virtuous soul might navigate that journey.

But while Calidore has walked among such imaginative wonders, tragedy has struck the Arcadian shepherds, as a throng of bandits has descended on their homes and taken captives. Outside the “golden world” of Colin’s songs, a society like Arcadia can hardly exist without the tireless and constant vigilance of the virtuous soul—an external projection from the beautified internal landscape of the heroic soul, not yet perfect, but sufficiently *fashioned* to face the

threats of an illusive and intransigent lower world. Whether or not Spenser intended this as a true ending to his labors remains a matter of healthy debate, and I will not press the matter too heavily. Had Spenser lived on long enough to resume the task, this comfortable conclusion, like that of the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, may well have given way to new crises, other societies besieged or lapsing, and yet another sequence of virtuous warriors willing to unite their souls in turn as links in that golden chain of righteousness. The work is often without recognition or reward, except insomuch as virtue is a reward in itself. Over the journey of these five chapters, I hope that my arguments have revealed the dynamic potential of the soul that shines through Spenser's poetry. I still maintain that the progression of the virtues by which Spenser fashions his sincere reader will only reveal its true riches if we approach it in the light of the Neoplatonist and Christian Platonist sources that must have shown Spenser the hidden glories of the human soul.

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