Sanctifying a Darke Conceit: Seeing the Bible in the Faerie Queene

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Sanctifying a Darke Conceit:

Seeing the Bible in The Faerie Queene

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Abstract

Approaching the poem from the perspective of reception history, the present dissertation seeks to show that the Bible’s role in The Faerie Queene is far more pervasive than has usually been recognized. Rather than see the biblical material as the domain of only certain sections—notably, Book I and perhaps Books II and V—I propose that it is to be seen as a meaningful presence throughout the poem. Indeed, I will argue that it provides a previously unnoticed, unifying structure to the whole.

I begin by giving a brief sketch of the Bible in Spenser’s early life. From here, I draw upon the resources of modern biblical scholarship—specifically, Childs’ “canonical approach”—to describe the way Spenser read the Bible and, consequently, the ways in which he alluded to it. I go on to discuss the notions of “typology” and “allegory,” providing the foundation for a discussion of Spenser’s reading not only of the Bible, but of the ongoing narrative of history. Then follows an exploration of the ways Spenser seeks to relate the various legacies of the Classical and biblical past to his Christian, humanist present, which culminates in a description of the Christian canon’s structuring role within the poem. This leads to a reflection on this structure’s significance through consideration of the various instances of books and of reading that occur in Book I. I then take up this theme again in Book III, in the transformation of Malbecco and in the idolatrous Tabernacle-Temple of Busirane. Drawing upon the early modern discourse concerning images and idols, I conclude with a discussion of The Faerie Queene as a unified, poetic sign pointing to the Divine Presence—a function typified in the discarded ending of Book III.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................. iii

Preface ................................................... vi

Chapter I. The Beginnings of Spenser’s Biblicism ................................. 1

Chapter II. Reading the Tangled Bible: Spenser’s Canonical Perspective ...... 24

Chapter III. Typology and Historical Allegory: Spenser’s Canonical Reading of History ................................. 58

Chapter IV. From Genesis to the Matter of France: Spenser’s Rewritten Everything ........................................... 79

Chapter V. Bold Readers & Bloody Books: Spenser’s Path to Wisdom ........ 119

Chapter VI. Images of a Jealous God .................................................. 146

Chapter VII. The End of Spenser’s Biblicism .......................................... 182

Bibliography ........................................................................... 199
Sir, knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entitled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or dark conceit, I haue thought good ... to discover unto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I haue fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by-accidents therein occasioned.¹

So Spenser wrote in his "Letter to Raleigh." In a few short pages, Spenser unfolds his now-familiar vision of a poem of twelve—or perhaps twenty-four—books, each dedicated to a particular knight in whom is figured a particular virtue. At the center of this vision stands the throne of the Faerie Queene, Gloriana, and her faerie court in a festal celebration. But, of course, the poem goes unfinished, and this poetic vision remains unwritten. In the pages that follow, I will propose that the vision described in the "Letter to Raleigh" was not the only one at work in The Faerie Queene. There was another, congruent plan guiding Spenser’s poem, which has, until now, not been “discovered” either by its author or its critics. As I will argue below, this second “darke conceit” provides a unifying structure to the whole that is borrowed not from courtly festival or Aristotelian ethics, but from the Christian Bible. Once discovered, this structure provides not only the framework within which Spenser wrote his poem, but also the lens through which it is to be read. What is revealed by this discovery, then, is an epic of a different sort, an epic built not only upon the Classical models that Spenser claims, but one everywhere sanctified by the presence of this undisclosed “darke conceit.”

¹ “Letter to Raleigh” in Hamilton, 714.
This study will seek to make good on these, admittedly, rather grand claims. And in this, I am aware that I will be working against an old and enduring scholarly consensus regarding the limited role of the Bible in *The Faerie Queene*. Take, for example, the seemingly unanimous opinion that Book III, the Legend of Chastity, has nothing to do with the Bible.\(^2\) Sure, one can find the occasional biblical allusion scattered among its pages—in fact, Naseeb Shaheen found fifty-five—but by and large, the thinking seems to go, these have little or no real impact on the meaning of the book. It is a piece cut from a different discourse. It is Classical. It is Italianate. It is Ovidian. It is, it seems, anything but biblical. For some scholars, the same is true for almost the entirety of the poem outside of Book I. Perhaps, it may be admitted, the Christian canon has some role to play in Book II, and among certain scholars, the concentration of biblical allusions in Book V has been taken to have some significance. But generally speaking, the Bible belongs properly in Book I and, if not nowhere else, almost that. Perhaps one example will suffice to sustain the point. Carol Kaske, whose authority on matters of Spenser and the Bible remains unsurpassed, writes:

The bulk of Spenser’s romance-epic is secular discourse and should be read as such. The almost complete absence of Scripture from *Faerie Queene* III and VI means that, like Shakespeare, Spenser does not regard the Bible as containing the answer to every question—for example, the question dominating Britomart’s quest: whom to marry.\(^3\)

It is this way of reading the poem that the current project is, in part, meant to correct. In the chapters that follow, I will try to provide a sketch of the way Spenser read the Bible (and in this, I will

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\(^2\) There are, of course, some scholars who do not subscribe to this, and my debts to them are to be found in the footnotes of the chapters below. Foremost among them, and the only one I will single out here, is Robin Headlam Wells, *Spenser’s Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1983), 20.

\(^3\) Carol Kaske, “Spenser and the Bible,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (ed. Richard A. McCabe; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 485–503. This quote, aside from the notion of the absence of the Scripture in the later books of *The Faerie Queene*, also misunderstands the nature of its role in Early Modern thinking. It is not a matter of the Bible having answers over against other forms of supposedly secular discourse. Rather, it is that those other forms of discourse are all-too-often seen as contained within the omnisignificant discourse of the Bible. On this see Deborah Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010), 5. We will return to this topic in chapters IV and V below.
draw heavily upon Prof. Kaske’s very fine work on the subject), as well as the way those reading practices shaped his methods of allusion to and reappropriation of the biblical text. Several of the examples I will discuss in pursuit of this goal are drawn from Book III, the Legend of Chastity. The reasons for this are threefold. First, it is my hope that by discussing a collection of texts that are integrally related, rather than “cherry-picking” them from here and there, it will be all the more clear that we are not dealing with an isolated and occasional phenomenon, but one that really is as pervasive as I have suggested. Secondly, this approach will provide us with the opportunity to see the ways in which these biblical allusions and themes are developed across a significant portion of the poem, an opportunity that a more scattered selection of texts does not afford. And finally, to these not incidental considerations, I would add the need to address the strong scholarly consensus that opposes my position with regard to Book III. If my effort is to succeed, it needs first conquer that terrain which is most well defended.

But though much of the book is devoted to discussion of Britomart and the book devoted to her, this need not have been so. Chapter II—as it stands, an examination of Britomart in light of the Strange and Valiant women of Proverbs—might as well have been an analysis of the figure of the Palmer and the Law, to name but one example. Chapter III could just as easily have been a treatment of the typology of kingship associated with Artegall in Book V, rather than the same theme in Book III. And chapter VI, an examination of the presence of the Bible in the House of Busirane, might as easily have been dedicated to, among other possibilities, the vision of the graces on Mount Acidale.

The point, again, is that the Bible exerts a much wider influence upon Spenser’s great poem than has previously been recognized. But discussion of all of the biblical elements in a poem of this scope is simply too much for one volume. What I have tried to offer, instead, is a sort of prolegomena in the form of a series of case studies. These case studies will seek to highlight the various strategies that Spenser
employs in reading and reappropriating the Bible, as they examine passages of the poem where the Bible’s influence has gone largely unnoticed. It is my hope that these sketches will point the way for future studies of the topic in other, similarly neglected areas of the poem.

A word about the auspices under which this project has been written is perhaps in order. As a student trained in the study of the Hebrew Bible, my interest in The Faerie Queene is, first and foremost, an interest in its place within reception history. Consequently, part of the burden of this study will be to connect our discussion of Spenser’s engagement with the Bible to the biblical discourse of the sixteenth century, an effort that is made throughout the pages that follow and occupies a central place in the concluding chapter. At the same time, though, it is my hope that as a student of the Hebrew Bible, I can bring a fresh perspective to the study of The Faerie Queene. Indeed, it is my belief that some of the methods of modern biblical criticism—especially the notions of a “canonical approach to Scripture” and of “rewritten Bible”—can provide a useful framework within which to understand Spenser’s biblical allusions. Discussion of these notions and exploration of their relevance to Spenser will make up the bulk of chapters II–IV, and so, we will not belabor the point by discussing them here.

Finally, because it has been written as a dissertation for a degree in Old Testament, I have tried to restrict myself, where possible, to discussion of texts drawn from that portion of the Christian Bible. However, Spenser’s was not the Hebrew Bible, nor the Tanakh. For him, rather, that portion of Scripture was always engaged with as the Old Testament; that is, as a collection inextricably bound up with the New Testament. And so, some reference to those texts will inevitably arise in the pages that follow. (And when they do, the resultant quotations, from Testaments both Old and New, are taken from the Geneva Bible (1560) unless otherwise noted.)
There are many without whom the current study could not have been written. I would like to offer my thanks to the Standing Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University for allowing me to pursue such a deeply interdisciplinary topic, and for the thoughtful guidance they provided in the direction of my research. My thanks go, also, to my teachers at Harvard: to Professor David Andrew Teeter, whose sensitivity to the intertextual subtleties and sophistication of biblical and Second Temple literature I have tried to emulate here; to Professor Peter Machinist, who has been, for me, a model of unflagging intellectual and academic patience and of academic inquiry that is humanistic in the best sense of the word; to Professor Jon Levenson, who has been not only my advisor and supporter in academic pursuits that all too often fell outside of the department norm, but also a teacher of uncommon clarity from whom I have learned so much of the artistry and theological depth of the Hebrew Bible; and finally, to Professor Gordon Teskey, who has so graciously supported my work from the beginning, not only introducing me to Spenser and *The Faerie Queene* in his graduate seminar on the subject, but also generously guiding me through key general exams, and finally directing the dissertation that is their result.

To Professors Machinist, Levenson, and Teskey, I also owe a debt of thanks for their careful reading and thoughtful comment on the project as a whole. And there is one other to whom this same debt is owed, and that twice and even thrice over—my wife, Lisa Wayland. She has tirelessly supported me through many long years of education, helping me at every turn with scheduling, with editing, with moral support and guidance. She has acted as the editor for countless term papers, and now, has been not only editor, but graphic designer and typist, too, for the present dissertation. (For her long hours spent helping to input the bibliography alone, I can never repay her!) Further, as various footnotes throughout the following chapters will attest, she has contributed substantively not only to the appearance, but to
the intellectual content of this project. Her insights have shaped, complemented, corrected, and inspired the present work in almost every chapter.

It has become cliche among biblical scholars to compare their wives to the woman of Proverbs 31:10–31. This, I suppose, is either because we biblical scholars are a particularly unimaginative bunch, or else because we are all fortunate beyond just measure to have been blessed with wives of this sort. In my own case, it is surely the latter (if not the former also) that is the truth. Lisa has shown herself to be—apart from the bit about rising early in the morning—the very model of a “vertuous woman.”

To all of these, and many others whom I have not named, I am deeply grateful for their role in helping to bring this project to completion. Naturally, whatever faults or errors that remain are my own.

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Chapter I. The Beginnings of Spenser’s Biblicism

As discussed in the preface, the purpose of this study is to explore Spenser’s use of the Bible in The Faerie Queene. But before we begin, it will perhaps be useful to familiarize ourselves with the role the Bible played in Spenser’s world more generally—in his experiences in Church, in his education, and in his daily life. The attempt made here must necessarily be cursory and brief, as the effort could easily usurp the entirety of the book, and we have other ends in mind. But it is hoped that the attempt will help to provide a foundation for the remainder of the study and, if nothing else, a framework within which we may examine what is idiosyncratic in Spenser’s reading and reappropriation of the Bible and what is merely another example of what was common in his day, however uncommon it has become in ours.

It is difficult for most people in the twenty-first century to imagine the importance of the Bible in early modern England. In his recent discussion of the Bible in the works of William Shakespeare, Hannibal Hamlin has made this point more exhaustively (and more eloquently) than we will be able to manage here. “William Shakespeare,” he writes, “was born into a biblical culture.”¹ Almost the same thing could be said of Spenser. But only almost, for, though a mere ten years separate the two men, it must immediately be admitted that those were an eventful ten years. 1554, the year of Spenser’s birth, was the second year of the brief reign of Mary I, which is to say, Spenser was born not into a biblical cul-

ture, but a divided one. Henry VIII's reign had seen among its many and momentous religious changes, the introduction of a legal English translation of the Bible in not one, but three versions—the Coverdale Bible, the Mathew's Bible, and, finally, the royally authorized Great Bible, which, in 1538, was ordered to be provided "in some convenient place" in every church in England.² And with that, the beginnings of a biblical culture emerged. For a thousand years or more, the Bible had been a closed book, its most familiar stories not the intellectual provenance of the laity, but "something that clerkis fyndyn wretyn in here book."³ But by 1539, when the injunction of the previous year began to be carried out, this changed, and a process was begun that would, before the century's end, see the Vulgate thoroughly displaced and the English Bible—specifically the Geneva Bible—assume the central place, not only in the religious sphere, but in the culture generally of the English-speaking world.⁴

This process was so strong that even the accession of the staunchly Catholic Mary I to the throne does not seem to have halted it. The injunction of 1538 was never overturned. And although there was a strong Catholic backlash against these new translations—one which led to a good many English Bibles being consigned to the flames alongside the martyrs who refused to relinquish them—when Mary's brief reign came to an end in 1558, the Great Bibles were still there, waiting to be used again.⁵ And where they were lacking, they were quickly restored—soon after assuming the throne, Elizabeth I repeated her father's injunction of 1538, ordering it be supplied to every church in her realm.⁶

⁴. Ibid., 513.
⁵. Bruce, Bible in English, 84.
⁶. Ibid., 85.
And so, with a real, but brief and only partial setback, the move toward a “profoundly and thoroughly biblical” culture continued in the earliest years of Spenser’s life. And by 1560, with the arrival of the Geneva Bible on England’s shores, the English Bible found its most common, and in some ways, its definitive form for the next half-century.

It is difficult to imagine the all-pervading presence the Bible enjoyed in those days. There is nothing in modern Western culture that quite compares. It was everywhere all the time. Indeed, growing up in a village on the eastern outskirts of London, there would likely not have been a day in Edmund Spenser’s young life without some exposure to the language and stories of the Bible. The presence of the sacred text extended far beyond the sanctuary walls, reaching into every facet of early modern life, both private and public. But naturally, this inundation would have begun in Church, and it is there that we will begin.

The Early Modern Bible in the Church

In 1559, Elizabeth’s Acts of Uniformity required every citizen of the realm to attend an Anglican service every Sunday and on holy days. In addition, services were held in the morning and in the evening every day of the week. It is difficult to know the attendance habits of the Spenser family, but one can safely assume that Spenser would have attended a church service at least once a week. And at the


9. The apparent certainty of such a statement needs be tempered by the very real difficulties imposed by the nature of the evidence available to the would-be biographer working on the sixteenth century. For helpful discussion of these difficulties and what appears, to me, to be a balanced, up-to-date discussion of Spenser’s early life, see Andrew Hadfield, Edmund Spenser: A Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–25.


11. To my surprise, I have been unable to find resources detailing the norms of church attendance in early modern England.
heart of every one stood the Bible. The *Book of Common Prayer* prescribed two chapters be read in each service, the first from the Old Testament and the second from the New. These readings were arranged, on ordinary days, to provide a systematic, sequential reading of the majority of the biblical text, both Old and New Testaments, once each year. In addition, certain Psalms were read in each service, such that the entirety of the Psalter, too, was read aloud once each month.\(^{12}\) As a result, the aural experience of the Bible would have been a regular and familiar fixture in Spenser’s world from a very early age. Even if his family attended church only as often as the law required, he would have acquired a deep and lasting memory of a significant portion of the biblical corpus, and especially of the Psalms. If his family happened to be more regular attenders, Spenser would likely have heard nearly the entire Bible read aloud numerous times before he left for Cambridge at the age of fifteen.

It is perhaps worth noting that this is not merely the Bible, or even the English Bible that Spenser was read. Rather, it is the Christian Bible, and more specifically still, it is a Protestant Bible on the road to what would become the Anglican Bible. Which is to say, with James Kugel, that the Bible is and always has been an interpreted text.\(^{13}\) In the liturgical readings of the *Book of Common Prayer*, this fact is most evident in the juxtaposition of the readings from the Old and New Testaments. The juxtaposition carried the weight of a long tradition that had made of the Hebrew Bible an Old Testament, a book that stood in relationship to, and in some way or other was replaced by, a New Testament. This much theology is discernible in the names themselves. What the liturgy adds is perhaps the notion of the ongoing value of both testaments as Christian Scripture. For all that they are, in some way, distinct collections—

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deserving of their own, individual reading schedules—they are, at the same time, for the Christian, two parts of the same whole.

This point would have been made by other uses of the Bible in the daily services. In addition to the daily lessons, readings from all over the Bible are scattered throughout the morning and evening orders of prayer. The morning service opens with the reading of a verse of Scripture—a list of appropriate options is provided, with selections from the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospels. This is followed by several readings drawn from the Psalter, the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, and a call and response between minister and congregation that is taken from the words of Psalm 51. In addition to these overt quotations, the *Book of Common Prayer (1559)* frequently alludes to the Old and New Testaments alike in more subtle ways. For example, after reading the opening sentence of the morning prayer, the minister addresses the congregation with the words, “Derely beloved brethren.” This is, as Hannibal Hamlin has noted, an allusion to Philippians 4:1.14 Similarly, the beginning of the general confession a little later in the service begins with an allusion to Matthew 18:12–14, the parable of the lost sheep: “Almightie and moste merciful father, we have erred and straied from thy waies, lyke lost shepe.”15 And so on the list of examples might go. Hardly a page of the prayer book is without such allusions to Scripture, large and small. In some cases, the allusions are so densely clustered that the text of the liturgy becomes a veritable pastiche. Examples can be found in many of the services, but as we have begun with the morning prayer, let us continue there.

Near the end of the service, before the second collect, one reads this call and response:

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14. Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103. This example, along with many others, can be found in Hamlin, *Bible and Shakespeare*, 19–21. His helpful, but cursory discussion of the use of the Bible in the *Book of Common Prayer* is, so far as I can tell, the only effort of its kind. While we will have opportunity to return to it briefly in chapter II, a more extensive treatment of the subject is needed.

Then the Minister standing up shal say.
O lorde, shewe thy mercy upon us. [Ps 85:7a]
Aunswere. And Graunte us they salvacion. [Ps 85:7b]
Prieste. O Lorde save the Queene. [Ps 19:10 (Vulgate)]
Aunswere. And mercifully here us when we call upon thee. [Ps 30:10a (cf. Psa 27:7)]
Prieste. Endue thy ministers with rightuousnes. [Ps 132:9a]
Aunswere. And make thy chosen people joyful. [Ps 132:9b]
Prieste. O Lorde save thy people. [Ps 28:9a]
Aunswere. And blesse thyne enheritaunce. [Ps 28:9a]
Prieste. Geve peace in our tyme, O Lorde. [Isa 39:8]
Aunswere. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but onely thou, O God.17
Prieste. O God make clene our hartes with in us. [Ps 51:10a]
Aunswere. And take not thy holy spirite from us. [Ps 51:11b]18

This corporate prayer weaves together snippets of biblical prayers, occasionally transforming them to suit the needs of the present liturgical context. Thus, “Lord save the King” in Psalm 20:9 becomes, in Elizabethan England, “Lord save the Queen.” Hezekiah’s words in Isaiah 39:8, which thank God for the promise of peace in his own time, have been adapted to a request for the same blessing in the time of the congregation.19 One might be tempted to question, though, whether such a passage ought even to be considered in a discussion of Spenser’s exposure to the Bible. After all, the citations to the quoted biblical texts provided above are absent in the Book of Common Prayer (1559). But I would suggest, and here I am

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16. The Geneva Bible follows the Hebrew numbering, counting this poem and verse as Psalm 20:9, rendering it: “Saue Lord: let the King heare vs in the day that we call.” The Vulgate, on the other hand, reads: *Domine salvum fac regem et exaudi nos in die qua invocaverimus te* (“O Lord, save the king, and hear us in the day that we shall call upon you.”). Both are possible renderings of the Hebrew, which reads: יִתיְחֵא יִהְיֶה לְעָלְמַךְ אָדָם (“save”). The Geneva translators have followed the Massoretic cantillation marks, placing the *atnach* (i.e. the major verse division) after יִתיְחֵא (“save”). Incidentally, the editor of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the standard scholarly edition of the Hebrew Bible, seems to prefer the Vulgate’s reading, placing the *atnach* instead after יִתיְחֵא (“the / O king”).

17. I can find no direct source for this phrase in the Bible. Rather, it appears to be a statement made under the influence of several biblical phrases and instances, including Psalms 70:4, 11; Lamentations 5:8; 2 Kings 6:17f.; and perhaps 2 Chronicles 14:11.


19. Of course, if one takes the whole context of Isaiah 39 into account, such a request takes on a new light—after all, what Hezekiah welcomed as a promise of peace in his lifetime was also a warning of terrible disaster to come in the time of his children.
not alone, that many people of Spenser’s day would not only have recognized such allusions, they would have gone out of their way to do so.  

The practice was, first of all, not an uncommon one. Other examples are to be found in the liturgy itself. (We will have opportunity to examine one in greater depth in chapter II.) But beyond the liturgy, it was also a common feature of the sermon. And in fact, we are fortunate to have contemporary testimony to this effect. In a letter, dated from 1608, Londoner John Chamberlaine wrote:

We had plenty of preaching here this Christmas. The bishop and the Deane performed theyr parts very well, and Dr Pasfield was not much behind them, but your brother Dove swept the scriptures together upon heapes, as one told me in that very phrase.

It might be tempting to see these scriptural “heapes” as the outworking of the reformers’ notion, Sacra Scriptura sui interpres—the Bible interprets itself. That is to say, when one passage is difficult or unclear, its meaning may be elucidated by other, less difficult passages that speak to the same topic. And this is undoubtedly true. But it is not the whole story, for the practice of clarifying the biblical text by appeal to the biblical text is not at all original to the Reformers. Indeed, the practice is as old as the Bible itself and as much a part of Catholic and, in fact, Jewish interpretive practice as Protestant. At the root of the practice is a deep-seated commitment to the essential unity of the Bible. And this commitment is common to almost all biblical religions going back to Second Temple Judaism itself.

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What was new in the Reformation was access to Scripture among the laity. As discussed above, the production of a legal English Bible was a revolutionary new development. Access to Scripture was so important that it even seems to have contributed to a rise in literacy rates, as the unschooled saw in Scripture a prize worthy of the effort of learning to read.\(^\text{23}\) Further, the laity, armed with their English Bibles, were encouraged to study and engage with Scripture on their own. Later versions of the Geneva Bible—which was, remember, by far the most popular Bible of the day—came complete with a helpful guide entitled, “How to take profit reading of the holy Scripture.” Attributed to “T. Grashop,” the guide instructed its readers in the principle of *Sacra Scriptura sui interpres*, urging them to, “Mark and consider the … agreement that one place of Scripture hath with another, whereby that which seemeth dark in one is made easy in another.”\(^\text{24}\) Further, the diligent Bible reader was encouraged to read the Bible prayerfully and often—at least twice a day, in fact—to consult commentaries where able, to confer with others who were able to interpret the Scriptures well, and finally, to “Hear preaching and prove by the Scriptures that which [was] taught.”\(^\text{25}\)

It is this last point that most concerns us here. According to Grashop, Spenser and his fellow congregants were not meant to be passive recipients either of the sermon or, presumably, of the liturgy. Rather, they were meant to engage with the teaching, including its scriptural sources, and to check it against their own readings of the Bible. Here, Grashop is not alone. Indeed, there was a growing concern among preachers in the latter half of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century to instruct congre-


\(^\text{24}\) T. Grashop, “How to Take Profit in the Reading of Holy Scriptures.”

\(^\text{25}\) Ibid.
gants in “the art of hearing.” Toward that end, manuals were produced, offering instruction not only for the individual, but for the entire family on how best to prepare for, engage with, and reflect upon the sermon. Included was the notion that congregants take notes on the sermon, marking not only the instruction, but the biblical sources from which it was drawn. These notes were then to be incorporated into meditations, prayers, and personal as well as group repetition and reflection when the service was ended.

That is, congregants were encouraged to and, indeed, actively trained to recognize biblical allu-
sion. So intently did some churchgoers engage in this allusion hunting, that the noise of it irritated the preachers at the pulpit. As Hunt reports, when faced with a biblical allusion, the congregation would “tosse the leaves of their Bibles to and fro (to seeke the place hee nominates).” There is also evidence that memorization of Scripture was a not uncommon phenomenon. Some were, undoubtedly, more prolific in this regard than others. Thomas Cranmer, for instance, is reported to have memorized the entire New Testament—in Greek. Surely, such heroic efforts cannot be assumed as any sort of norm. But memoriza-
tion of large portions of Scripture, perhaps most commonly the Psalter, seems to be a demonstrable part of the culture seen prominently in Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*—that is, as early as 1563.

But speaking of dates here raises the issue for our other sources, and I suppose this is not likely to have escaped the reader’s notice. It must be admitted that the sources cited—the manuals on the art of listening, Grashop, and the testimonial evidence—are all a decade or more too late to be applied...
to Spenser’s childhood without some qualification.\textsuperscript{30} Testimony from the 1590s is hardly evidence for practice in the 1560s. And this is readily conceded. However, some cautious qualifications can be offered in defense of their consideration here. First, the date of publication of these ideas and practices is no sure indication of the date of origination. Many are the pastors who have carried on their efforts for years without publication.

Second, it needs be remembered also that the practices of allusion described here, those found in the \textit{Book of Common Prayer (1559)} and in sermons were all active and ongoing during Spenser’s formative years. Further, long before Grashop’s advice was to be found within the covers of the Geneva Bible, the principles of \textit{Sacra Scriptura sui interpres} and the practice of reading commentaries and consulting with the godly and learned were all modelled and recommended by the annotations and introductory letter of the original version. Which is to say, even if the recommendations found in the preachers’ manuals were, indeed, too late to have affected young Spenser, and I am not convinced they are, the practices of Bible reading and allusion to which they point were undoubted fixtures of his church experience.

\textit{The Early Modern Bible in Everyday Life}

Spenser’s exposure to the Bible, though, was not limited to those experiences in and related to church. Indeed, far from it. Long before Henry’s injunction in 1538, the literate laity and even the illiterate had found ways to (safely) acquire knowledge of the Bible.\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps most common among these was popular literature that retold biblical stories in the service of other genres. Chronicles such as the fourteenth-century \textit{Polychronicon} often began their account of world history with the biblical account

\textsuperscript{30} As stated at the outset, this chapter is deeply indebted to Hamlin’s similar discussion of Shakespeare. Many of the sources cited here are to be found there, too. However, the issue of the date of this instructional material, Grashop, and the manuals discussed by Hunt is not addressed. The case is perhaps a bit less pressing for Shakespeare, ten years Spenser’s junior; however, those ten years still leave some twenty-nine years at least between the date of Shakespeare’s birth and the first, extant example of this sort of instructional guide. (Hunt, \textit{Art of Hearing}, 19–59).

\textsuperscript{31} Rex, “Humanism and Reformation,” 513–16.
of creation and proceeded from there to recount significant portions of the biblical narrative in addition to ancient, Classical traditions. John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (an English adaptation of Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*) provided moralized versions of the stories of Adam and Eve, Deborah, and several other biblical figures, along with the myth and history of other sources. Similarly, the fourteenth-century epic *Cursor Mundi* offers a versified summary of the Bible. In addition to these, Spenser would, naturally, have been familiar with Chaucer and Langland, both replete with biblical content.

In addition to the poetical works of the previous centuries, there was an ongoing tradition of biblical verse that was extremely popular during Spenser’s childhood. Protestant discomfort with secular poetry, especially secular ballads, gave rise to a religious controversy that was, in part, carried out in the form of religious ballads. These mock-ballads contained, in addition to Protestant doctrinal concerns and anti-papal sentiments, a great deal of biblical content. Alongside these grew a tradition of metrical Psalm writing. And in the 1550s and 60s, these two efforts were part of the same controversial cultural effort, but by the 1570s, the metrical Psalms began to eclipse the ballads, which, with one or two momentary resurgences, went into steady decline in popularity. For our purposes, though, this matters little, as they had already had their effect. They were yet another source of exposure to the Bible in Spenser’s childhood.

Still another form of popular discourse, this one available to the literate and illiterate alike, was drama. Though there had been Protestant efforts to stamp them out, the mystery play tradition was still

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32. Ibid., 516.


alive and popular in Elizabeth’s reign. And as Richard Rex put it, “Though often taken from secondary sources ... and embroidered with pious imagination or dramatic business, these plays gave some sense of the course of salvation history.” This was accomplished not in a single play, but in the cycle—in the series of plays that move from, for example, the Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer to the Creation and Fall of Man, and on through such Old Testament highlights as Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac, and Moses and Pharaoh, to the events of the New Testament—the Annunciation and Nativity through the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and, ultimately, to the Coronation of the Virgin and the Final Judgment. And as we will see, this tendency to summarize the Bible, to adapt it into a digest form of essential moments, was common to other visual media as well.

In spite of the iconoclastic efforts of earlier decades, much religious art remained intact, some of it even in the churches. Religious imagery in stained-glass windows, rood screens, paintings and sculpture adorned the parish church as well as the cathedrals of early modern England, and while not all of it was directly scriptural in content, scenes from the Old and New Testaments were common subjects.

Outside of the church, but still in the realm of the sacred, is the fascinating phenomenon known as the Biblia Pauperum—the “Bible of the poor.” Circulated in the Middle Ages, but surviving into the early modern period, each page of these books juxtaposed a cluster of biblical scenes—usually from the Old Testament. These books were intended to be read by the laity, and their purpose was to provide a shorthand version of the Bible for those who could not read it themselves or access it in its original form. The selection of scenes in these books was often based on popular devotional literature and the liturgical calendar, and they were produced in a variety of formats, including manuscripts, illuminated manuscripts, and printed books. The Biblia Pauperum was not just a visual summary of the Bible, but also a tool for personal devotion and prayer, providing a visual aid for understanding the stories of the Old and New Testament.


36. Ibid.


Testament—around a central image depicting a scene from the life of Christ. And around this array of images were brief, usually scriptural quotations, as can be seen in Figure I.1.

Further discussion of the typological reasoning that undergirds the selection and combination of images will have to wait for a later chapter. For now, let it suffice to say that the same logic that is operative here was, likewise, operative in the religious art of the Middle Ages more generally. And like the mystery plays, the Biblia Pauperum as a whole serves to provide through visual means not only the content of the Bible, but an interpretive framework through which it is to be understood. In this case, that framework is one which serves to “demonstrate how the Old Testament is a shadow of what is fulfilled in the New.”

This same sort of visual biblical interpretation can be found, likewise, in the art that adorned the walls of wealthy households. Whether it was the tapestries paradigmatically represented in the collection of Henry VIII, or the wood paneling of lesser-known houses, biblical scenes were a familiar subject of both private and public ecclesiastical art. More than that, the Bible was often found imprinted upon the

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more functional, ordinary objects of everyday life as well. Examples have been found of spoons capped by images of the apostles, playing cards decorated with scenes of the crucifixion, chimneypieces engraved with scenes from the “sacrifice” of Isaac, and so the list could go on. Some of these items evidence an interpretive framework, at times rather elaborate ones. Others are simpler. But they all point to the central and ubiquitous place of the Bible in the material culture of Spenser’s world.

There is one final characteristic of these visual media—indeed, of the sermons and popular literature as well—that needs be mentioned, and that is, it is often syncretistic. We have seen already that the Chronicle tradition and Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* often placed biblical narrative alongside Classical myth and secular histories. This tendency to combine the Classical and the biblical can also be found, for example, in the works of Chaucer. And with the onset of the Renaissance, concern for and interest in the ancient, non-biblical traditions only intensified, so that even in the sermon itself elements of Classical culture could be found. Debates over the place of Classical languages in the popular sermon arose—should learned humanist ministers quote texts in Latin and Greek? But it was also common practice among ministers to invoke stories and figures from Classical literature as illustrations of their biblical messages.

Such intermingling of ancient traditions is found, likewise, in the visual media. Take, for example, the wooden chest pictured in Figures 1.2 and 1.3. Two of the three scenes are drawn from the Classical tradition, depicting Lucretia and Mars. The third depicts Judith from the apocryphal book by


that name. What the stories have in common is not their tradition, but their content—they are all rape stories. The relationship between Classical and biblical traditions will be explored further in chapter IV, and so, we need not linger over it here. Rather, let it simply be noted that such a juxtaposition was a common occurrence and another facet of the way the Bible was viewed and handled in the culture of early modern England generally.

There were still other spheres in which the Bible’s presence would have been felt as well. As we will see briefly later in this chapter—and more extensively in chapter III—the Scriptures played a key role in political discourse in Tudor England. It was, likewise, common in judicial imagery and scholarship, as well as ethics, aesthetics, and even the initial traces of comparative anthropology. Indeed, the more one investigates the matter, the more it seems that there was hardly a sphere of sixteenth-century life—intellectual, sacred, or mundane—in which the presence of biblical discourse was not evident. And as a result, before he ever stepped foot in grammar school, indeed, before the Merchant Taylors’ school ever opened its doors, Spenser would have spent years steeping in this biblical culture, absorbing both the content and the handling of Scripture. But of course, Merchant Taylors’ did open its doors in 1561, and Spenser’s education began, opening yet another venue for him to interact with the Bible.

Under the watchful eye of Richard Mulcaster, Spenser was given a firm grounding in the Classical languages, rhetoric, and, of course, the Bible. In the early forms, he is likely to have spent time reading biblical passages in Latin and Greek—Spenser acquired a reputation as one especially skilled in the latter—as well as translating excerpts of the Bible from English back into the Classical tongues. In the lower forms, one might expect him to have spent time especially on the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Psalms, which texts were recommended by, among others, both Erasmus and Mulcaster’s professor at Cambridge, Sir John Cheke. This was also the practice of St. Paul’s, which seems to have exerted some influence on Mulcaster’s curriculum as well.

In this way, Spenser was given access not only to the Bible, but to the Bible in a plurality of forms. As discussed above, the English Bible was already a pluriform affair. To the Coverdale Bible and the Great Bible of Spenser’s earliest memory were soon added the Geneva Bible, the Bishops’ Bible—the Elizabethan replacement for the Henrician Great Bible—and the Catholic Douay version, to name only the most prominent few. But with the acquisition of the Classical languages, the plurality of Bibles available to Spenser increased still more. In Greek, there was the New Testament, including the newly edited version of Erasmus, as well as the Septuagint. In Latin, of course, the Vulgate. And in both languages, but especially Latin, there were numerous contemporary efforts to translate the Scriptures anew.


50. Hamlin, Bible in Shakespeare, 29.

51. Though only the New Testament translation of 1582 was completed in Spenser’s lifetime. The first volume of the Old Testament (covering Genesis–Job) was not available until 1609.

But Latin and Greek were not the only languages Mulcaster supplied his students. It seems that his curriculum was, in fact, trilingual, following the trends of the universities in offering Hebrew in addition to Latin and Greek. Spenser, along with his classmates, would likely have devoted most of their efforts in Hebrew translation to the Psalms, the inevitable starting place, it seems, for almost all forms of engagement with the Old Testament in the early modern world. And indeed, Spenser does seem to have translated certain Psalms, as well as another early modern favorite, the book of Ecclesiastes. When he completed these translations is unclear, but what does seem certain is that by the time Spenser left London for Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1569, he took with him a secure knowledge not only of Greek and Latin, but of Hebrew as well.

At Cambridge, Spenser’s engagement with the Bible would have undoubtedly continued. We know he continued with Latin, with Greek and with the Bible, upon which all theology lectures were required to be based. (This is over against the medieval practice of basing theology lectures on Peter Lombard’s *Sententiae.*) Whether he continued with Hebrew or not is difficult to say—though, had he wished, the opportunity was certainly available. Thomas Wakefield, Robert Wakefield’s younger brother, assumed the Regius Professorship of Hebrew upon its inception at Cambridge, and under his leadership, as well as his brother’s before him, the study of Hebrew took hold there far more readily than at the more-conservative Oxford. However, Thomas’s lectures were interrupted twice—apparently due to his

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53. For review of the evidence supporting the presence of Hebrew instruction at Merchant Taylors’, see Hadfield, Spenser, 29, 32, 436n92, and 437n110. See also Jones, *Discovery of Hebrew*, 225–26, 230–32.

54. Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1. It is perhaps also worth noting that Reuchlin, to supplement his introductory Hebrew grammar, published a short workbook in which students were guided through a selection from the Psalms. Kessler, “Christian Hebraists,” 261.


Catholic sympathies—first, in the reign of Edward VI, during which time his offices were discharged by no lesser scholars than Paul Fagius and Immanuel Tremellius, and again, between 1569 and 1575. The latter period spans nearly the entire duration of Spenser’s stay at the university. During this time, the duties of Hebrew instruction were carried on by, among others, William Fulke—the same William Fulke who, incidentally, assumed the position of Master of Pembroke in 1576.

Beyond being a source of accessible Hebraism, Fulke was also at the center of the latest religious controversy to overtake the university. In 1565, four years before Spenser’s arrival at Pembroke Hall, Fulke led local Puritans in a protest over the use of the surplice in chapel. This, along with the later controversy between Thomas Cartwright and John Whitgift over vestments and, ultimately, church government—a controversy that cost Cartwright his professorship—won Cambridge the distinction of being the “nursery of Elizabethan Puritanism.”

It is difficult to tell precisely what effect these controversies may have had on Spenser, but one effect was, surely, to provide yet one more place for the Bible at the center of public discourse and, therefore, at the center of his thought and daily life.

Spenser’s time at Cambridge would have continued, rather than altered, the interactions with the Bible discussed above. One important idea that has thus far gone unmentioned, though Spenser surely would have encountered it much earlier in his life, is the Reformation notion of sola scriptura, the Bible alone. That is, the Bible alone is the source of religious authority over against medieval sources of authority found in tradition, Church councils, canon law, and the Pope. This notion, along with all the others introduced by the continental Reformation had met with hot debate within the English universi-


59. For discussion of the issue, see Milward, “Religious Controversies, 596–97.
ties, but it seems that by Spenser’s time, the Protestant position had largely won the day.⁶⁰ That is not to say that Spenser necessarily ascribed to this notion—that will have to wait for the discussion in chapter V—but it is worth noting from the outset that, one way or another, this idea, too, would have been woven into the fabric of Spenser’s ideas about the Bible.

The Origins of Spenser’s Hebraism

Before we conclude our discussion of Spenser’s early exposures to the Bible, let us take a moment to look at how it came to be that, as a boy, Spenser studied not only Latin and Greek, but Hebrew. It should be noted just how remarkable this last bit of information really is. That a Christian schoolboy in Europe, much less one not of the upper classes, should have ready access to Hebrew learning was almost inconceivable before the sixteenth century. Indeed, at the beginning of the century, “fewer than one hundred Christians in Europe could read Hebrew and none could even imagine writing in that strange tongue.”⁶¹ As few as this seems, in fact, this was a greater level of Christian competence in Hebrew than had been seen in the preceding millennia, as ready dependence on the Vulgate, the ongoing effort to convert the pagan populations of Europe, and a reticence to interact with Jewish neighbors (who did know Hebrew) all played their part in diverting Christian interest and effort away from the original language of the Old Testament.⁶²

With the advent of the Renaissance, though, this began to change. The efforts to go “back to the sources” that drove the rediscovery of the Greco-Roman languages and culture in Italy also drove some bold humanists to seek out the hidden treasures of Jewish antiquity. Most important among these, for

⁶⁰ The debate over this claim extends into an extensive bibliography. For a helpful installment in that bibliography, see Richard Rex, “The Early Impact of Reformation Theology at Cambridge University, 1521–1547,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* (1999): 12–47.


⁶² Ibid., 13–15.
our purposes, was a brash young polymath named Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. He is most important because it was through him, primarily, that instruction in the Hebrew language (as well as in Jewish mysticism) came to Johannes Reuchlin, a humanist scholar and lawyer whose controversial career catapulted Hebrew learning to the center of early modern Europe’s intellectual stage.63

In 1507, Johannes Pfefferkorn, a Moravian Jewish convert, seeking to facilitate efforts to convert other Jews, wrote a pamphlet calling for the confiscation and destruction of all Jewish books. Having heard his case, Emperor Maximilian called for the opinions of three experts, and among them was Johannes Reuchlin. Not only was Reuchlin a lawyer, but since his tutelage under Pico, he had acquired a reputation, also, as a Hebraist, and it was in both of these capacities that he was called upon. Reuchlin came to the defense of the Jews, arguing they be allowed to keep their books not only because they had a legal right to them, but because the books themselves were valuable, containing information helpful and beneficial to Christians. These arguments, flying in the face of a thousand years and more of anti-Semitism, ignited a controversy that arrested the attention of all Europe.64

Ultimately, Reuchlin won the day, and the Jewish communities kept their books, though the Church ruled that his defense was guilty of causing scandal.65 But another victory was won as well, as Hebrew learning received a new lease on life. Reuchlin’s successful defense of Jewish books helped pave the way for other Christians to study them, beginning to beat back the stigma of “Judaizing” that had long clung to such efforts. In addition, Reuchlin also produced an introductory grammar of Hebrew, complete with a small dictionary, that was superior to anything previously available to Christians, and


64. Friedman, Ancient Testimony, 24–28.

65. Ibid., 27.
so, in yet another way, made the Hebrew language more accessible. In the wake of Reuchlin’s efforts, trilingual colleges offering Hebrew instruction sprang up all over Europe, and by 1550, as Friedman put it, “nearly every student could find Hebrew instruction at the majority of universities in western Europe and Germany.” Naturally, this rapid progress was also fueled by the onset of the Protestant Reformation, with its keen interest in the Bible in its original languages. But Reuchlin’s importance for the spread of Hebrew throughout European Christendom must not be underestimated.

Indeed, if his influence were the only factor to consider, it still seems likely that Richard Mulcaster would have been teaching Hebrew at Merchant Taylors’. Mulcaster’s intellectual circle included Sir John Cheke, a vocal defender of Reuchlin, and was deeply connected with the Continent and the burgeoning study of Hebrew in the wake of Reuchlin’s controversy.66 But, as it turns out, Reuchlin is not the only factor to consider. There is also the fallout from the “King’s great matter.”

Henry VIII’s divorce from Catharine of Aragon is a familiar tale and need not be rehearsed here. What may be less familiar, though, is the role Hebrew played in the ensuing controversy and, as a result, the role the controversy played in furthering Hebrew learning in England. The details of the affair have been captured succinctly by Richard Rex:

Disappointed by his first wife’s failure to deliver him a son, Henry began to consider a divorce in the mid-1520s, and sought grounds in the nature of his relationship to Catherine, formerly his elder brother’s wife. After Prince Arthur had died in 1502, a papal dispensation was obtained to enable her to marry Henry, although this second marriage did not take place until 1509. Yet Leviticus stipulated at two points that a man should not marry his brother’s wife (Lev 18:16 and 20:21), and Henry now argued that the Pope had no authority to dispense anyone from such a clear scriptural prohibition. Catherine’s advisers, however, drew attention to the contrary passage in Deuteronomy which positively enjoined such unions when a dying husband left behind a childless widow (Deut 25:5). Since, for political reasons, the Pope was unable to deliver a prompt

verdict, the exegesis and reconciliation of these apparently contradictory texts became a matter of the highest political moment.  

And, under the influence of the Renaissance, the fact that these texts were specifically Old Testament texts suddenly thrust not only them, but their original language into the first tier of political import. It was not long before Robert Wakefield, the kingdom’s finest Hebraist, was leaving his post at Cambridge for Oxford, and from there heading to court. There, he not only carried on the defense of the king’s claims through exegetical argument, but offered Hebrew instruction to court advisers. Further, his death in 1538 was followed soon after by Henry’s decision to establish “Regius Professorships” in Hebrew at Oxford and Cambridge. And with that, the ongoing access to and importance of Hebrew in England was secured into Spenser’s lifetime and beyond.

One final note before we conclude: Henry’s divorce, in addition to its incidental support for Hebrew learning, also provided a current and central example of the importance of the Bible in early modern politics. This was the sort of Bible to which the young Spenser was exposed, a Bible whose words mattered, and mattered profoundly, not only for salvation or personal piety, but for matters of state and of national sovereignty. And indeed, the Bible continued to play this role in Elizabethan England as well, as we will discuss in chapter III.

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our tour of Spenser’s early interactions with the Bible. And going forward, it will be helpful to keep in mind some of the things that characterized the common experience of the Christian Scriptures in the sixteenth century.


68. Ibid.
In this period, as we have seen, the Bible was, first of all, ubiquitous.69 It was imprinted upon the walls of houses, churches, and palaces alike—written, preached, and alluded to in virtually every last corner of the culture. Moreover, it was viewed as a unified text, one that never disagreed with itself and, as such, was self-interpreting. And at the same time, it was a text in need of interpretation of the sort that can be found in commentaries, godly mentors and especially in preaching, as Grashop and others suggested. It was a unity knit together by typological, allegorical and theological logics that all centered, ultimately, upon the life of Christ. And it was a text that could, through appeal to various interpretive frameworks, be rendered in digest form of one sort or another, whether the typological summary of the *Biblia Pauperum* or the salvation history of the mystery plays. The Bible was also, in fact, many Bibles—a pluriform entity instantiated in multiple English, Greek, and Latin translations, as well as the original Greek and Hebrew texts themselves. Finally, the Bible in Spenser’s day was eternally relevant and true. Whether its ancient words were being echoed in the liturgy as the prayer of the faithful in the present, or in debates over matters of modern political moment, the words of the Bible remained always relevant and always authoritative. It is with this sort of Bible in mind that we may now turn to an examination of Spenser himself and the methods of reading and alluding to the Bible that are evident in his epic masterpiece, *The Faerie Queene*.  

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69. The whole of this summary is indebted not only to James Kugel’s works (see n13), but to the adaptation of that work done by Shaye Cohen, “The Hebrew Bible” (course taught at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., Fall 2014), for whom I was fortunate to serve as a teaching fellow.
Chapter II. Reading the Tangled Bible: Spenser’s Canonical Perspective

There is no poet for whom the techniques of close reading are more unsuitable if relied on exclusively, or more likely to mislead if mechanically applied. When we read The Faerie Queene we need a long memory and a distanced, somewhat relaxed view of its entanglements even more than we need the capacity for paying minute attention. Matters are complicated and deepened in Spenser’s verse by continually widening contexts and by what I have called entanglements.1

These elegant words might as easily have been written about the Bible. We saw already in chapter I some evidences for a Bible deeply “entangled” with itself. The notion of a self-interpreting Scripture, the intricate typological maneuverings of the Biblia Pauperum, the cento-like elements found in the Book of Common Prayer (1559)—each, in its own way, pointed to this reality. In fact, this facet of biblical tradition has enjoyed a renaissance of interest among scholars of both Spenser and the Bible in recent decades, and it is this common interest across disciplines that has, in part, prompted the present study.

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to sketch, in brief, the history of this development and from there, begin to explore its implications for our understanding of Spenser’s masterpiece.

Spenser’s Biblical Poetics and the Canonical Approach to Scripture

By 1970, modern biblical scholars had discarded nearly everything I have said about Spenser’s Bible. The early modern assumptions about the Christian canon as a divinely inspired unity, as a work that spoke not only of the past, but to the present, indeed, that it was the divine Word spoken to a chosen people—all of these assumptions had been revealed and rejected by over two hundred years of

scholarship. And with those assumptions went the early modern modes of handling Scripture. Scholars had become less and less concerned with amassing Scripture into “heapes” than with prising it apart. No longer was the end of exegesis to draw together the teaching of the whole Bible on a given topic; rather it had become to separate the books of the anthology into ever-smaller units in an effort to reconstruct the original sources that underlie the Bible’s present form. Of course, the transition was not immediate or complete; the Church went on being the Church, reading the Bible as its Bible, but with an ever increasing distance between the Bible of the scholars and the Bible of the believer—leaving pastors and the believing scholars who trained them to somehow navigate the divide.2

One such attempt was made by (believing) biblical scholar, Brevard Childs in his 1970 work, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Here, Childs first laid out his program for establishing a rapprochement between the historical-critical endeavor and the ongoing role of the Scriptures within the Church.3 This program came to be known as the “canonical approach” to Scripture. In it, Childs called for a renewed scholarly interest in the canon as a legitimate context for the interpretation of the biblical text. The interpretive task, he argued, must surely include the historical-critical attempt to understand the text in its historical context, even where that meant acknowledging and reconstructing the historical sources that underlay a given biblical text. But for Childs, this could only be the beginning of the interpreter’s

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3. Of course, a similar crisis was ongoing during this same period with regard to the Tanakh and Jewish communities of faith, one reacting not only to the inadequacies of the historical-critical method experienced among Christians, but also to the latent Protestant assumptions and biases that undergirded the historical-critical enterprise as a whole. (On which, see Levenson, 1985 and 1993). Much of what will be said here about the specifically Christian (indeed, specifically Protestant) reaction to this crisis found in the “canonical approach” could also be said of two disciplines that emerged at around the same time, largely from the work of Jewish scholars; namely, the fields of inner-biblical exegesis and the “literary approach” to Scripture. For the beginnings of scholarly engagement with inner-biblical exegesis, see, for example, Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in A. Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 29–46; and Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For the beginnings of the literary approach to Scripture, see, for example, Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg, “The King through Ironic Eyes,” *Ha-Sifrut* 1 (1968), 263–92 (Hebr.); and Robert Alter, “A Literary Approach to the Bible,” *Commentary* 60 (1975), 70–77.
task. From there, with the text disassembled into its constituent parts, the exegete set about the work of putting the text back together again. He must attempt to follow the interpretive, ideological, often theological motives that guided the various redactors, collectors and canonizers until, finally, he is faced with interpreting the meaning of the text as it stands within the final form of the Christian canon as we have it today.  

Which is to say, Childs called for, albeit in a qualified and nuanced way, a return to the unity of the Bible. Along with that return to a unified Bible, Childs sketched the outlines of an interpretive approach—an approach that, as we will see, bears striking resemblance to early modern exegesis. In his original study, Childs modeled three methodological mandates that are of particular import for our present study. First among these was: the canonical critic’s approach should be highly intertextual. He should attempt to see a given passage not only in the light of its historical context, nor even in its immediate literary context, but in light of the canon as a whole. So, for example, the ancient Israelite hymn now known as Psalm 8 must be analyzed not only in the context of ancient Israelite worship, nor even within the context of the book of Psalms, but, as a participant in the ongoing biblical tradition of creation, its relation to that tradition, too, must be analyzed. So, the canonical interpreter turns to Genesis 1–2, Psalm 104, Job 38–40, etc.  

In addition to connections of a topical nature, Childs suggested, the canon contains intertextual linkages established by allusion and even direct quotation. Certain texts—often from different books or even different testaments—are bound together by shared keywords or phrases, inviting the reader to

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interpret each in light of the other. And it is in the response to this invitation—in the attempt to understand these texts in relation to one another—that their full, canonical significance begins to emerge. So, for example, when Psalm 8 is echoed in Job 7, it is in the contrast between the Psalmist’s pious perception of the human experience and Job’s rather more confrontational one that the biblical teaching about humanity begins to be seen. But it is only a beginning, as the interpreter has still to consider the invocation of (the Septuagint version of) that same Psalm in the New Testament book of Hebrews (2:6), as well as in Ephesians, Colossians, and still others besides. Already one sees those “heapes” of Scripture rising again.

The canonical critic will also, Childs suggested, be highly sensitive to the history of biblical interpretation. And this history, of course, begins within the Bible itself, not only in inner-biblical (including inter-testamental) allusion, but also in the ancient versions and textual variants of the Bible. For Childs, the Septuagint version of the Old Testament—so often the version quoted in the New Testament—must be taken seriously as part of the biblical witness. But beyond that, the Septuagint and other ancient versions—and even variant readings within those manuscript traditions—represent the efforts of ancient faith communities to interpret and appropriate the biblical witness for their own uses. Likewise, biblical interpretation through the ages—from the Church Fathers to the early modern exegetes and all the many years of biblical tradition in between—are resources upon which the canonical critic should draw as he seeks to interpret and appropriate the biblical text in his own day.

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6. Ibid., 151–163.

7. Childs, Introduction, 69–108; Childs, Theology in Crisis, 139–150. Though it should be emphasized that, for Childs, they are resources only, not an authoritative tradition, as one might expect to find in early modern Catholic or Jewish interpretation.
What all of this amounts to is simply this: Childs’ “canonical approach” was, in many ways, an attempt to reclaim early modern exegesis for the modern Bible scholar. It should be noted that it was early modern exegesis, and more specifically early modern Protestant exegesis, and not, say, patristic or medieval, that Childs had in mind. This can be seen most clearly in his overt commitment to the Reformation tenant of sola scriptura. That being the case, we should not be surprised to find that the reading practices of the canonical critic look a great deal like those used by Spenser himself—as even a cursory glance at Carol Kaske’s work will show that they do.

In her ground-breaking—and all-too-brief—study, Spenser and Biblical Poetics, Prof. Kaske examined a body of medieval and early modern exegetical literature, especially the concordance-like collections commonly called distinctiones, which espouse a particular view of the Bible and the literary conventions that shaped it. The Bible, this literature suggests, is actually constructed so as to lead the reader to engage in a mode of reading similar to that discussed above. This mode, Kaske labeled “concordantial reading.” The concordantial reader of the Bible, like the canonical critic, assumes that the Bible is a unity that is, in some way, coherent. Thus, analysis of any given passage will inevitably be an intertextual endeavor, taking into account not only that passage, but all canonical instances in which the topic of that passage—its images, concepts and keywords—are treated. It is in the effort to relate these various passages to one another and construct a coherent relationship between them that the biblical teaching emerges. The effort is not merely an academic, historical one, in which the interest is finally in a historical reconstruction of a theology from a distant and now alien past. More than that, it is an attempt to

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8. This is not to say that Childs recommended scholars abandon modern historical-critical methods in favor of pre-critical ones (as he has often been accused). Rather, his was, as stated above, an effort to reincorporate elements of pre-critical engagement with the Bible into the modern exegete’s toolbox, using them in combination with source criticism, form criticism and the comparative studies of more recent scholarship in an effort to understand the Bible “as Scripture.” On the controversial nature of Childs’ work in relation to historical-criticism, see Levenson, 2000. For an extended, and excellent, example of Childs’ approach, see his The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).
discern the teaching of a Bible that is the eternal Word of God, one whose truths are as true and applicable in the present as they ever were.

Kaske’s analysis has, I think, adequately demonstrated that Spenser was not only aware of this conception of biblical poetics—and the mode of reading it suggested—but actively imitated it in his composition of *The Faerie Queene.* And for that reason, the present study stands deeply in her debt. But while Prof. Kaske’s work in this area has been invaluable in providing a historical model for Spenser’s own poetic technique, she has left largely unexamined the question of how this conception of biblical poetics shaped his actual allusions to the Bible. What does it look like when a “concordantial reader” like Spenser alludes to the Bible? What are the principles and techniques that guide him? These are, I suggest, extremely important questions. They are also, it so happens, the sort of questions which canonical critics of the Bible are especially prepared to answer. For, the canonical critic is perhaps as close as one is likely to come to a modern “concordantial reader” of Spenser’s sort. But before we attempt to answer these questions with regard to Spenser, it will be useful to look at actual examples of “canonical” reading with which he would have been familiar. To that end, let us return to a source mentioned in chapter I, the *Book of Common Prayer (1559).*

**Concordantial Allusion: Contemporary Examples**

In chapter I, we had the opportunity to look briefly at a section of the order for morning prayer. That section turned out to be a pastiche of biblical prayers and promises that had been taken up in the liturgy and reapplied to the early modern Christian communities of England. But it was, at the same time, an example of a concordantial reading of Scripture, one gathered together in a canonical expression

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9. Kaske’s insistence upon the practice as one especially derived from and exclusive to the Bible seems, to me, to draw too sharp a line between the biblical and Classical literatures. This seems unlikely to capture the more porous view of a Christian Humanist like Spenser. On this, see chapters IV–V.
of hope and desire for the continued blessings of God upon his chosen people. The example we will look at here is similar in that it, too, is comprised of an attempt to appropriate the words of the Bible into the early modern situation; but in this case, the attempt is prompted by the needs of a particular occasion—a wedding.

“The fourme of solempnizacion of Matrimonye” in the Book of Common Prayer (1559) is too long to be handled in its entirety here. We will, of necessity, have to content ourselves to deal with bits and pieces as best we can. We will begin roughly in the middle, where the function of the language shifts from establishing the marriage bond to blessing it. In the prayer that immediately follows the exchange of rings, we read:

Let us praye.
O ETERNALL GOD, creatoure and preserver of all mankynd, giver of all spirytual grace, the auctour of everlastyng life: send thy blessing upon these thy servauntes, thys man and thys woman whom we blesse in thy name

First, notice that the occasion of the prayer, a blessing upon the happy couple, has already provided what will prove to be a keyword for the entire section: bless. And, as we might expect, the first appearance of this keyword is an echo of a biblical promise of blessing. Deuteronomy 28:8a reads, in the Vulgate: emitte Dominus benedictionem super cellaria tua (“the Lord will send forth [his] blessing upon your storehouses”). Again, biblical language—in this case, a piece from the great list of blessings promised to an obedient Israel—has been taken and appropriated for Christian use.

But this is not the extent of the Bible’s presence in this portion of the prayer. Even just these two lines present several biblical resonances. The phrase “preserver of all mankynd” echoes Job 7:20, “giver of all spirytual grace” echoes 1 Corinthians 12:4 (and perhaps, also, 1 Peter 5:10), and “the auctour of

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11. The Great Bible has here, “The Lord shall put the blessing upon the in thy store houses,” where the Geneva follows the Hebrew more closely with its, “shall command the blessing.” The original reads, $ymsab hkrbh-ta $ta hwhy wcy.
everlastyng life” is a slight alteration of Hebrews 5:9. But the most important invocation of the Bible to be found here is surely the notion of God as creator. This, of course, is not an echo of a single verse, but the invocation of a concept that pervades both Testaments. Its importance for the blessing of a married couple is perhaps not altogether obvious, but for the concordantial reader, the accounts of creation could not be more relevant.

It is in the account of creation in Genesis that we read about the first divine blessings. They are bestowed upon the birds of the air and the fish of the sea (1:22) and then, climactically, upon the first man and first woman, indeed, upon the first husband and wife:

And God sayde: let us make man in oure ymage after our lycknes ... And so God created man in his awne ymage: in the ymage of God created he him, male and female created he them. And God blessed them, growe and increace and replenyshe the erth (Gen 1:26–28; Great Bible)

Whether the phrase, “male and female created he them,” had anything to do with marriage in its original setting is not our present concern.12 The Christian tradition of Spenser’s day saw in these verses not only a picture of a humanity divided into separate genders, but one in which those genders are bound together again in matrimony. Or, as Calvin put it, in this verse, “[Moses] commends to us that conjugal bond by which the society of mankind is cherished.”13 Similarly, Luther sees this verse as an allusion to the creation of Eve given in fuller detail in Genesis 2:21–25, which verses he sees as the origins of the institution of marriage. And indeed, this is the reading of “The fourme of Matrimonie.” The service opens with these words:


Dearely beloved frendes, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregacion, to joyne together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable state, instytuted of God in Paradise, in the time of mannes innocencie, signifiyng unto us the mistical union that is betwixt Christ and his Churche.

In light of all this, the invocation of God as creator at this particular moment takes on new meaning. For, it is surely no accident that it is here, at the moment of transition between the sealing of the marriage covenant and the blessing of that covenant, that the allusion occurs. In that context, it cannot help reminding the concordantial reader of Scripture that the present service has been constructed in imitation of the very first marriage—the marriage of Adam and Eve—officiated, it seems, by God himself. Just as God, having created the primordial couple, first bound them together in matrimony, and then blessed them with progeny and prosperity, so, too, this “Fourme of Matrimony” first binds the happy couple in marriage, and then turns to the task of blessing their union.

Before we move on, we should note the mention of the “mistical union ... betwixt Christ and his Church.” This is an allusion to the common figural reading of the Church as the Bride of Christ, a metaphor that originates ultimately in Old Testament texts which portray God’s chosen people as his wife. This notion does not figure prominently in our present discussion of the marriage service, but as it will become very important in later discussions, it is worth noticing that it, too, is part of the network of texts and ideas that are evoked for the concordantial reader by the topic of marriage.

Returning to the order of the service itself, we find that once the prayer begun above is compleeted, the couple are declared man and wife, and the program of blessing begins in earnest. This takes the form of a reading of Psalm 128:

Blessed are all they that feare the Lorde, and walke in his waies.
For thou shalt eate the labour of they handes: O wel is thee, and happy shalt thou be.
Thy wife shal be as the fruitfull vine: upon the walles of they house.

Thy children like the Olive braunches: rounde about thy table.
Lo thus shall the man be blessed: that feareth the lorde.
The Lorde from out of Sion shal blesse thee: that thou shalt see Hierusalem in prosperitie, al thy life long. Yea, that thou shalt see they childrens children: and peace upon Israel.\textsuperscript{15}

It will be noticed immediately that this Psalm contains the keywords and concepts that have been raised by our discussion of creation. Notions of blessing, prosperity, marriage (in the form of the mention of a wife),\textsuperscript{16} and children—all are present here. And in fact, the connection between these creation themes and this passage is so strong that the glossators of the Geneva Bible, in commenting upon the blessing of the man and woman in Genesis 1:28, actually direct the reader here. All of this suggests that the selection of this particular Psalm was the result of a concordantial reading of the canon. But more than this, the “Fourme of Matrimonie,” in trying to capture the results of that reading of the Bible, was itself composed “concordantially.” That is, the text evidences the same literary features—repetition of keywords, themes, and images—that support the canonical reading of the Bible, and it is in the tracking of these features within the “Fourme” that the internal logic of the service becomes clear.

This point may be served by looking at one final selection from the text of the “Fourme.” Upon completing the reading of the Psalm,\textsuperscript{17} there is a brief exchange between the minister and the now mar-

\textsuperscript{15} Book of Common Prayer, 160. For reasons of space, we have omitted discussion of the biblical pastiche that lies between the declaration of matrimony and the reading of the Psalm. The passage reads, “God the Father, God the Sonne, God the holy Ghost, blesse, preserve, and kepe you, the Lorde mercifully wyth his favour loke upon you, and so fil you with al spiritual benediction, and grace, that you may so lyve together in thys life, that in the world to come, you may have life everlasting.” It is a blending of phrases drawn from Numbers 6:24a, Psalm 41:2, Numbers 6:25, Leviticus 26:9 (which, in the Vulgate reads, \textit{respiciam vos et crescere faciam multiplicabimini} [“I will look upon you and make you increase”]), Romans 15:13, Colossians 1:9, and Mark 10:30 (and parallels).

\textsuperscript{16} On the problem of translating the more neutral Hebrew terms (e.g. \textit{יָוָה}) with more specific English terms, as done here with “wife,” see again, Tadmor, “Women and Wives,” 1–27.

\textsuperscript{17} It should be noted that the \textit{Book of Common Prayer (1559)} provides an alternative to Psalm 128 at this point in the service, in the form of Psalm 67. Though the intertextual connections with this poem are not as abundant as Psalm 128, a similar analysis of its place within the service remains possible. Cursorily, it should be noted that, as expected, the concepts of blessing and progeny feature prominently there; likewise, the keyword, “mercy” is picked up from the blessing pastiche, along with an allusion to the priestly blessing of Numbers 6 (see footnote 15 above), which further connects it to the blessing for progeny to follow. Finally, the emphasis on God and the nations in Psalm 67 is perhaps meant to be seen in light of the blessing to Abraham, which is obliquely invoked in the prayer following (\textit{Book of Common Prayer, 161}). See the discussion of that prayer below.
ried couple, and then the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. That done, the minister launches into another prayer for blessing:

O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, blesse these thy servauntes, and sowe the sede of eternal life in their minides, that whatsoever in thy holy worde they shal profitably learne, they may in dede fulfil the same. Loke, O Lorde, mercifully upon theim from heaven, and blesse them. And as though diddest send thy blessing upon Abraham and Sara to their greate com-forte: so vouchsafe to ende thy blessing upon these thy servauntes, that they obeiyng thy will, and alway beyng in saufetie under thy protection, may abide in thy love unto their lives end, through Jesu Christe our Lorde. Amen.

There are many biblical resonances to be noticed here, but the most important one is certainly the invocation of Abraham and Sarah, who are presented as a blessed married couple of the first order—one might even say, a “byword of blessing.”18 This portrayal, too, brief as it is, depends upon a canonical reading of this couple’s story.

In the first instance, this reading has noticed the prominent role played by the concept of “blessing” in the Abraham story. In Genesis 12:1–3, the opening verses of that story, the term occurs no fewer than five times. It is perhaps not unlikely, then, that the “Fourme” sees in this promise to Abraham the renewal of the original blessings upon humanity at creation—and, in fact, such a connection was not uncommonly made in Spenser’s day. The Geneva Bible, for instance, suggests that this promise is the means by which “the worlde ſhal recouer … the blessíg w thei lo ſt in Adám” (Geneva Bible ad loc). But this is perhaps assuming too much. After all, one hardly needs a concordance in hand to connect Genesis 12:1–3 to the theme of blessing.

But there is another keyword introduced in this passage that is also featured prominently in the story of Abraham: “sede.” At first glance, the term does not appear to be related to the story of Abraham at all. In the Book of Common Prayer (1559), it is the “sede of eternal life” that is in view, but in Genesis,

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it is the progeny of Abraham. It is hardly obvious then, on a straightforward reading of the Abraham story, how one seed might relate to the other. But, of course, the relation is obvious in light of a canonical reading. For, in the Christian Bible, as is well known, the “sede of Abraham” has already been identified with Christ (e.g. Gal 3:16). This is the same Christ who is the source of eternal life (e.g. 1 John 2:25) and is called “the Worde” (John 1:1). Taken in this light, the whole first line of the prayer becomes a plea that Christ be present and active in the lives of the couple.

Given this, we turn back to the rest of the passage to find what other resonances with the story of Abraham have been activated. Take, for instance, the mention of obedience in the fifth line. In the present context, the obedience in question is that of the newly married couple, but in light of the analogy already set up between them and their blessed counterparts, one expects to find some indication of obedience in the story of Abraham and Sarah as well. And, of course, the story is rife with examples of that very thing. The paradigmatic example, though, is surely found in Genesis 22 with the Binding of Isaac. The story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of his long-awaited son needs no further summary, but it is worth noting that a canonical perspective connects it with the current concerns in more than one way.

First, as mentioned, it is the pinnacle example of obedience—perhaps in the whole Bible. But more than that, it should be noted that in this passage, the obedience of the couple is linked to the ongoing relationship between them and God (“that they obeying thy will, and alway beyng in saufetie under thy protection, may abide in thy love”). A canonical reader of the Abraham story cannot help seeing in this an allusion to James 2:21, which reads, “Was not Abraham our father iuſtified through workes, when he offred Iſaac his ſonne vpon the Altar?” That is, the ongoing relationship between God and believers under discussion in James is, in some way, contingent upon their works. The intense debate

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19. If one is tempted to protest that the term “obedience” never occurs there, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the term is used in the Geneva Gloss. Again, the Geneva Gloss cannot be the source for the Book of Common Prayer (1559), but it does show that the term was connected to interpretation of the chapter among certain English interpreters of the day.
of these ideas among Christians in the sixteenth century need not detain us here. The point here is not
to situate this passage within that debate, but, rather, to notice that the passage’s engagement with a ca-
onical reading of Scripture, and especially the Abraham story, is more evident than might first appear.

With that, we bring our discussion of “The Fourme of Matrimonye” to a close. What the discus-
sion has shown, it is hoped, is that concordantial/canonical reading is in evidence within the text of
the marriage service. Furthermore, that mode of reading fostered a particular practice of allusion to the
Bible. And this practice was marked by a tendency to allude not to a single biblical text, but to many at
once, invoking the whole “heape” of texts amassed in the process of concordantial reading. It should be
noted that, in the right context, all that was needed to add another text to the pile was a single keyword.
Think, for instance, of our discussion of “sede” above. That one word, in a context that also included an
allusion to Abraham and Sarah, was enough to constitute an allusion to Galatians 3:16, and not only
that, but to do so in a way that activated allusions to still other texts through other keywords. This sort
of subtle, accumulative allusion will be important to remember when we turn to our analysis of The
Faerie Queene.

This mode of allusion also makes frequent use of interpretive tradition. The traditions we saw
applied to in the Book of Common Prayer (1559) were mostly the product of the scholarly commentary
tradition. And, no doubt, Spenser made use of those resources as well.20 But in this chapter and those
that follow, we will find that Spenser was also familiar with other interpretive traditions of the sort
mentioned in chapter I—visual representations of the Bible, retellings in popular and secular literature,
as well as the host of other lay interpretations of the Scriptures circulating in the biblical culture of early
modern England.

Finally, it should be noted that the concordantial readings we have seen thus far are not idiosyncratic affairs. The connections they make between biblical texts are, themselves, part of the ongoing interpretive tradition upon which these readings rely. And for this reason, the resultant complex network of texts found in one author is often similar to, if not identical with that found in others. So, for example, in the *Book of Common Prayer (1559)*, texts such as Genesis 1–2 and Psalm 128 were related to one another and to the topics of blessing, marriage and progeny—and this same network of connections was also to be found in the works of Calvin, Luther, and the Geneva Bible. The primacy of these intertextual networks has been demonstrated even more decisively by Kaske, whose study is largely based upon the *distinctiones*; that is, on a kind of literature whose sole purpose is to provide its readers with topically derived intertextual networks of just this sort. 21 We should not be surprised, then, to find that when Spenser alludes to the Bible in *The Faerie Queene*, he alludes not to a single passage, but to the network of passages with which that single passage is associated. And furthermore, we should expect to find that the means for these allusions—the textual triggers by which Spenser signals the invocation of a biblical intertext—are similar to the subtle practices described here with reference to the *Book of Common Prayer (1559)*.

**Concordantial Allusion in The Faerie Queene III: Preliminary Considerations**

As we move from the *Book of Common Prayer* to *The Faerie Queene*, we find ourselves crossing the boundary not only between different works, but between works of entirely different sorts. The theological and pastoral considerations of a liturgical context give way to the aesthetic as well as theological and didactic concerns of early modern epic poetry. And as these specifically aesthetic concerns will not

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21. Ibid., 18–64.
occupy a central position in the discussion that follows, it will perhaps be useful to address them briefly here.

No doubt, our analysis thus far, so deeply concerned with the identification of sources and miniscule markers of allusion, will have struck some as out of keeping with the way one actually reads and enjoys poetry—or, for that matter, the way one listens to the liturgy. And for the average twenty-first century reader, this is probably true. But for the early modern reader, the case was, I suggest, rather different. We have already seen indications of this in chapter I, in our discussion of the way congregants were encouraged to—and, in fact, eagerly undertook to—interact with the densely allusive sermons of the day. At the very least, this tells us that concordantial reading (or, in this case, concordantial listening) was already an active industry in Spenser’s day. But it may also suggest that church-goers found the activity not only illuminating, but pleasurable—and, indeed, any student of inner-biblical exegesis, to name but one modern example, well knows there is pleasure to be found in this sort of thing.

In early modern discussions of poetry, one finds some indication that poets and their readers, too, enjoyed the pleasure of recognizing allusion, especially of the subtle and learned sort we have been describing. So G.W. Pigman, in his discussion of the imitation of Classical poets during the Renaissance, can say that the function of these subtle allusions “may be no more than to allow the learned reader the pleasure of recognizing a phrase from an ancient poet.”22 What Pigman has in mind here is not what we have been calling “concordantial” or “canonical” allusion. His examples are neither specifically tied to the Bible, nor are they concerned with the sort of accumulative allusion we have described. But the pleasure found in the instances he discusses is similar, I think, to that which is to be found in the more elaborate forms of allusion we will discuss below.

What underlies both of these categories is an idea illuminated long ago by Rosemond Tuve. In her classic study, *Allegorical Imagery*, Tuve discusses the collections of medieval moralia reproduced by the sixteenth-century author, Thomas Lodge. She observes:

... the pleasure which is often the only one in such stories escapes us. It was clearly shared by mediaeval author and Renaissance imitator: the pleasure in pure seeing-of-similitude, taken in as immediately as an echo ... what pleases is merely to observe the nature of the world and correspondences one can see in it.”23

Again, the precise literary phenomenon in Tuve, as in Pigman, is not identical with canonical reading, but the point remains that in each, one finds an aesthetic pleasure being taken in the mere recognition of analogy. The learned early modern reader—accustomed to this sort of aesthetic pleasure and trained in the art of recognizing scriptural allusion—would have found, I think, deep satisfaction in the sort of reading of *The Faerie Queene* in which we are about to engage.

Turning to that reading, the passage that will form the basis of our test case will be the opening canto of Book III of *The Faerie Queene*. At the beginning, it will be well to ask if there are, in fact, biblical allusions at work in this passage—if there is evidence for a canonical reading of Scripture here, what occasion has prompted it? If marriage stands at the heart of “The Fourme of Matrimonye,” and blessings upon the nation at the heart of the patchwork prayer in the order for morning prayer, which topic forms the center of this passage of *The Faerie Queene*? The answer, of course, is there in the title of the book: “The Legend of Britomartis. Or of Chastity.”

If Chastity is the topic toward which this particular poetic endeavor is directed, it may be useful to ask whether there is a commonly conceived network of texts devoted to this topic. And indeed, there is. A look at the sources reveals a vast network of texts ranging across the canon. It includes texts that

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speak to lust, to marital fidelity, to the sins of the flesh, to the desire of the eye, and, not least importantly, to idolatry. This last is a function of the Bride of Christ metaphor noted above—if the Christian person is married to Christ, then the worship of other gods is naturally to be equated with adultery. This extension of the marriage metaphor is found in its earliest biblical examples. So, in Hosea 1–3, the people of Israel are portrayed as God’s unfaithful wife because they have been worshipping Baal.

Of course, the figural significance of the marriage metaphor is not the only one—there is also the literal. And neither level—literal sexual continence, nor figural religious infidelity—is ever quite allowed to eclipse the other. Even in those contexts where one might expect for this to occur—say, for example, in a sermon entitled “Against Whoredom, and Adultery”—one is disappointed. For, in that widely rehearsed sermon from the 1547 collection, the two themes—idolatry and adultery—are continually linked, one to the other.24 We would do well, then, in approaching a text about the topic of chastity, to keep the two sides of this marital metaphor firmly in mind.

But apart from these general characterizations of a canonical reading of chastity, we must ask: is there a text or set of texts which forms the heart of the tradition? Is there, for example, something akin to the relationship of the story of Abraham to the topic of marital blessing—something that was read as an epitome of the biblical teaching on the topic? And naturally, there is. Or, I should say, there are—for unlike the case of blessing in the Bible, which saw its pinnacle expression in a single and positive example, the canonical view of chastity is two-sided, finding its fullest expression in the contrast between two opposed abstractions: “Lady Wisdom,” the picture of all that is faithful and good, and “Dame Folly,” the epitome of wantonness and infidelity.

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These two women, Wisdom and Folly personified, are found in the Bible in chapters 1–9 of Proverbs, but outside the Bible, the opposition between them comprises one of the most common topoi to be found in medieval biblical and ethical discourse. Frances Biscoglio goes so far as to say that the opposition between these two figures “is found in practically every literary and iconographic representation of the virtues and vices.” So, for example, one finds them depicted in the Notre Dame Cathedral’s rose window (Figures II.1 & 2.) See, also, their prominent roles in such works as Prudentius’ Psychomachia, where the acquisition of Wisdom (or rather, Wisdom’s acquisition of the soul) forms the triumphant climax of the allegory, as well as in Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy, where the parts are played by Fortuna and Lady Philosophy.

Now, one may be tempted to protest, and in all likelihood has already been doing so for several lines, that these examples are hardly derived merely from the figures of Wisdom and Folly in the book of Proverbs. They are, the protest might run, at least as dependent upon the Greek and Roman ethical

25. The question of whether other instances of Wisdom in the Bible are meant to be read similarly as personifications, for example, the Wisdom sought after in Job 28, need not detain us here. On this, see Michael David Coogan, “The Goddess Wisdom—where can she be found?: Literary Luxetions of Popular Religion,” in Ki Baruch hu: ancient Near Eastern, biblical, and Judaic studies in honor of Baruch A. Levine (eds. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 203–09.


27. Biscoglio, Valiant Woman, 53.
and philosophical traditions as they are on the Bible—and, indeed, to say that they have anything to do with the biblical tradition is to engage in rank anachronism and the most careless syncretism. True enough. But if anachronism and syncretism it is, the fault lies not with me, nor with Biscoglio, but rather with the Judeo-Christian tradition itself. For, in truth, the attempt to harmonize the Classical and biblical traditions is older than Christianity, originating in the Judaism of the Hellenistic period which produced such monuments of accommodation as “the Letter of Aristeas,” where Jewish scribes are also masters of Greek philosophy, the Septuagint translation of Genesis 1, where the terms of Platonic cosmology translate the biblical account of creation into Hellenistic terms, and the allegorical exegesis of Philo of Alexandria, who, likewise, sought to show the harmony between the traditions of the two cultures. These trends found already in the Judaism of Jesus’ day only became more extensive, more common place, one might say even more inextricably woven into the cultural fabric that became Western Christendom. Thus, to protest that the image in question is Classical rather than biblical is to introduce a dichotomy far too absolute to be adhered to by a Christian humanist like Spenser. Indeed, the case is similar with the traditions of Renaissance Italy and ancient Egypt, too, which were, in one way or another, integrated into the encyclopedic, humanistic efforts. Within the context of those efforts, then, we must not be surprised to find the identification of the Bible’s Woman Wisdom with Greco-Roman notions of virtue, nor even with Athena, pagan goddess though she is.

Demonstration of this argument and attention to the particulars of how Spenser attempts to relate these various cultures will be addressed further in chapters IV–VI. But for now, we will have more


than enough on our hands in simply showing that the Bible really is present in *The Faerie Queene* III in this concordantially allusive way.

Returning to the canonical view of Wisdom and Folly, it should be noted that these two abstractions, ideal though they are as fodder for allegories of their respective virtue and vice, are tied to the topic at hand—that is, to chastity—only metaphorically. Early in the biblical tradition, Wisdom had come to be identified not only with the Law, but with the divine Logos, which was, for Christians, Christ himself. One can see this identification most clearly in the apocryphal book of Ben Sirach. In the twenty-fourth chapter of that book, Wisdom, here again personified as a woman, is extolled as proceeding from the mouth of God, indeed, as the very Word spoken at creation that “cauſed ὣ light that faileth not, to arise in the heauen” (24:6). In the Greek version of this text, this “word” is nothing other than the divine Λόγος, which came in the course of time to be identified with Christ (John 1:1). As the passage continues, Wisdom wanders the earth until she is given a home in the Israelite Tabernacle (as were the tables of the law; Exod 40:20), and is praised in words quoted from Psalm 19:10. But in the Psalm, these words are not spoken of Wisdom, but of “the Law of the Lord.” If one can still wonder whether such an intertextual form of argument would have been noticed by Spenser and his contemporaries, we may point out that the Geneva Bible notes the quotation. Further, the chapter argument’s notice that Wisdom “is giuen to the children of God” in the context cannot help suggesting the giving of the Law at Sinai. Thus, for the canonical reader of Scripture, the directive to heed the call of Woman Wisdom is a call to respond in obedience to the words of the Creator himself. And, moreover, the seductive and competing call of Dame Folly is an enticement to apostasy—to infidelity to Christ as the divine husband.

30. Ben Sirach 24:23, quoting Psalm 19:10. It is true that the presentation of Wisdom here is more complex than this. She does seem to be identified with, or, at the very least, closely associated with the Torah here, but she is also pictured as the Spirit of God at creation, which is, in turn, identified with the Pillar of Cloud and Fire and, evidently, with the cloud of Glory that filled the Tabernacle. The personification of wisdom, then, comes to encompass all of these various venues through which God is made manifest to the world and his people.
The identification of Wisdom and Folly with the topic of Chastity, then, is a strong one—at least, within the logic of a canonical reading of Scripture. And yet, it remains an indirect one, one that pertains most directly to the figural side of the “Christian as Bride of Christ” metaphor. For that reason, we should not be surprised to find Woman Wisdom playing a figural role in the Book of Chastity and, indeed, for Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, to bear her a striking resemblance. However, we should also not be surprised to find that Britomart is not herself to be identified in any strict sense with this personification of Wisdom. And the brief appearance of the mysterious Palladine in the book devoted to Britomart could be seen to suggest this very relationship; for, it is in the Book of Chastity that this other lady knight, with a name modeled on that of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom, makes her cameo appearance. That she makes her appearance in Book III may suggest the close relationship between Britomart and the figure of Wisdom. That she exists within the poem at all points to the fact that Britomart herself is not to be identified with that virtue.

We must then look for another model that may have informed Spenser’s portrayal of the Knight of Chastity. And in light of what we have said already, we should expect our model to have a close relationship with Woman Wisdom, one related to her as the literal sense is related to the figural. And it so happens that such a creature exists not only for Woman Wisdom, but likewise for Dame Folly in the persons of the “Vertuous” Woman and the Strange Woman. The characteristics of these two women—both in their biblical settings proper and within the ongoing interpretive traditions surrounding them—will be discussed as they arise in our treatment of The Faerie Queene III.i below.

31. “Vertuous” is the translation provided by the Geneva Bible. It will be discussed below.
The Faerie Queene III.i: The Strange Woman in Britomart’s Bed

I have suggested that Britomart has been modeled after the figure of the Vertuous Woman in Proverbs 31:10ff. But as the reader turns to the first canto of her story, he may well seek the evidence for this claim in vain. In part, this is because the evidence is of a certain sort that the reader must be prepared to see. But at the same time, it is, no doubt, because Spenser has not meant for it to be seen—at least, not at first. This is a narrative tactic of which Spenser is particularly fond—withholding, for example, a character’s name until well after he or she has been introduced. Usually, in these instances, he has given signals that point to the character’s identity from the very beginning, but they are signs easily missed unless the reader is particularly familiar with their significance or is especially attuned to the context from which they come. Take, for example, the modern reader encountering the description of the Red Crosse Knight in Book I:

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many’ a bloody fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield:
...

And on his brest a bloodie Crosse he bore,
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord. (FQ I.i.1–2.2)

The average modern reader will more than likely recognize the bloody cross as an indicator that this is a Christian knight. The first book being the “The Legend ... of Holinesse,” the reader is unlikely to be surprised by it. But our imagined modern reader is far less likely to recognize that the red cross also identifies the knight as St. George, patron saint of England. (That is, not apart from the helpful notes in most scholarly editions of the poem.) And yet, though Spenser does not bother to say so himself until
I.ii.12, these implications were there to be read from the start. Similarly, I suggest, this is the case with the identification of Britomart with the Vertuous Woman of Proverbs 31.

But there is another problem associated with identifying Britomart with her biblical model that the reader quickly encounters—there really isn’t very much to go on. One has the magic spear, and this is, of course, suggestive of Athena and the traditions Classical and biblical that cling to her. So far, so good. But the other great identifying feature of her description, her equivalent to George’s bloody cross, is her shield “that bore a Lion passant in a golden field” (FQ III.i.4). Not that this symbol tells us nothing. On the contrary, the figure of a lion is suggestive of so many allusions and associations it is difficult to know where to begin. (Which conundrum we will address in chapter III.) No, the trouble is, for our current argument anyway, that this appears to have very little to do with the Woman of Vertue—which text, it is probably long overdue that I provide:

10Who shal finde a vertuous woman? for her price is farre aboue the pearles.
11The heart of her houſband truſtheth in her, and he shal have no nede of ſpoile.
12She wil do him good, and not euil all the daies of her life.
13She ſeketh wooll and flaxe, and laboreth cherefully with her hands.
14She is like the ſhippes of marchants: ſhe bringeth her fode from a farre.
15And ſhe riseth, whiles it is yet night: and giueth the porcion to her houſholde, and the ordina-
rie to her maids.
16She conſidereth a field, and getteth it: & with the frute of her hands ſhe plãteth a vineyarde.
17She girdeth her loynes with ſtrength, & ſtrengtheneth her armes.
18She feleth that her marchandiſe is good: her candle is not put out by night.
19She putteth her hands to the wherue, & ſhe hands handle the fpindle.
20She ſtretcheth out her hand to the poore, and putteth forthe her hands to the nedie.
21She ſeauere the ſnowe for her familie: for all her familie is clothed with ſkarlet.
22She maketh her ſelf carpets: fine linen33 & purple is her garment.
23Her houſband is knowen in the gates, when he ſitteth with the Elders of y e land.
24She maketh shetes, and ſelleth them, & giueth girdels vnto the marchant.
25Strength and honour is her clothing, and in the latter day ſhe ſhal reioyce.
26She openeth her mouſh with wiſdome, and the law of grace is in her tongue.
27She ouerſeeth y e waies of her houſholde, and eateth not the bread of ydlenes.

33. The Great Bible (1540) translates, “whyte sylke & purple.” This variant will be important below.
Her children rise up, and call her blessed: her husband also shall praise her, saying,

Manie daughters have done vertuously: but thou surmountest them all.

Faour is deceitful, and beautie is vanitie: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her owne workes praise her in y gates.

(Prov 31:10–31)

At first glance, there is little in the canto that would suggest this passage. Certainly, there are no lions lurking here, and nothing that might suggest them. Nor does Britomart appear to have much particularly in common with this “vertuous woman.” Scanning through the rest of the canto, one finds her rising early, “ere the grosse Earthes gryesy shade, / Was all disperst out of the firmament,” which sounds rather like verse fifteen, “And she riseth, whiles it is yet night.” But this is spare evidence to go on, and anyway, it does not come up until the final stanza.

All of that said, there is one piece of crucial evidence that we have thus far left unexamined: the name of this biblical model, this “vertuous woman.” For those familiar with Hebrew, the translation may seem rather a poor one. The original phrase, אשת חכים (eshet chayil), enjoys a much wider semantic range than what modern English speakers mean by “virtuous.” Modern usage of that word is dominated by meanings to do with morality. But the Hebrew term it translates has usages in semantic fields as diverse as “wealth,” “upper class,” and “power,” in addition to more martial meanings, such as “army,” “fit for military service” and “brave” or “courageous.” Naturally, none of this is to be found in the modern meaning of “virtuous.”


But in the sixteenth century, the case was different. In addition to the moral range, the term vertuous could designate qualities of a different sort, specifically of a martial or heroic sort. Thus, the Oxford English Dictionary provides the definition of the term when applied to a person: “distinguished by strength and fortitude; full of courage; valiant, valorous.” The term remains still far less capacious than the Hebrew word it translates, but in early modern usage it does capture an important aspect of its semantic potential. And this newly added semantic freight is not incidental for our present purpose. For, if the woman in Proverbs 31 can be understood both as a moral woman and as a valiant, strong, and courageous woman of fortitude, this is highly suggestive of our lady knight, Britomart.

It is interesting to note that a similar semantic range is found in Jerome’s Latin translation of the titular phrase of our poem, namely, mulier fortis. This phrase, too, carries connotations of strength and martial prowess. And this stood as the Church’s translation of the phrase for more than a thousand years; and yet, intriguingly, not once is this relation to martial concerns raised in relation to Proverbs 31 until the sixteenth century.

But in the 1560s, Hebraist Jean Mercier wrote what would become an enduring monument of scholarship on the book of Proverbs in his Commentarii in Jobum, et Salomonis Proverbia, Ecclesiasten, Canticum Canticorum. And in his comment on the phrase, which he renders in his Latin translation with the familiar mulier fortis, he relates the phrase to his vernacular (French), une vaillante femme. And at the same time, for the first time in English, the Hebrew term received a translation that also captured

this expanded range in the form of the 1560 Geneva Bible. This seems an incredible coincidence. I would like to suggest the possibility that the answer to this riddle lies in the study of Hebrew, and, more specifically, in Reuchlin’s popular introductory Hebrew grammar, *De Rudimentis Hebraicis*, published in 1506.

Reuchlin’s entry for the term לִיָּֽךְ lists as possible glosses: *robur, virtus, fortitudo, exercitus*. The student of Hebrew flipping open his dictionary to this entry cannot help seeing in לִיָּֽךְ a strong martial overtone. It is little wonder, then, that in the decades following the publication of this grammar, the word came to be understood in these terms for the first time, both by Mercier and by the Geneva translators. Whether Spenser was familiar with Mercier’s commentary or not is difficult to say. That he knew the Geneva Bible has long been established, and that he was familiar with Reuchlin’s grammar is, as discussed in the preceding chapter, at least very likely. From that set of facts, it is difficult to draw conclusions about Spenser’s own use of Hebrew. However, what is clear is that when one meets a female knight in his poem, one who is the hero of a Legend of Chastity, with qualified associations to Wisdom—who is described as constant, possessed of “stedfast courage and stout hardiment” and a wielder of “matchlesse might”—the “vertuous woman” of Proverbs 31 cannot help coming to mind.

The descriptions of the lady knight just listed spring to life as pointers of the Vertuous Woman. And just as the “sede” in the matrimonial blessing acquired new meaning at the mere mention of Abraham’s name, so, too, Britomart’s rising before the dawn in the final stanza looks a little less dubious. Still other examples, that we have not mentioned yet, such as Malecasta’s “Law” and Britomart’s response to

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40. Previous translations in the sixteenth century are unanimous in rendering the phrase with, “an honest faythfull woman”—so, the Great Bible, as well as the Bishops’ Bible of 1568. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine the change to “vertuous woman” going unnoticed by Spenser, who was so deeply involved in the romance and epic traditions.

it, take on a new significance in light of Proverbs 31:26 and its mention of “the law of grace”—the discussion of which I leave for chapter III.

But the point remains that the reader, if he is familiar with the apparently newly discovered associations between the heroic tradition and Proverbs 31, is likely to follow Britomart into Castle Joyeous thinking of her as a “vertuous woman.” And if so, our astute concordantial reader will also be on the lookout for her counterpart, the Strange Woman of Proverbs 7. He will not have to look for long.

From the very first moment that Britomart and the Red Cross Knight lay eyes upon her, the description of the mistress of Castle Joyous would have inescapably invoked this biblical figure to the early modern reader.

Thence they were brought to that great Ladies vew,  
Whom they found sitting on a sumptuous bed,  
That glistred all with gold and glorious shew,  
As the proud Persian Queenes accustomed:
She seemd a woman of great bountihed,  
And of rare beautie, sauing that akaunce  
Her wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed,  
Did roll too highly, and too often glaunce,  
Without regard of grace, or comely amenaunce. (FQ III.i.41)

The comparison with the Persian queens, alone, would have been enough to evoke the notion of the Strange Woman of Proverbs. For, in the early modern conception, the Strange Woman was, first and foremost, a harlot and, second, a foreign woman—and more specifically, an eastern woman, the image of far-off eastern lands like Persia, known in Spenser’s day as dens of decadence and moral degeneracy.42 But in this case, we need not work very hard to find further analogies that tie the figure of Malecasta to Proverbs 7.

Upton suggested that we see in the last three lines of the stanza a reference to 2 Peter 2:14, “Hauing eyes ful of adulterie, and that can not ceaſe to ſinne, beguiling vnſtable foules.” And this, I think, is correct. But what has been missed is that this text, too, is part of the intertextual network associated with the topic of adultery, and that as such, its invocation should at the least alert the reader to the possibility of an allusion to the pinnacle, indeed, paradigmatic practioner of adultery in the Bible—the Strange Woman of Proverbs.⁴³

In addition to the allusion to 2 Peter and the comparison to the Persian queen, we may cite several details in the context more generally that are reminiscent of our passage in Proverbs. Take, for example, the description of Malecasta’s bed: “Whom they found sitting on a sumptuous bed, / That glistred all with gold and glorious shew.” This, compare with the description of the Strange Woman’s bed in Proverbs 7:16: “I have deckt my bed with ornaments, carpets and laces of Egypt.” Further, Malecasta conducts herself as the Strange Woman does. In the most general terms, she is deceitful, she engages in flattery, and she is notoriously lustful. And what’s more, the way to her house is—thanks to her law—a way either to sin or death.

That is enough, I hope, to secure the connection between these two women, and so, let us look to what happens when the strange woman meets the vertuous. Malecasta plays her part to a tee. She sees Britomart with only her face bared and mistakes her for a young male knight. It is perhaps worth noting the resononance here with Proverbs 7:15 where the strange woman says to her young prey, “Therefore came I forthe to mete thee, Ʋ I might feke thy face.” Ironically, by only revealing her face, not only did

⁴³ It is perhaps worth noting that the passage in 2 Peter 2:14 shares many features in common with Proverbs 5–7 that would have led the canonical reader to connect them: the children who have gone astray in 2 Peter connect to the situation of Proverbs 1–9. “Eyes full of adulterie,” are opposed to the having the right way, the father’s instruction, as the “apple of his eye” (Prov 7:2); the comparison with brute beasts led by sensuality is reminiscent of the unwise young man led away as an ox to the slaughter in Proverbs 7:22–23.
Britomart conceal her sex and so, create the comic situation that follows, she also donned the mantle of Malecasta’s wonted prey—that of the foolish young man.

What is telling is that Britomart, though she does not fully act the part of the foolish young man—being protected from this extremity of folly by her sex—she does not quite show herself wise, either. Indeed, in some ways, she looks more like an odd mix of the foolish young man and the strange woman. As to her foolishness, she is taken in by Malecasta’s lust, believing that she has actually been smitten by love and not mere lust at the sight of her. And as to her strangeness, it should be noted that Malecasta is not the only one engaged in deceit. Not only has Britomart hidden her true identity in order to avoid her would-be seducer’s advances, she has “dissembled them in ingnoraunce” (FQ III.i.50).

What sort of virtuous woman is this, then? Like the Red Crosse Knight at the beginning of his quest, Britomart is dressed like—and in many ways, acts and even appears to be—the biblical model upon which she is based. (In the case of the Red Crosse Knight, the model is, of course, Christ himself.) But she has not yet reached that goal, and, in fact, at times, she still behaves more like the very opposite of her biblical model than the goal toward which she strives.

Now, before we continue, the time has come to admit some other ways in which Britomart is different from her model in Proverbs 31. (The case for similarity having been made, it seems safe now to point out the dissimilarities so as to explore their significance.) Unlike the woman described in Proverbs 31, Britomart is an unwed maiden. She is not a wife. She is not a mother. At least, not yet. We will learn in the next canto of her story that marriage is actually the object of her quest. Having seen the image of an unknown knight in her father’s magic mirror, Britomart was stricken with love for him, and sent on her way from her native Britain to Faerie Land to seek his hand in marriage. Incidentally, this is yet
another way in which Britomart is similar to the Strange Woman. She is herself “strange,” in the sense that she is a foreigner in Faerie Land.

There is another biblical character who shares some of these same traits with Britomart, one who is at once connected with the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 and, yet, is a “strange” woman in a strange land. More than that, she is a woman in search of a husband. The character I am referring to is, of course, Ruth. And lest the reader suspect the connection was not made in Spenser’s day, let us note here the depiction of Ruth’s story found in one of Henry VIII’s many tapestries (Figure II.3). We find Ruth between her sister-in-law Orpah and mother-in-law Naomi. Here, we see Ruth’s identity with the Vertuous Woman spelled out plainly in her dress—white, trimmed in purple. It is perhaps worth noting that her sister-in-law, Orpah—whose name sounds a great deal like the Hebrew for “stubborn”—is dressed up in the bejeweled scarlet garb of the Strange Woman. That is, in this particular instantiation of the tradition, the two Proverbial archetypes have been located in these two separate characters. But in the biblical text, the situation is a bit more complex.

As the reader will recall, Ruth was a Moabitess who married an Israelite, was widowed, and followed her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem, in Judah, where she sought a husband. Already, the reader familiar with the Bible will see the problem. Not only was Ruth a foreigner, she was a foreigner of the
worst sort: she was a Moabitess, one of the groups expressly forbidden to mingle among the people of Israel (Deut 23:3). She was, in this sense, the strange woman par excellence.

And yet, she acts in ways reminiscent not of the Strange Woman, but the Vertuous. She rises early and gathers grain to feed her family. She has the “law of grace” upon her lips. (See her famous speech in chapter one: “whither thou goeft, I wil go …”; Ruth 1:16–17). The list could go on. And more than that, by the end of the story, not only is Ruth acting like the vertuous woman, she is being treated like her. She is being praised in the gates. Mothers are being blessed on her account. She is said to have surpassed not merely many daughters, as the woman of Proverbs 31, but many sons.

What has happened to bring about this change, to solidify this strangest of strange women as the most vertuous? The pinnacle moment comes in chapter three. Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, concocts a plan to win her a husband. She tells her to put on her best clothes, to make herself as attractive as possible, and to go in the middle of the night to the threshing floor, where Boaz, her next of kin and would-be husband can be found. She is to wait until he has “eaten, and dronkē, & cheared his heart” (Ruth 3:7), and then she is to go to the place where he is sleeping and climb under his covers.

Now, apart from the brazenness of such an act, and the patent potential for, shall we say, adult content in a situation such as that, it should be noted, too, that again, the specter of the strange woman hovers over the scene. For, in going out to seek a man at night (Ruth 3:2), she is dangerously close to the actions of the strange woman who, in Proverbs 7:9, goes out to meet the foolish young man “in the twilight in the euening, when the night began to be blacke and darke.” Thus, as midnight comes and she makes her way across the threshing floor and climbs into bed with her would-be husband, her relation-

ship to these two Proverbial archetypes is ambivalent. Her fate hangs in the balance, and it turns on one thing: will Boaz see in her the strange woman or the woman of vertue?

His response could not be more clear. Finding her there, in his bed in the dark, he listens to her request for his help and responds:

Blesſed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: y ſhewed more goodnes in the latter end, then at the beginning, in as muche as thou folowedſt not yong men, were they poore or riche. 11And now, my daughter, feare not: I wil do to thee all that thou requireſt: for all the citie of my people knowe, that thou art a vertuous woman [אשת ידה]. (Ruth 3:10–11)

This is the only other occurrence of the phrase אשת ידה in the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Not only that, but Boaz commends Ruth for not pursuing young men—that is, he commends her for not acting the part of the strange woman. And with that, there can be no doubt which of the two archetypes he sees standing before him. And so, with her identity now firmly established, Ruth rises early, before the dawn (as the vertuous woman is wont to do), and goes on her way.

Obviously, the connections between Ruth and the vertuous woman are very strong, such that any concordantial reader could not help but see them. And indeed, the testimony of the history of interpretation bears this out. And so, we might expect Spenser to have noticed it, too. More than that, given that his own version of the vertuous woman has started out her story surrounded by some of the same tensions, some of the same confusion over her identity with the strange and vertuous women, we might expect to find allusions to this other biblical narrative at work in our canto. In this, we are not disappointed.

Britomart’s evening at Castle Joyeous is spent in feasting until everyone is heading to bed when,

... th’eternall lampes, wherewith high Ioue
Doth light the lower world, were halfe yspent (FQ III.i.57.6–7)

Which is to say, at midnight—compare this with Ruth 3:8, which notes that the action on the threshing floor occurs at the same time. If the reader has managed to follow the movement of the concordantial allusion thus far, he will not be surprised by what comes when Britomart finally goes to bed, for what follows is a comic reenactment of the scene at the threshing floor. The nature of the situation demands that Britomart, as the mistakenly sought-after would-be husband, play the role of Boaz. But it should be remembered that, for Britomart at least, there is still some question as to the true nature of her hostess. She has been taken in by her “craft” (FQ III.i.50, 57; compare Prov 7:21) and goes to bed still unaware of her true nature and intentions, still entertaining the possibility—as the reader has been encouraged to do both for Britomart and for Ruth—that this Strange Woman might yet prove herself a Woman of Vertue.

And so, true to form, we watch Malecasta assume the role of Ruth. She “lightly [arises] out of her wearie bed / And vnder the blacke vele of guilty Night” (FQ III.i.59), creeps into what she thinks is a young man’s bed. (Contrast Boaz’s commendation to Ruth.) And, of course, from there the whole thing goes horribly wrong.

... At last the royall Mayd [i.e. Britomart]
Out of her quiet sloomber did awake,
And chaungd her weary side, the better ease to take.

Where feeling one close couched by her side,
She lightly lept out of her filed bedd,
And to her weapon ran, in minde to gride
The loathed leachour. But the Dame halfe dedd
Through suddein feare and ghastly drerihedd,
Did shrike alowd, that through the hous it rong,
And the whole family therewith adreedd,
Rashly out of their rouzed couches sprong,
And to the troubled chamber all in armes did throng. (FQ III.i.61.7–62.9)
Like Boaz, Britomart rolls over in the middle of the night and finds a strange woman in her bed—and decidedly so. For, in that moment, all confusion over Malecasta is removed. Her nature is revealed, and Britomart reacts, first, in outrage and then, as the rest of the household arrives, in violence.

But what of the tensions surrounding Britomart herself? What has become of her relation to the women strange and vertuous? The key moment occurs when Malecasta’s household begins to fight back:

But one of those sixe knights, Gardante hight,
  Drew out a deadly bow and arrow keene,
  Which forth he sent with felonous despight,
  And fell intent against the virgin sheene:
  The mortall steele stayd not, till it was seene
  To gore her side, yet was the wound not deepe,
  But lightly rased her soft silken skin,
  That drops of purple blood thereout did weepe,
  Which did her lilly smock with staines of vermeil steep. (FQ III.i.65)

The first thing to notice here is how Britomart is dressed. Underneath her armor, we find her wearing not the “whyte sylke & purple” of the Vertuous Woman, but merely a “smock lily white.” But even before we have been told of the difference, the difference has been removed—the white silk dyed purple by the arrow’s sting. And with that, I suggest, the confusions surrounding Britomart, too, are resolved. In the course of the ordeal, she has been marked not as the Strange Woman, but as a Woman of Vertue. And with her identity firmly established, she rose early, “ere the grosse Earthes gryesy shade, / Was all disperst out of the firmament” (as vertuous women are wont to do), and continued on her way to find her husband.
Chapter III. Typology and Historical Allegory: Spenser’s Canonical Reading of History

There is another side to the figure of Ruth in biblical tradition that we have not yet discussed. And as it bears upon both our understanding of the previous episode and the present discussion of typology and historical allegory, it will perhaps be useful for us to consider this unexplored facet of her character. The facet in question is her role in the line of promise. This, I have alluded to already in chapter II—recall Henry VIII’s tapestry, which depicts Ruth dressed as a vertuous woman over against her “stubborn” and “strange” sister-in-law, Orpah (see Figure II.3, page 53). Perhaps the most conspicuous detail of that tapestry, though, we passed over in silence—the flowering tree at its center, under whose branches Ruth stands. This tree and Ruth’s position beneath it are, in fact, pointers to her role as a mother, and specifically as an ancestress of David and, ultimately, of Christ himself. But in order to properly approach this facet of Ruth, and its consequent outworking in the figure of Britomart, we must first look briefly at the phenomenon upon which it is predicated—typology. Having done so, we may then turn to the history of interpretation for examples of this phenomenon that undergird and inform Spenser’s Legend of Chastity.

Typology: A Very Brief Introduction

Let us take as our beginning the useful definition of our key terms offered by Barbara Lewalski in her now classic work, Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric.
Allegory was understood to involve the invention of fictions, or the contrivance of other systems of symbols, to represent underlying spiritual truth or reality. Typology by contrast was recognized as a mode of signification in which both type and antitype are historically real entities with independent meaning and validity, forming patterns of prefiguration, recapitulation, and fulfillment by reason of God’s providential control of history. In precise terms, typology pertains to Old Testament events, personages, ceremonies, and objects seen to foreshadow and to be fulfilled, forma perfectior, in Christ and the New Dispensation.  

Leaving aside for a moment this notion of allegory, let us focus first on typology. As Lewalski notes, the term designates a “mode of signification” that derives the meaning of one historical event by means of comparison with another historical event. Whether either was actually historical—whether Christ was really raised or the sea really parted—is, for our discussion, beside the point. The point is that these events were conceived of by would-be typologists as historical realities that occurred in the world of flesh and blood and water in which they lived their lives. They were paradigmatic moments that provided a pattern of divine action, a pattern deliberately repeated by God in his providential outworking of history. This way of making meaning out of the past in the present naturally gave rise to a mode of historiography that was deeply intertextual, portraying recent history in light of these paradigmatic patterns established in past events. So, for example, in the biblical tradition, the entry into the Promised Land is modeled on the crossing of the Red Sea. Likewise, the baptism of Christ at the hands of John the Baptist

1. Barbara Lewalski, Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 11. In fact, the view of history in terms of recapitulated patterns is widely attested within the Hebrew Bible, quite apart from the problem of relating the Old Testament to the New. (Although, the problem does find its rough equivalent in the attempt to relate the patriarchal period, what one scholar has called “the Old Testament of the Old Testament,” to the Sinaitic traditions of Israel. See Moberly, 1992.) And in fact, it is the reflection upon these patterns found in the Hebrew Bible that underlies even the most infamous New Testament examples of typology in the “proper” sense, given here by Lewalski. Understanding the “fulfillment” of prophecies like Hosea 12:1 depends upon a reading of that text as a pointer to an ongoing historical pattern wherein God calls “his son” out of Egypt. Compare, then, Abraham, the descendant of Adam through the line of Seth, in his “exodus from Egypt” (Gen 12:10–20), to the Exodus of Israel, God’s son and heir (Exod 4:22), from that same nation, and, likewise, the flight to and return from Egypt of God’s political “son,” King Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 11:40; cf. Ps 2:7 and the notion of the king as the son of God). That these historical patterns need to be “fulfilled” in some way is not a strong misreading of the text in Hosea—or if it is such, it is not one original to the writer of Matthew—but a result of reading these typological patterns in light of the shape of the canon as a whole, a canon which looked for a new Exodus that would eclipse the old (e.g. Isa 43), a new covenant with a new prophet like Moses (Deut 34:10f.; Jer 31:31–34), and, finally, a new David (Jer 23:5 and Ezek 37:24). That is, the canon in its final form had come to be read as pointing to another climactic and final rendition of the typological patterns already witnessed in Israelite tradition. In light of this expectation, Matthew’s invocation of Hosea 12:1 is not an ignorant misappropriation of Scripture, but a sensitive effort to, as one of my teachers has put it, ‘read along the shape of the canon,’ to claim that this providentially guaranteed pattern in the history of Israel has, indeed, been recapitulated and has found its ultimate instantiation in the life of Christ (D. Andrew Teeter, personal communication).
evokes these events, as well as the similar crossing of the Jordan made by Elijah and Elisha. Note, here, the change in scale—events of national scope, the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan, are reiterated at the individual level in the Old Testament figures of Elijah and Elisha and, again, in the life of Christ.

The latter iteration, indeed, becomes the basis for the application of these patterns within the life of every Christian believer. In Paul, the baptism of the believer is explained, like Christ’s own baptism, as a reiteration of the pattern begun with Israel at the shores of the sea. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 10:1–6:

Moreover, brethrē, I wolde not that ye shulde be ignorāt, that all our fathers were vnder the cloude, and all passed through the see, 2 And were all baptized vnto Mofēs, in the cloude, and in the see, 3 And did all eat ſame ſpiritual meat, 4 And did all drinke the ſame ſpiritual drinke (for they dranke of the ſpiritual Rocke that followed them: and the Rocke was Chriſt) 5 But with many of thē God was not pleaſed: for they were ouerthrown in the wildernes. 6 Now these are enfāmples to vs, to the intent ſe we shulde not luſt after euil things as they alſo luited.

The explanatory power of these typological patterns, then, comes to be applied not only at the corporate level, where it is the people of God as a whole (however conceived) that is in view, but in the life of each and every person within that community. And these same levels of application, the same flexibility of use found in the biblical period are, likewise, active in the early modern period.2

These various biblical precedents were followed widely within Christian tradition, historiographers making free use of biblical narrative to make meaning of history at the level of Church, Empire, and individual alike. What is more, this frequent trend in historiography led to the adoption of typology as a trope in literary fiction as well. Characters in fictional works like Dante’s Commedia live out their stories within the patterns established by the biblical tradition.3

2. Lewalski, Protestant Poetics, 111–32. That these different sorts of typology, corporate and personal, are active within the biblical tradition seems not to have been noticed, or at least has not been noted, in Lewalski’s discussion.

3. Erich Auerbach, “Figura” in Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–78; I am aware of a similar trend in the Classical tradition. We will take up this topic in chapter IV.
And it is at this level that we have already seen examples of typology in *The Faerie Queene*.

When we saw Britomart’s experiences in Malecasta’s castle in light of Ruth’s at the threshing floor, when we spoke of the reader’s expectations within the present narrative being shaped by that other biblical narrative, where we spoke of Britomart as a “figure” for the biblical personages of Ruth and even the Vertuous Woman—in all of those places, we were speaking the language of literary typology. But literary typology is not the only variety of typology, as we have been at pains to show. Nor is it the only sort of typology to be discerned in this canto. But to demonstrate that claim, we must revisit the figure of Britomart in light of the history of biblical interpretation.

*Britomart and the Line of Promise*

From the moment that Britomart first appears, pricking on the plain with that golden lion on her shield, the reader begins to suspect the connection with royalty, at least, and perhaps, too, with the biblical line of promise. As we will see, these two are not unrelated. For, the lion had long been a symbol associated with kings. In fact, it was the symbol of the line of Troy to which English monarchs, through the figure of Brutus, traced their ancestry. But it was also, in the biblical tradition, a symbol of the line of promise that included not only David, but Christ himself. So, for example, one reads in Genesis 49:8–9:

> Thou Iudáh, thy brethren shal praise thee: thine hād fhalbe in ȝ necke of thine ennemies: thy fathers fônnes fhal bowe downe vnto thee. 9Iudáh, as a lions whelpe fhalt thou come vp from the spoile, my fonne. He fhal lie downe & couche as a lion, & as a lionesse. Who fhal fter him vp?

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4. On typology as a set of expectations conventionalized and established in the reader, see Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (ed. Charles Segal; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30n12. “When considered from within the text … typology can be defined as convention. For the reader a series of narrative constants organizes the text according to a system of expectations. Because of this conventionalization, the narrative text … acts as programmed structure. It becomes the place of an author-reader strategy, a strategy grounded on the predictability of the discourse, upon which basis a communication can be constructed.”

5. We will have some opportunity to address the relationship between these two genealogies and the traditions from whence they came in the following chapter.
It is possible that the very alert reader will have begun to suspect biblical significance in Britomart even before any other indication of her identity has been given. But there is another place in the poem wherein the connection between Britomart and the line of promise becomes clear. This is found in *The Faerie Queene* III.iv.3 (note, again, the information being withheld until late):

Yet these [examples of feminine power], and all that els had puissaunce,
  Cannot with noble Britomart compare,
  Aswell for glorie of great valiaunce,
  As for pure chastitie and vertue rare,
  That all her goodly deedes do well declare.
  Well worthie stock, from which the branches sprong,
  That in late yeares so faire a blossome bare,
  As thee, O Queene, the matter of my song,
  Whose lignage from this Lady I deriue along.7

In this provocative stanza, Spenser reveals two key associations for our consideration. First, Britomart is conceived of as an ancestress of Elizabeth. To this, we shall have to return momentarily. Before that, we must deal with the imagery associated with this line of descent; that is, the “stock, from which the branches sprong, / That in late yeares so faire a blossome bare.” Here, Elizabeth is a single bud on a grand, flowering tree of descent. Already, the reader will have recalled the portrait of Ruth in Henry’s tapestry, standing under the branches of just such a blossoming tree (Figure II.3, page 53). And, of course, this is the very point. For, both text and tapestry find the source of this imagery in the same biblical text—the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1, “Bvt there ſhal come a rod forthe of ſy ſtocke of Ifhái.”

This text is one that enjoys far too wide a history of interpretation to be meaningfully dealt with here. That it was universally interpreted among Christians as a prophecy of Christ’s birth perhaps goes

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6. In fact, my wife, Lisa Wayland, is one such alert reader. It was here, and in connection with the line of promise that she first began to see Ruth in Britomart.

7. The treatment of this passage provided here is endebted to, though different from, that found in Robin Headlam Wells, *Spenser’s Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1983), 14–21.
without saying.\(^8\) For the rest, it will be expedient to select one instance of its interpretation from which we may begin. And as we have already met with a singularly helpful, if not perhaps obvious instance of just this sort, let us begin with it. In this, I am referring to our sample page from the *Biblia Pauperum* (Figure I.1, page 13).

As we saw in chapter I, this typical page from the so-called “paupers’ Bible” has as its center a depiction of the infant Christ and the holy couple. The two scenes on either side are derived from biblical narratives that had come to be read as types of the birth of Christ. On the left is Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3). This unusual angelophany came to be understood as a type of the mystery not only of the Immaculate Conception—in which the Virgin’s womb housed without harm the very Son of God—but, also, of the mystery of the Incarnation itself, which saw the holy presence of God contained in, but not consuming, the physical form of a human being. This provides a fascinating example of the level of sophistication to which typological exegesis can attain—and it is specifically typological\(^9\)—but unfortunately, this is not the example which must demand our attention here. Rather, our focus falls upon the scene on the right. Here, we find a depiction of the story in Numbers 17. In it, there has arisen another round of grumbling within the people of Israel as they wander the desert waiting to die. This time, the source of contention is the exclusive priestly prerogative of Aaron and his sons. In order to establish his brother’s divine right to this office, Moses places Aaron's staff, along with those of his opponents, inside

8. If not, see, for example, the argument for the chapter in the Geneva Bible: “Christ borne of the roote of Ishai. 2 Hi Ver-tues and kingdome 6 The frutes of the Gospel. 10 The calling of the Gentiles.”

9. This is another, somewhat elevated, form of canonical reading that is predicated upon the mystery of a localized presence of a holy—i.e. dangerous—and omnipresent deity. It is strictly typological in that this kind of localization is an event that occurred several times in sacred history, including the indwelling of the Tabernacle in Exodus 40, of the Temple in 1 Kings 8, and in the incarnation, as conceived in John 1:14. The same principle of mysterious divine presence is, likewise, indicated in the nod to the Eucharist found in the table-like “manger” in which Christ is laid. Cf. Tarald Rasmussen, “Bridging the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: *Biblia Pauperum*, their Genre and Hermeneutical Significance,” in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation Vol 2: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (ed. Magne Sæbø in cooperation with Michael Fishbane and Jean Louis Ska, $\ddot{\text{S}}$; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 82n10. For further discussion of the biblical and early modern Protestant understanding of the Divine Presence, see chapter VI.
the Tent of the Testimony. Upon inspection the following day, Aaron’s staff—and Aaron’s alone—is found to have sprung to life, putting forth a blossoming shoot.

Now, one might try to suggest that this image and the text in Numbers really have nothing to do with the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1. And it is true that one can connect the birth of Christ with this incident without reference to the Jesse Tree tradition. For, as with the mystery of divine presence in the burning bush (see note 8), this figure, too, might work on a principle of analogy. In this case, the analogy would be the miracle of life from whence life cannot naturally spring. The lifeless rod of Aaron should no more be producing blossoms than the womb of a virgin should be producing sons. And if the Jesse Tree tradition did not exist, one would certainly be left with only this explanation for the page in the *Biblia Pauperum*. However, the Jesse Tree tradition does exist, and given what we have said and seen already of the tangled Bible, we will not be surprised to find that tradition active here.

The analogy between Numbers 17 and Isaiah 11 perhaps goes without saying. They both share similar verbiage and the same imagery of a dead piece of wood miraculously acting as though it were alive. But the imagery is not precisely parallel. In Numbers 17:8, we read:

*sequenti die regressus invenit germinasse virgam Aaron in domo Levi et turgentibus gemmis erupserant flores qui foliis dilatatis in amigdalas deformati sunt* (Vulgate)

And when Moſéſ on the morowe went into the Tabernacle of the Testimonie, beholde, the rod of Aarón for the houſe of Leui was budded, and broght forthe buddes, & broght forthe blossoms & bare ripe almondes. (Geneva Bible)

Whereas in Isaiah 11:1, we find:

*et egredietur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet* (Vulgate)

Bvt there ſhal come a rod forthe of ſtroke of Iſhái, & a grafe ſhal growe out of his rootes. (Geneva Bible)
That is to say, where in Numbers we have a “rod” (virga) that brings forth flowers and fruit, in Isaiah we have only a “stocke” that produces a “rod” (virga). But as we have already seen, the tradition of the Jesse Tree is always one of a tree bearing blossoms—not only in Henry’s tapestry, but ubiquitously in early modern England. This is the way one finds it, for example, on title pages, as seen here (Figure III.1), and commonly also on household walls, ceilings, and more.\(^\text{10}\)

However, this imagery cannot have been derived from only the passage in Isaiah, where there are no blossoms to be found, but depends equally upon the depiction of Aaron’s rod in Numbers. And the reader will, no doubt, have noticed the same is true of Spenser’s account of Britomart’s genealogy, which is born of a “stock” that “so faire a blossom bare.”

The association between these two texts and the birth of Christ through Mary is not based upon the imagery of spontaneous life alone. As the quotations above suggest, there is another text operating in the background, signalled by the near homonyms in Latin, virga (rod) and virgo (virgin). The text, of course, is Isaiah 7:14—the famous Emmanuel prophecy:

\[
\textit{propter hoc dabit Dominus ipse vobis signum ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium et vocabitis nomen eius Emmanuhel} \quad \text{(Vulgate)}
\]

Therefore the Lord him self wil giue you a sign. Beholde, the virgine shal conceiue and beare a fonne, and she shal call his name Immánu-él. \textit{(Geneva Bible)}

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The analogy, then, is complete—as the stock and rod (virga) miraculously bring forth new life, so, too, the virgin (virgo). The fact that Numbers shares the keyword, virga, with Isaiah 11:1, and that the latter goes on to provide a description of a future ruler readily applied to the Messiah—all of this informs the logic and makes for the basis of the interpretive tradition found on this page of the Biblia Pauperum.

The centrality of Mary in this tradition cannot be overstated. Look, for example, at her prominent position at the top center in Figure III.1. Yes, she has the infant Christ in her lap, but it is Mary and not her infant son that receives the primary emphasis here. For, in fact, the linguistic play between virgo and virga just described suggests that it is not Christ, but she who is the “rod” that is sprung from the “stocke” of Jesse. Christ, then, becomes not the rod, but the blossom. This detail is significant for our interpretation not only of Britomart, but of Elizabeth.

In the line as written in The Faerie Queene III.iv.3, Britomart is cast as a literary type of the Virgin Mary. And this should come as no surprise. Not only is she, as the Knight of Chastity, a paragon of virginity, but Britomart is further connected with Mary through the very set of associations outlined in chapter II. Our focus upon the Old Testament, as well as the particular demands of the canto, made mention of the New Testament figure of the Virgin Mother unnecessary in our analysis above. But it cannot be denied that for the early modern canonical reader, the network of texts discussed there finds its ultimate and perfect fulfillment in the blessed Virgin. Ruth herself was read as a typological fore-runner—that is, as a mere shadow—of Mary not only as a vertuous woman, but as a mother in the line

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of promise. Further, Mary came to be associated with the figure of Wisdom herself. It is perfectly expected, then, that we should find Britomart referred to in terms usually reserved for her. What is perhaps more surprising is the way that our heroine is related to Elizabeth. For, in the language of the stanza, the regnant Virgin Queen—so naturally associated with the mother of Christ—is described instead in terms that evoke Christ himself.

If this is surprising, though, it is only so as a result of our chronological remove from the medieval and early modern cultures. For, in truth, the Jesse Tree was a familiar piece of not only religious, but political imagery as well. It was a fixture within the iconographic tradition that undergirded the notion of the divine right of kings, and, as such, it was featured prominently in displays of royal authority.

Examples of this can be found in many places; one such has been discussed helpfully by Arjo Vanderjagt:

In the first civic triumph or “entry” of the Burgundian duke, Philip the Good, into Bruges in Flanders on December 11, 1440, it is not Christ who buds forth from the topmost branch of the Jesse Tree. Philip’s “presence before the tree defines the duke himself as its promised flower. A spiritual son of David sprung from the house of Jesse, his coming illustrates Isaiah’s prophecy of messianic advent”. Thus the OT Jesse Tree and the NT entry of Christ into Jerusalem are fused into one to sacralize the power of the duke.

13. It should be noted that both of these similarities appear to be active in the genealogy of Christ found in Matthew 1. There are only four women included there: Tamar, Rahab the harlot, Ruth, and Bathsheba. The logic that appears to have demanded the inclusion of these women, and not, for example, Sarah or Rebekah, is the tension between their perception as either a strange or virtuous Woman. Tamar’s first two husbands died upon their union with her, and then, when the third candidate was withheld, she showed up pregnant anyway; Rahab was a prostitute; Ruth, we have already looked at; and Bathsheba was caught up in an adulterous affair with King David. On top of all of this, they each appear to be of non-Israelite stock. Which is to say, on the face of it, they all seem to be the very model of a strange woman—adulterous, lecherous, and one who brings her husband down to Sheol. But, as with Ruth, all four prove not to live up to this archetype, and, in fact, become faithful wives and mothers in the line of kings. That they are invoked just before the story of the virgin birth is only one more example of the typological reasoning discussed briefly above (note 1). For, in Mary the pattern is repeated, in that she, too, appears to have been an unfaithful fiancée—and so, Joseph intends to break off their engagement—and yet, miraculously, proves to be faithful and, more than that, the pinnacle of chosenness in that she is to bear the Son of God himself. In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, though, Mary is not the last iteration of this pattern. That falls to the Church, the Bride of Christ who appears to teach doctrine contrary to the Law and, moreover, allows gentiles into its ranks.


15. Gordon Kipling, “The Deconstruction of the Virgin in the Sixteenth-century Royal Entry in Scotland,” European Medieval Drama 9 (2005): 127–52. While it is true that part of Kipling’s argument here is the recession of this sort of imagery, so popular in the Middle Ages before the onset of newer, neoclassical elements, the recession he describes is not an immediate one. That the imagery was still closely associated with kingship in Spenser’s day is demonstrated not only by the examples below, drawn from the early parts of the sixteenth century, but by Spenser’s own invocation of the tradition.

Here, we have wandered into a political use of Scripture which we have not yet encountered outside of the king’s great matter in chapter I. And it is perhaps of particular note that this use is, likewise, dependent upon a secular appropriation not only of Scripture, but of typology, too. The historical entry of Philip is portrayed, in good concordantial fashion, in light of a network of biblical texts, and these texts provide not only an evocative set of theatrical images, but also a conventionalized set of expectations that guide the viewer to the correct—in this case, the state-sanctioned—interpretation of those images and, therefore, of the present historical event. In this sort of appropriation, Philip is far from alone. Many more examples might be found, not least among them the similar use of the Jesse Tree in Henry VI’s procession. Beyond this, one thinks of the much wider campaign waged by Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII not only for the divine right of kings, but for the notion that the king was the supreme head of the church. This campaign was undergirded by a consistent identification between Henry and that pinnacle of Old Testament kingship, David.

In light of this, we should not be surprised to find that Elizabeth I, too, was associated with the tradition of the Jesse Tree, nor even that she, as the reigning monarch, was cast as a figure for Christ. This much was the standard fare of Medieval and early modern royal iconography. There is even precedent for the same being applied to women in positions of power. So, when Margaret of Austria entered Geneva in 1501, part of the processional included her being confronted with a towering model of the Jesse Tree, apparently some sixty feet high at least, and in the branches were perched actors portraying not the lineage of Christ, but the ancestry of the archduchess herself.


There was, of course, a typical role allotted to queens married to a still-ruling king within the Jesse Tree tradition—the role of the Virgin Mary. And here, we come to what is noteworthy about Elizabeth. It is not her association with either of these figures in the Jesse Tree tradition; rather, it is that she comes to be associated with them both simultaneously. But to understand this simultaneous association, we will need to look briefly at the political discourse of the Elizabethan era.

The Bible and the Elizabethan Monarchy

Elizabeth’s reign was contested on two fronts: first, on the grounds that she was a woman, which won her the enmity of John Knox and others of his ilk; second, because of her rejection of Catholicism. Each of these assaults upon her monarchy had to be met on its own front, and each defense—as well as the attacks it was designed to refute—drew heavily upon the Bible.

In terms of the first objection, the biblical associations employed by Henry VIII would take Elizabeth only so far. She could, of course, associate herself in the normal way with the Jesse Tree tradition and the male models of David and Christ that evoked. But this could only serve to highlight the point of contention in the eyes of her opponents. And so, the queen and her advisors were forced to seek biblical examples of women exercising political authority. This was found prominently in the figure of Deborah, but also, in Judith and Esther. This, of course, would not satisfy her opponents, but at least it could provide a serviceable answer that might satisfy the populace. And, indeed, it provided the justification for Elizabeth’s greater point: that, in fact, a Queen might as readily embody those virtues that were usually


21. See, for example, Wells, Cult of Elizabeth, 18–19. It is perhaps not incidental that in The Faerie Queene III.iv.2, that is, just before the invocation of the Jesse Tree in Britomart’s genealogy, there is also mention of Deborah.
conceived of in terms of masculinity—virtues such as courage, bravery, strength, etc.—as a king.\textsuperscript{22} That is, all the virtues of the “vertuous woman” as outlined above.

One can see, then, why Britomart would have been embraced by the Virgin Queen. (The first volume of the poem met with such approval that it won Spenser an annual stipend of some fifty pounds per year.) The lady Knight of Chastity embodied the very merger of masculinity and femininity that Elizabeth sought to portray in herself as monarch, the key to which, as we have seen, was the figure of the Vertuous Woman of Proverbs. What is more, by making this heroine an ancestress of the queen, Spenser seems to have suggested not only the likeness of lineage, but of typology. For, just as Ruth and Mary were both branches in the same family tree as well as instantiations of the same typological pattern, so too, Spenser seems to say, with Britomart and Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{23}

Elizabeth’s rejection of Catholicism, too, proved a point of great contention, and this on two levels. First, there was the problem of popular religion in England. With the removal of the icons and the discontinuation of the worship of saints, a central locus of popular devotion was removed. And within this popular piety, there was no more central figure, and, therefore, no greater void left, than that of the Blessed Virgin. Following the lead of her father, Henry VIII—who, in his day, had replaced the rood screens with his own royal arms in churches all over the island—Elizabeth attempted to divert the popular devotion previously given to Mary to herself. And, in fact, circumstances aligned such that the replacement was a ready one. Quite aside from Elizabeth’s own refusal to marry, there was the fortuitous—or was it providential?—date of her birth on September 7, the day before the Nativity of the Virgin Mary.


\textsuperscript{23} That Britomart is to be seen as a figure for Elizabeth is a common opinion among Spenserians. See, for example, Wells, \textit{Cult of Elizabeth}, 15.
These two factors, along with an active campaign toward these ends, seem to have given rise to a genuine devotion to the queen bordering in intensity upon the level of religion. Indeed, scholars have long spoken of the “Cult of Elizabeth.” But this, along with Elizabeth’s rejection of Catholicism more generally, brought a problem of a different sort. Catholics both in and outside of England were quite naturally displeased to see Elizabeth succeed her sister Mary I. In their eyes, Elizabeth was an apostate from the one true Church, and worse, an apostate ruler who threatened to lead all of England into the sin of idolatry, just like the biblical Jezebel before her.

This biblical queen of Israel was the Phoenician wife of the wicked King Ahab in 1 Kings 16–2 Kings 9, famous for her cruelty and murderous deception, her devotion to the foreign deities and consequent persecution of the prophets of the God of Israel, and ultimately her role in the fostering of idolatry among the elect nation. It is quite easy to see, then, why Catholics would have associated Elizabeth with this wicked queen. Her Protestantism and the cult of devotion she established around herself both suggested the parallel. Indeed, with so ready a comparison, one is not surprised to find it made emphatically and often. So popular was it that one man, James E. Phillips, actually wrote an entire collection of poems devoted to the theme in a volume entitled De Jezebelis.

Thus, early in her reign, Elizabeth faced a problem of public perception. She would have herself seen as an instantiation of both sides of the Jesse Tree tradition—of Mary and, in the common politicized way, of Christ himself. However, her Catholic opponents would have her cast as a type—in the strict, historical sense—of the vicious queen Jezebel, who was, of course, another instance of the biblical “strange woman.” That this is the case hardly needs argument. She was vicious and led men to their

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24. See Wells, Cult of Elizabeth.
26. Ibid., 28.
death through deception, she was foreign, and, most of all, she was an idolater that led men into the same (1 Kgs 16:31–34).

Seen in this light, the problem of perception that Elizabeth faced was precisely the problem of perception with which Spenser confronted the reader in *The Faerie Queene* III.i as outlined above. Just as Britomart displayed elements of the Strange and the Vertuous, so, too, the public persona of Elizabeth was split in the ongoing political discourse of the day between associations with one or the other of these two biblical archetypes. But before we make much of this correspondence, we should note that Elizabeth was not the first to confront this problem of perception among British monarchs. She was preceded in this by her half-sister, the Catholic Queen Mary I.27

Like her successor, Mary was naturally connected with the Blessed Virgin among her supporters and, at the same time, with the vicious, idolatrous wife of Ahab among her opponents.28 The latter were mostly to be found outside of England, natives who had been exiled from their homeland for their Protestant loyalties—a situation that in the biblical imagination could not help but evoke the fate of the Lord’s prophets under Jezebel in 1 Kings 18:13. Moreover, Mary’s devotion to Catholicism, with its practice of devotion to saints and images, was inevitably targeted by the ongoing Protestant polemic, which identified these practices as idolatry. (This polemic will be discussed further in chapter VI.) And just as with the Catholic opponents of Elizabeth, these English exiles were quick to exploit the comparison.

John Knox, John Ponet, and Christopher Goodman all refer to Mary as “Jezebel.” Take, for example, this quote from Goodman:

27. In fact, it has been suggested that the rhetorical strategies of the two queens, generally speaking, were so similar that Elizabeth must have intentionally imitated her predecessor. Cristy Beemer, “The Female Monarchy: A Rhetorical Strategy of Early Modern Rule.” *Rhetoric Review* 3 (2011): 258-74.

And the counterfeyte Christians this day, which everie where (but especiallie in our miserable countrie) imprison, famishe, murther, hange, and burne their owne countriemen, and dear children of God, at the commandement of furious Jesabel, and her false Priestes and Prophetes.29

What we find, then, in Spenser's day is a situation in which the nation has recently had two queens, rivals for the throne of England. Both of them have sought association with Mary and, through her, with the network of texts that surrounds both the Jesse Tree and the Vertuous Woman. And at the same time, their opponents have attempted to cast them in the role of Jezebel, the quintessential instantiation of the Strange Woman in the Old Testament.

The similarity to the situation in *The Faerie Queene* III.i, with its similar pair of women caught between these two biblical archetypes, is clear. And once it has been noticed, an entirely new level of signification is suggested—that of “historical allegory.” In the final pages of this chapter, we will look briefly at that phenomenon and the example of it suggested here in Britomart’s travails at Castle Joyeous.

**Typology and Historical Allegory in Castle Joyeous**

Perhaps we should begin by reminding ourselves of Barbara Lewalski’s definition of allegory—“Allegory,” she says, “was understood to involve the invention of fictions, or the contrivance of other systems of symbols, to represent underlying spiritual truth or reality.”30 In terms of historical allegory, then, the underlying reality is not spiritual truth, but historical reality. As we will see, this bears a very close resemblance to literary typology. In the latter, the fictional narrative is contrived so as to correspond to a given historical narrative through similar sequences of events and characterizations. Sometimes, as we have seen, typology itself can be quite flexible, shaping the fate of a single individual on patterns estab-


30. See page 59 and n.1 above.
lished in the course of national history. This, we saw above in the case of Jesus’ baptism and the national deliverance at the Red Sea.

Instances like this, it seems to me, hover in the space between typology and allegory, where historical sequence has been cast in light of historical sequence, but, at the same time, the individual has come to personify, in some way, the nation. But in allegories proper, these sorts of identifications become still more flexible. Examples abound. Characters can signify vices and virtues, shields can symbolize Protestant faith, and a house can come to represent the human body in rather graphic detail. 31 So far as I can tell, it is this greater flexibility of analogy that really separates the two forms of signification. And as we will see, the two can bleed into one another in certain incidents within The Faerie Queene. One such incident is that surrounding Castle Joyeous.

We have seen already the identification of the Red Cross Knight with the patron saint of England, St. George. And given what we have just said, it will not surprise us to learn that in the logic of Book I, the Knight of Holiness is often treated as a figure for that land. So, the reader of the poem as a whole will see, as Britomart gallops up to the walls of Malecasta’s castle, not merely the Red Cross Knight beset by six of that strange lady’s knights, but the kingdom of England itself. Viewing this scene, the reader aware of the typological connections we have already unpacked here will immediately notice that the six knights correspond to the six years of Mary Tudor’s reign. 32

The “allegory,” then, is begun. We have the English nation confronted with the six years of Mary’s Catholic rule, and into this situation enters the chaste avatar of Elizabeth. And it continues with

31. On personified virtues, see especially Gelosy in The Faerie Queene III.x; on the house as the human body, see the House of Alma in The Faerie Queene II.x; on shields as Protestant faith, see Kaske, Biblical Poetics, 73–90.

32. Cf. The Faerie Queene I.xii.18 and note in Hamilton 2001, ad loc.
the discussion of their point of contention, which also takes on a new level of meaning. The initial characteriza-

tion is given by St. George when he says:

These six would me enforce by oddes of might,
To chaunge my liefe, and loue another Dame,
That death me liefer were, then such despight,
So unto wrong to yield my wrested right:
For I loue one, the truest one on grownd,
Ne list me chaunge; she th’ Errant damzell hight,
For whose deare sake full many a bitter stownd,
I haue endurd, and tasted many a bloody wownd. (*FQ* III.I.24.2–9)

Notice the subtle allusion to George’s lady love in this speech. For, the “one” he loves is a pun upon his

love’s own name—Una. And like George, she has her own common allegorical meaning in Book I where she represents, most broadly speaking, Christian Truth. So, at the level of the allegory, the six years of Mary’s Catholic rule have tried to force England to substitute its allegiance to Christian Truth for allegiance to the Catholic Queen. Notice, here, that there may be some slight critique of the notion of royal supremacy, for, it is not devotion to Catholicism or to the Catholic Church that seems to be in view.

(That, we will not meet until chapter VI in the House of Busirane.) Rather, the issue seems to be the conflicting obligations to monarchic power and religious devotion, which point becomes all the clearer when the six knights speak for themselves:

Within this castle wall a Lady fayre,
Whose soueraine beautie hath no liuing pere,
Thereto so bounteous and so debonayre,
That neuer any mote with her compayre.
She hath ordaind this law, which we approue,
That euery knight, which doth this way repayre,
In case he haue no Lady, nor no loue,
Shall doe vnto her service neuer to remoue.

But if he haue a Lady or a Loue,
Then must he her forgoe with fowle defame,
Or els with vs by dint of sword approue,
That she is fairer, then our fairest Dame,
As did this knight, before ye hether came. 
Perdy (said Britomart) the choise is hard: 
But what reward had he, that ouercame? 
He should aduaunced bee to high regard, 
(Said they) and haue our Ladies loue for his reward. (FQ III.i.26–27)

The language of Law here evokes the ongoing conversation among Protestants—especially those exiles in Geneva—regarding civil disobedience. That is, if a sovereign such as Mary I, who was seen as appointed by God himself (Rom 13:1), requires by civil law religious apostasy, what is the duty of the believer? To which of these conflicted demands is he beholden, to the law of God or to the law of God’s appointed? The Genevan exiles went to great pains to demonstrate that their obligation in this instance lay only with the Law of the Lord. Take, for example, this quote from Christopher Goodman, where he makes his case, as we would expect, by appeal to biblical precedent:

Thus we see that althoghe Dauid thoght it not lawful in his priuate cause to touche Gods anoynted, yet are no people or nation therby constrainved either ot [sic] obeye their anoynted in vnlawful demandes, or els forbidden to withstand the open transgression of Gods Lawes and mans. For in that case Saules seruauntes would not obeye him, commandinge them to murther Ahimelech and the rest of the Leuites and Priestes: so that not to withstand such rages of Princes in tyme according as the Lawe requireth (which commandeth that the euill be taken forth from amongst you) is to geue them the bridle to all kynde of mischiffe, to subuerre all Lawes of God and man, to let will rule for reason, and therby to inflame Gods wrathe agaynst you, wholy, as your selues in Englande are this day an example to all nations and people that beare the Name of Christe.33 (Goodman 140–41)

Far from being answerable to the wicked monarch in matters contrary to the Law of God, the believer is actually required of God to disobey, even to resist the monarch. Not to do so is to invite divine chastisement. Faced with this, one expects to find in Britomart’s reply a defense not only of conjugal love, but also of this Protestant position. And we are not disappointed:

Ne did she stay, till three on ground she layd, 
That none of them himselfe could reare againe; 
The fourth was by that other knight dismayd, 
All were he wearie of his former paine,

That now there do but two of six remaine;
Which two did yield, before she did them smight.
Ah (sayd she then) now may ye all see plaine,
That truth is strong, and trew loue most of might,
That for his trusty seruaunts doth so strongly fight. (FQ III.i.29)

It is perhaps too early in Book III to expect the reader to see in the language of “trew loue” an opposition between the false love, Cupid, and the true love, which is God himself (1 John 4:8). We will return to this opposition in chapter VI, in our discussion of the House of Busirane, but for now, it merely needs to be noted that it has been suggested here.

More important for our purposes is the language of “truth.” For, in the ongoing Protestant polemic, Catholicism in all its forms was contrasted with the truth of Evangelical doctrine. As Calvin so pointedly put it: “if the true church is ‘the pillar and ground of truth’ (1 Tim 3:15), it is certain that there is no church where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy.” Or again:

There is falsehood wherever the pure doctrine of Christ is not in vigor.... This falsehood prevails under the Papacy. Hence the Papacy is not a church. Still the papists extol their own church, and charge those who dissent from it with heresy and schism. They attempt to defend their vaunting by the name of personal succession. A succession which abandons the truth of Christ proved to be of no importance.35

At the allegorical level, then, Britomart’s response becomes not merely an affirmation of what is right in the relationship between a knight and his lady love, but between the believer, the government and the Church. What is more, the trial by might, in which Britomart single-handedly unseated three of these knights and St. George another, has proven her point. The laws of government have no more right to constrain the believer to abandon Christian—that is, Protestant—Truth than an adulterous woman has to claim the rights to a man betrothed to another. Note that the metaphor at work for religious senti-

35. Ibid., 690.
ment is the same as that found in the biblical tradition, in texts like Hosea 1–3, for example—religious devotion is expressed in terms of marital love.

One further note on this exchange at the gates of Castle Joyeous is in order. It will be remembered that where the Strange Woman was full of flattery and deceit, the Vertuous Woman “openeth her mouth with wisdome, and the law of grace is in her tongue” (Prov 31:26). Britomart is here, by defending faithfulness to Una and, by extension, Protestant Truth, defending, too, the doctrine of sola fides, salvation by faith alone. And in this way, the law of Grace truly is placed upon her tongue.36

We need not revisit the scene inside Malecasta’s castle. It is enough to recall that the tensions worked out there also participate in the mix of historical allegory and typology we have been describing. The political rhetoric surrounding both Elizabeth and Mary is predicated, in large part, upon the same networks of biblical texts as Spenser’s poem. And so, as these texts are alluded to, so, too, is that political discourse. In this way, Spenser confronts the reader of his poem with a situation similar to the one which confronted the average observer of the transition from the reign of Mary to the reign of Elizabeth. That observer would have been faced with the conflicting characterizations of these two women, characterizations that tried to paint each with the other’s brush, as it were. The question of how to sort out such conflicting claims would have been a pressing one for the would-be “gentleman” that Spenser envisions as his reader. And so, it is not without purpose that he provides a typological recreation of this historical situation—complete with conflicting scriptural cues and guidelines—and then guides him step-by-step to the proper conclusion. This, of course, is that Elizabeth I, figured in Britomart, is the true Mary, the true Ruth, the true Vertuous Woman—and Mary I, with her Catholic dogma, the true English Jezebel.

36. See, also, III.i.26 and the potential play on “one” and “faithful” that our analysis has suggested.
Chapter IV. From Genesis to the Matter of France:
Spenser’s Rewritten Everything

We have seen in chapter III that, for Spenser, the Bible provides the interpretive key not only to itself, but to the ongoing narrative of history as well. But, at the same time, the Bible is not the only tradition upon which Spenser draws in his poem, nor even in his poetic reinterpretations of contemporary history. His reflections upon the reign of Mary I were made in biblical terms, yes, but also in those of Greco-Roman myth, the literature of courtly love, and the Italian romanzi. Thus far, we have done our best to leave these other sources and influences aside in order to better highlight the often-overlooked presence of the complex networks of biblical tradition. But the time has come at last in our study when the relationship between the Bible and these other traditions must begin to be addressed. This subject will be the occupation of this chapter directly and will inevitably spill over into our discussion in chapter V, where we will address the nature and shape of Spenser’s Bible.

The Bible and the Classical Tradition

The attempt to relate these two ancient and, for Western Civilization, foundational cultures is hardly new in Spenser. We saw already in chapter II, Jews in the Second Temple period—that is, the Hellenistic and Roman eras—were confronted with a similar task. And it was this confrontation of cultures that produced not only the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, but perhaps even some portions of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves.¹ The New Testament, likewise, was forced to confront

¹ See, for example, the arguments for Ecclesiastes as a product of this meeting of cultures in Peter Machinist, “Fate, miqrekh, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought,” in Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epı-
the same problem, and so, too, its immediate offspring, the Fathers of the Early Church. In the latter situation are formed the two most enduring solutions to this problem in Christian tradition. The first, typified in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*, is to see Classical (as well as Egyptian) culture as a systematic plagiarizing of the Hebrew Bible on a massive scale. He goes to great lengths to provide evidence of Greek exposure to and borrowing from the still-more-ancient Israelite tradition. “What else is Plato,” one of his sources asks, “than Moses speaking Attic Greek?”

Another solution to the problem is found in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, who famously compared the intellectual insights of the pagans to “Egyptian gold.”

Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and shunned but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves … similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies … but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of truth, and some very useful moral instruction.

Here, philosophical and spiritual truth is not the exclusive provenance of the revelation to the Hebrews; it is also to be found, mixed in with “superstitious imaginings,” among the pagan nations. But as

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3. Of course, there is another sort of solution that is really no solution at all—rejection. There were many among the early Christian movement who sought to discredit pagan cultures altogether, dismissing them as historical error (Euhemerism) or the work of demonic forces, or both. These efforts to reject Classical culture were rejected, in turn, by Spenser and his fellow humanists, and so, they need not concern us here. For a brief introduction to these, see the treatment in Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), 1–26.


5. Ibid., 260.

all truth belongs to the God who is truth, and Christians are the chosen people of that God, the logic
seems to go, this intellectual property properly belongs to them. In the background here is the notion, so
contrary to contemporary, post-modern thinking, that “truth” is something out there to be discovered,
whether in divine revelation or in philosophical reasoning and experience—something which finds its
ultimate validation not in this physical world, but in the realm of the divine, indeed, in God himself.7

Seen in this light, pagan culture is not disagreeable to Christian belief, nor even to be seen as altogether
separate from the biblical tradition. Rather, for Augustine, biblical revelation and what truth is to be
found in pagan cultures find their ultimate origins in the same source—God. The task of relating to
Greco-Roman philosophy, for example, is one of discernment and appropriation. The “Egyptian gold”
must be sifted from the sands of “superstitious imaginings” and put to better use.8

In one form or another, these two solutions went with what remained of Classical tradition into
the Middle Ages where they—and here, especially perhaps Augustine—provided the justification for the
ongoing use of Greek philosophy and pagan mythology in the Christian West. On these bases, appro-
priations of Classical culture proceeded on a grand scale.9 And they were, likewise, ready to hand when,
in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the floodgates of Classical culture were opened once again.

With the Renaissance came a nostalgia for the past, which made the traditions not only of the
ancient Greeks and Romans, but of the Egyptians and the Jews as well, the focus of a wave of scholarly
inquiry and learning, making the need to somehow relate pagan sources to the still regnant truth of

8. It is perhaps worth noting that a similar approach seems to be found in the New Testament itself. Preaching in Athens to
a Greek audience in Acts 17, the apostle Paul quotes the Greek poet Aratus in his defense of the gospel. Indeed, the entire
chapter is laced with terminology drawn from Stoic philosophy. Here, the “Egyptian gold,” it seems, has been sifted and
used against the Egyptians themselves.
9. For discussion of some examples, see Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place
the Bible and Christian theology as pointed as it had ever been.¹⁰ Within these traditions were found not only echoes of already known biblical and Christian truth, but new and exciting ideas that, likewise, needed to be accommodated. No one pursued this humanistic project more boldly than that great synthesizer and early Christian Hebraist, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In defending his use of Jewish sources, he writes:

When I had procured these books at no small expense and had read them through with the greatest diligence and unwearied labor, I saw in them (God is my witness) a religion not so much Mosaic as Christian. There is the mystery of the Trinity, there the incarnation of the Word, there the divinity of the Messiah;... In those matters that regard philosophy, you may really hear Pythagoras and Plato, whose doctrines are so akin to Christian faith that our Augustine gives great thanks to God that the books of the Platonists came into his hands.¹¹

Pico invokes the synthesis of Classical and Christian traditions worked out by Augustine and his successors as precedent for his new attempt to appropriate Jewish Kabbalah. Similar syncretistic sentiments may be found in the writings of Johanes Reuchlin.¹² But the issue of the Classical cultures was perhaps not as settled as Pico’s sentiment suggests. Plato was, by the sixteenth century, an old Christian friend, but with the new Classical learning, other, newer problems had emerged. Should one attempt to imitate Cicero when writing in Latin, or not?¹³ Should the Latin Bible itself sound like Cicero?¹⁴ Should one use Classical sources as illustrations when preaching a Christian sermon?¹⁵ These and other issues were pressing among Christian Humanists of Spenser’s day.


We ought not be surprised, then, to find Spenser, a Christian humanist himself, mixing and even overlaying biblical and pagan imagery and ideas—indeed, in trying somehow to relate Christianity to Classical culture more generally. What should concern us, though, is how he goes about relating these two traditions—and perhaps more pressing still, why? It is to these questions that we now turn.

**Christianity and Classical Culture in The Faerie Queene: An Example**

We will take as our test case the scene in Malbecco’s castle found in *The Faerie Queene* III.ix–x. Here, we find the vertuous Britomart in a scene very similar to Malecasta’s castle, but faced with an entirely fresh cast of characters. The master of the house, Malbecco, has reluctantly welcomed Britomart and two other errant knights, Satyrane and Paridell, into his home. Together with the lady of the house, the beautiful Hellenore, the party has enjoyed a meal and turned to conversation wherein we find Paridell recounting his ancestry.

Paridell is, of course, a descendant of Paris and so, of the line of Troy. It will be remembered that Britomart bears the symbol of that line upon her shield, the “lion passant in a golden field” (*FQ* III.i.4.9). And indeed, she, too, traces her lineage from the Ilian line. To the double-significance of this symbol, we will return below, but for now, let us focus on Paris and the legacy of Troy. Paridell begins the account of his genealogy with a lament:

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Troy, that art now nought, but an idle name,
And in thine ashes buried low dost lie,
Though whilome far much greater then thy fame,
Before that angry Gods, and cruell skie
Vpon thee heapt a direfull destinie,
What boots it boast thy glorious descent,
And fetch from heuen thy great genealogie,
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Sith all thy worthie prayses being blent,
Their ofspring hath embaste, and later glory shent. (FQ III.ix.33)\textsuperscript{16}

Notice the ambiguous legacy granted to Troy here. Paridell sees all of its descendants as “debaste”—but what exactly is being debased here?

As said above, and as he soon reveals, Paridell is the descendant of Paris, whose abduction of Helen caused the Trojan war. Over the next four stanzas, he traces his descent from this Son of Priam through a bastard-born shepherd named Parius, his son, Paridas, and an unknown number of generations elided in the line, “From whom I Paridell by kin descend” (FQ III.ix.37.5). Having, thus, finished his own line, Paridell is prompted by Britomart to tell of the line of Aeneas. He gladly complies, recounting in a brief three stanzas the tale it took Virgil twelve books to tell, concluding with the first mention in this of the city of Rome.

At this point, Britomart again intercedes:

There there (said Britomart) afresh appeard
The glory of the later world to spring,
And \textit{Troy} againe out of her dust was reard,
To sitt in second seat of soueraine king,
Of all the world vnder her gouerning.
But a third kingdom yet is to arise,
Out of the \textit{Troians} scattered ofspring,
That in all glory and great enterprise,
Both first and second \textit{Troy} shall dare to equalise. (FQ III.ix.44)

Here, suddenly, we get two new pieces of information. First, that in Aeneas and in Rome, the Trojan line was not shorn of all later glory, but, in fact, established a second Troy, whose king ruled all the world.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. III.iii.22.5–9 “For from thy wombe a famous Progenie / Shall spring, out of the auncient \textit{Troian} blood, / Which shall reuiue the sleeping memorie / Of those same antique Peres, the heauens brood, / Which \textit{Greeke} and \textit{Asian} riuers stained with their blood;” Spenser appears to be punning on the form, “peres.” Note, it can also be a verb, “pere,” “To pour out, esp. in a small trickle.” "peir, v.2." \textit{OED Online}. December 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/139728?rskey=7LS2i&result=8&isAdvanced=false (accessed January 30, 2015). But note that it is also a near homonym with both Paris and Perez. Even at the very first accounting of Britomart’s Trojan ancestry, there is a faint echo of the biblical line of promise.
This, of course, is the Rome of Classical antiquity. And second, there is a third Troy still to come, Britomart goes on, called Troynauant, which is, of course, London.

The first implication of all this is simply that the legacy of Troy is a divided one. It has produced the likes of Paridell, through Paris, a line begun in adultery that led to war and death, and continued in this knight who, as he put it, “for faire ladies loue, and glories gaine, / My nativiue soile haue left” (FQ III. ix.37.7–8). On the one hand, this sounds a great deal like the reason for which Britomart left her own home. But on the other, in light of his name and the story of his namesake so lately told, one expects rather a different sort of quest from him. (This is perhaps to be seen in the possibly plural object of his quest: “ladies.”)

But Troy has, likewise, produced the line of Aeneas, the hero of the Aeneid whose adventures became known throughout the world. Far from “debaste” and disgraced of all glory, his line founded Troy anew in Rome. The contrast between the two lines could not be more clear—and the contrast is, in fact, highlighted in Paridell’s own recounting of the two tales. Setting out from Troy, Paros sails to an Island in the Aegean and then northeast toward the Black Sea, while Aeneas travels out of the Aegean to the southwest. The two lines thus share a common origin, but they soon part ways, heading in opposite directions—one to obscurity and disgrace, the other to power and glory.17

But there is one other detail, seemingly rather small, that separates these two scions of Troy. Parius, we are told, “after Greekes did Priams realme destroy, / Gathred the Troian reliques sau’d from flame, / And with them sayling thence, to th’Isle of Paros came” (FQ III.ix.36.7–9).

Contrast this with Aeneas, who “out of the flames for safegard fled, / and with a remnant did to sea repayre” (FQ III.ix.41.2–3). Notice that there is no mention of relics. This small detail might be

easily dismissed, I suppose. Perhaps Spenser did not think it important, or perhaps only mentioned them in the first place because it helped to complete the scansion of the earlier stanza. Perhaps. But it should be remembered that the relics of Troy were a notable feature in Virgil’s account of the hero’s escape from the burning city (Aeneid II.840–50). One begins to wonder, then, why, if they were to be mentioned at all, were the relics not put in Aeneas’ hands? Here, I think we come to the crux of our problem and the central tension of Spenser’s poem at this point.

For, we cannot help but notice that the two characteristics that mark out Paris over against Aeneas are familiar ones: adultery—with a foreign woman, no less—and idolatry (i.e. the pagan relics of Troy). No less familiar is the discussion of Augustine’s “Egyptian gold,” which was opposed to the “idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and shunned.” That is to say, in his discussion of this ancient, Classical story, Spenser has placed the unwanted burdens of the past upon the shoulders of Paris, while the weight of the “Egyptian gold” is borne away by the hero Aeneas.

But this pairing, in light of our discussion of Queen Mary I above, cannot help suggesting yet another association and another city, one that has as yet gone unmentioned—the eternal city, with its cathedrals and relics all its own. That is, the Catholic Rome of Spenser’s day. And with the notice of this implicit city, the picture is complete—the legacy of Troy is a divided one. On the one hand, it is a legacy of foolish war, adultery, and idolatry. On the other, it is a legacy of heroism and philosophy and glory—the legacy of Rome. But this second Troy, too, has a divided legacy. There is the Rome of Virgil, the source of Classical heritage to which the Renaissance looked with longing and esteem. And to this, Britomart clearly alludes and, indeed, claims for Britain’s heritage. And then, there is the Rome left hanging at the end of Paridell’s debased lineage, a Rome characterized by the same unfaithfulness and
whoredom that mark out Paridell and the Troy that gave him birth. This, I suggest, is sixteenth-century Catholic Rome.

In this way, these paired genealogies are about not only identity, but disassociation. In claiming a connection with the Classical past, the genealogy of Britomart, and the line of British kings which she typifies, threatens to claim too much. For, the Classical world, for all its glory and humanistic accomplishment, is irrevocably pagan. In order for it to be claimed, this dangerous legacy of idolatry must, in some way, be suppressed. Just as the Christian reader with pagan writings, the “Egyptian gold” must be sifted from the sands of a superstitious past. At the same time, though, these genealogies gesture toward the narrative future, the England of Elizabeth I. And in this England, the legacy of Troy has a rival claimant in Catholic Rome. And in a single, rather brilliant rhetorical stroke, Spenser manages to sluff all the dross of Troy’s legacy off of the line of Brutus and onto this relic-keeping rival.

Lest the reader forget, though, that Troy is not the only legacy to which Britain’s monarchs fall heir, Spenser concludes the genealogy of Britomart with a reference to the biblical tradition.

Indeed he said (if I remember right,)
That of the antique Trojan stocke, there grew
Another plant, that raught to wondrous hight,
And far abroad his mightie braunches threw,
Into the utmost Angle of the world he knew. (FQ III.i.x.47.5–9)

The imagery of the tree, in light of all that we have already seen, cannot help suggesting the notion of the Jesse Tree. As with the lion on Britomart’s shield, Britomart’s family tree has been given a double significance. It is at once the stock of Jesse and, now, the stock of Troy. But not only that, it is the stock of Classical, humanistic, heroic Troy that has been claimed. And, in this way, all that the Christian humanist of the Renaissance held dear has been claimed for Britain and its Virgin Queen. The difficulties of claiming
identity with the pagan past have been negotiated, and this now qualified past, in turn, has been identi-
ified with the Protestant England of the present.

It is perhaps worth noting that a similar set of conclusions can be drawn from the context sur-
rounding these genealogies. In the story of Britomart, Hellenore and Paridell, we find the familiar faces
of the Woman of Vertue, the Strange Woman, and the foolish young man once again, only this time
dressed in the garb of characters from the Classical tradition. But as we have already covered these
themes in some detail, and as there is still a great deal of the poem we have not yet addressed, let us set
our sights a little wider. Let us instead ask the question: what if the effort to relate the Bible to Classical
and contemporary traditions is not limited to incidents here and there, but, rather, it is a feature of the
poem everywhere present and on a scale heretofore wholly unnoticed in Spenserian scholarship? What if
this effort to relate the poem to the canon, and the canon, in turn, to other traditions, has, in some way,
affected the shape of the poem as a whole?

In fact, there is a long tradition of such works in the Christian and Jewish traditions alike. Go-
ing all the way back to the Second Temple period, one can find examples. The so-called “rewritten Bible”
texts—texts such as Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, even the Temple Scroll—take particular portions
of the biblical material as the structure upon which their own compositions are built. Interpolations
(almost always from other scriptural texts), alterations, and subtractions are brought to bear, making of
the biblical framework a new composition of its own that is, at once, deeply connected with and deeply
interpretive of its scriptural model.

18. Here, we find Britomart once again seeking shelter in a strange castle at night. She fights with, rather than on behalf
of, the wandering knights that she meets at the gate (contrast Red Crosse Knight), and so, the opposition between her and
Paridell begins. Going in out of the rain, she is forced to strip her armor to let herself dry, and her ankle-length golden hair,
compared with the light of the sun, marks her out immediately as a type of the Woman Clothed in the Sun (Rev 12) and,
therefore, as a type of the Woman of Vertue. The story progresses, then, as one would expect: Paridell this time plays the role
of the foolish young man. Hellenore plays the role of the Strange Woman. Finally, Malbecco plays the role of the husband in
Proverbs 7, down to the presence of the bag of money (Prov 7:20; compare FQ III.x.19ff.). Thus, the biblical archetypes are
instantiated here in the characters of Classical epic. Further, the association of Paridell and Hellenore—and, therefore, of
pagan Troy—with Catholicism is seen in the “sacrament profane” (FQ III.ix.30).
Christians in the early centuries of the Common Era, too, produced compositions of this sort in the form of centos. Faced with alienation from their native Greek and Roman cultures, these Christian converts resorted to this ancient form in which a text is composed entirely of the language of another text. So, for example, fourth-century Roman Christian Faltonia Betitia Proba composed a paraphrase of the Bible, from Creation through Pentecost, comprised of phrases drawn from the poetry of Virgil. In this, she and her fellow centoists sought to bring their native traditions along with them into the Christian fold. As Proba herself says in the opening lines of her poem: *Uergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera christi: rem nulli obscuram repetens ab origine pergam* ("That Virgil put to verse Christ’s sacred duties / Let me tell. And reinterpreting (better, “reclaiming?”) /a theme obscure to none, I shall pursue it / From its source").19 That is to say, the Christian Truth was actually concealed within the Roman tradition. Virgil, as much as he looked like a pagan, was really a Christian all along.

Similar efforts were made with regard to other classics in the pagan tradition. Homer, Ovid, the Athenian playwrights, all came in for this sort of interpretive reappropriation. And in each case, what drove these rewriters of “scripture” were the changing demands of the present. Whether it was the need to see the theological and liturgical concerns of Second Temple Judaism reflected in the narratives of Genesis, or else to find some way to keep hold of a pagan past in a Christian present—each of these writers was motivated by a need to overcome the disconnect that had arisen between their present and the authoritative scriptural past—to reveal in the Scriptures not merely a word from the past, but a message relevant to the now altered contemporary reality of the community.20

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The question, then, becomes, was *The Faerie Queene* a part of this long tradition? Was the poem as a whole meant to address this same need, felt so widely within the Renaissance, to reconcile the Bible with the best of the pagan past, and the two, in turn, with the Christian present? The answer, I suggest, is a clear and emphatic, yes. To demonstrate this claim, though, we will need to widen our scope of inquiry beyond this isolated episode, and even beyond the confines of the Legend of Chastity, which has thus far been the emphasis of our discussion. To that end, let us turn to the beginning of the poem and the Legend of Holiness.

*Spenser’s Rewritten Everything*

With this claim, we may begin at last to address that other and equally bold claim with which we began in the preface; namely, that the Bible’s presence is pervasive and, indeed, a structuring element within *The Faerie Queene* as a whole. Demonstration and exposition of these claims through close readings could fill a substantial volume all its own. Not having this luxury, our treatment here will necessarily be brief and perhaps even cursory. We will have to limit ourselves to concise glances at only the most relevant episodes. Most of these, as we will see, are to be found at the beginning and end of each respective book of the poem, as Spenser seems to have deliberately placed the clearest indications of his scriptural program at the seams of his great work, allowing these scriptural eruptions to color the, at times, less overtly biblical episodes that come in between. With that small proviso in place, let us turn to the task at hand.

The beginning of Book I, we have looked at briefly already in chapter II. And so, we have already seen that the opening vignette is one evocative of the beginning of the New Testament. The Red Crosse

21. Though, in giving that answer, I must immediately confess that the question and answer both occurred first to my wife, Lisa Wayland, who, seeing Mary and Joseph give way to Adam and Eve in the opening canto (see below) immediately took it in mind that this pattern of systematic biblical engagement might persist. All that follows rests upon the foundations of her initial insight.
Knight pricking on the plain, with Una behind him dressed like a nun and drawing behind her a lamb on a leash—such a scene cannot help suggesting to the Christian reader the holy family. Of course, one cannot mistake this group for the holy family themselves. Mary wore no habit, Joseph was no knight, and Jesus was a lamb only in a metaphorical sense. Which is to say, there is no danger of this poem being mistaken for the Bible itself. The connection, strong and clear as it is, is strictly a typological one. But it is worth noting that the opening scene is not only a typological one, but one that invokes specifically the beginning of the New Testament narrative. If we are to see in this an effort to rework the Bible, this deviation from the canonical ordering must be taken into account. Whatever other scriptural allusions or invocations may follow, Old Testament or New, they have been cast already as borrowings specifically from the Christian canon.

The episode that follows this opening scene is one which scholars have long agreed is shaped by biblical tradition. George and his lady love are driven from the plain by a sudden rainstorm. Seeking shelter in the woods, they become lost and finally find themselves faced with the monster Errour. The allegorical significance of the episode is apparent simply from the monster’s name. But it is in the description of the monster (as well as the setting at the center of an idyllic wood\(^2\)) that the biblical allusion becomes apparent.

\[
\text{Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,} \\
\text{But th’other halfe did womans shape retaine,} \\
\text{Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine (FQ I.i.14.7–9)}
\]

The champion of Christian holiness, then, is confronted by a monster that is half dragon, half woman—or, perhaps better, half serpent and half Eve.

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22. The catalogue of trees in *The Faerie Queene* I.i.8–9 is, in light of the wider context, an allusion to the description of Eden in Gen 2:9, “For out of the grounde made the Lord God to growe euerie tre pleafant to the fight, and good for meat: the tre of life also in the middes of the garden, and the tre of knowledge of good and of euil.”
Of course, this is not the beginning of the Old Testament. We have not begun with the creation of the world, but, in good Classical style, have begun in media res. But this is only in regard to the narrative of the poem itself. In terms of the Old Testament canon, we have begun as near the beginning as possible. Adam and Eve have already been created and united, as our characters begin already in one another’s company. But from that point in the biblical action, our poem proceeds. Thus, the opening of the New Testament narrative has given way to the opening of the Old Testament narrative.

It is perhaps worth noting that the transition between the two Testaments has been accomplished by reference to Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Like Dido and Aeneas before them, George and Una seek shelter from a storm in the woods, a search that, for each of them, ends in an encounter in a cave. The resonances between the three episodes—the battle between Errour and the Red Crosse Knight, Dido and Aeneas’ tryst, and the pseudo-sexual temptation of Eve and Adam by the serpent—are apparent. Already, the process of identifying biblical and Classical episodes on this common thematic, perhaps even typological, level has begun.

No sooner than the Old Testament has appeared, it is gone again. Our holy couple proceeds from Errour’s den through the woods until they meet the wizened old man dressed like a monk who offers them a place to stay for the evening. Here, again, a non-biblical element is used as a transition. The old man, Archimago, is a clear echo of another old hermit met near the beginning of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (II.12–18). But the transition takes up almost no time at all before it, too, gives way to the return of New Testament resonances. These begin with Archimago’s offer of shelter for the night. “Now day is spent,” he says, “Therefore with me ye may take vp your In” (*FQ* I.i.33.6–7). This cannot help re-

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minding the reader of Luke 2:7, where we read that Mary and Joseph “laid [Jesus] in a cratche,\textsuperscript{24} because there was no rowme for them in the ynne.”

Moving forward, we find the holy couple spending the night under Archimago’s roof, where he is revealed as a wicked old sorcerer who, as any wicked old sorcerer would, uses his dark arts to work his guests woe. He summons up a dream to inflict upon the Red Crosse Knight, a dream in which Una proves herself less chaste than she seems. She comes in the middle of the night to her champion’s room and seeks to work her way into his bed. But he rebuffs her, and the temptation is over.

Here, too, I suggest, the reader is asked to see an echo of the New Testament story. Joseph, too, was faced with circumstances that seem to suggest the unfaithfulness of his virginal companion, and these circumstances, too, are tied up with a dream (see Matt 1:19–21). Of course, the echo, if it is one, is more muted than either of the first two above. Joseph’s dream was not the work of a wicked magician and a hellish spirit, but the visitation of an angel of God. Moreover, his dream was not meant to test, but to reassure. And the holy couple famously did not stay in the “ynne.” But it should be remembered that the clear echoes of Eden in Errour’s cave had undergone a similar transmutation.

Una, whom the opening scene has taught us to see in light of the Virgin Mary, cannot play the part of Eve. We have seen already that these two were seen as two instantiations of utterly opposed archetypes. And accordingly, we find the wicked temptress Eve combined with the serpent into a single monstrous form. Similarly, in this transmutation of the Fall, the Fall doesn’t actually occur. George fights with Errour, yes, but he fights and wins. And yet, in spite of all of this, the echo of Scripture is still strong enough to have been almost universally recognized. I would suggest that the same is true of the following episode and its echoes of this New Testament story.

What we find, then, in the opening canto of *The Faerie Queene* is three separate incidents, each one alternating between the New Testament narrative and the Old, with transitions from one to the next drawn from the non-biblical traditions. Leaving these transitions aside for a moment, we have seen this sort of handling of the Christian canon before. In the daily readings from the *Book of Common Prayer*, as we saw in chapter I, the two testaments were read out from beginning to end, a chapter at a time. Beginning in Genesis and Matthew and proceeding from there, the Old and New were alternated in a liturgical calendar that invited and, in some ways, required the hearer to see the two testaments in light of one another. So, too, with the *Biblia Pauperum* and its retelling of the life of Christ. Each page provided an installment in the Gospel story, even as this life was framed and interpreted by scenes from the Old Testament.

Thus, we find at the outset Spenser signalling to his reader that the present work—minimally, the present book of the present work—is one indebted to the two-part Christian canon. Returning to those non-biblical transitions, it is also a work drawing from the Classical and contemporary epic tradition, from Virgil to Ariosto. We might add that it is also drawing from the native English tradition. The catalogue of trees alluded to above (p.90n23) is actually a nod to the greatest of English poets in that day, Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as such Classical luminaries as Virgil and Ovid.25 Likewise, the fact that the hero of the story is St. George is a clear sign that this is, above all, an English epic. All that in only the opening canto. The poem that follows upon such a beginning is the attempt of a master to synthesize the greatest strands of his literary tradition. That there are several strands is clear, but equally clear is the

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fact that the dominant strand, the one that lends structure to the whole, is drawn from the two-testament Christian Bible.

Again, space will not allow us to continue through the whole of Book I. Rather, we must turn quickly to the end of the Legend of Holiness to see what has become of this master’s efforts. The reader looking for biblical tradition will not be disappointed. For, here, too, we find biblical allusions so strong that they have enjoyed unanimous scholarly recognition for centuries.\(^ {26}\) Coming to the end of his quest, St. George the dragon slayer, true to form, confronts an evil dragon. But not just any dragon—this is the dragon that has conquered and terrorized Una’s own home, the land of Eden. In a clear borrowing from the book of Revelation, Spenser makes of the tempting serpent in Eden a great, devouring dragon that has imprisoned and enslaved the people of God.\(^ {27}\) It is this dragon that the champion of the bloody cross has come to confront. And confront him, he does in a magnificent three-day battle. At the end of the first day, our hero falls, but falls into the well of life, and in this baptism is renewed. The end of the second day, too, sees him defeated and cast at the foot of the tree of life. But the sacramental sap of this tree once again restored the hero to life, and on the third day, he rose and slew the dragon with a massive, God-empowered stroke to the beast’s head. And all the saints rejoiced.

That this scene, thus, is laden with biblical and Christian imagery is clear. What needs most to be noticed is that the scene depends in largest part upon the book of Revelation—the last book in the Christian Bible. Already, our claims for a biblical structuring for *The Faerie Queene* appear to be in jeopardy. The Legend of Holiness, the very first book of the poem, opened with the beginning not of one Testament, but of both—and now, its final episode imitates the end not only of the canon, but of


\(^ {27}\) See Revelation 12:9, 20:2.
the Christian vision of history itself. And it is true. The final canto of the first book, after the fight with
the dragon is ended, is given to the betrothel of George and Una, and to their wedding feast, just as the
end of the Bible sees the victorious Christ united with the New Jerusalem, the Christian Church that
is his Bride (Rev 21). But there is a difference. The closing vision of Revelation is final and unqualified.
Death, Sin and the Devil have been cast into the fiery pit. Christ and his Bride are united forever under
the rulership of a present God. But not so the Red Crosse Knight and his lady love. They are betrothed,
but not united, for, George must leave again to serve six more years in the service of Gloriana, the faerie
queene. Moreover, Archimago, the wicked sorcerer, unlike the devil, has not been finally defeated, but
even interrupts the wedding feast itself with his schemes.

In the preface, we saw that many scholars have seen the influence of the Bible largely restricted
to the first book of the poem. The fact that this book opens with the beginning of the canon and closes
with the end could be seen as support of this. But I suggest that the provisional nature of the ending, the
enduring presence of evil and the transitory union of Holiness with Truth, leaves open the possibility
of an ongoing engagement with the biblical tradition. And as the reader turns to the beginning of the
second book, he finds just that.

The second portion of *The Faerie Queene* is “The Legend of Sir Guyon or of Temperaunce.” It is
commonly agreed that the dominant tradition within this book, that which provides its starting point
in ways similar to the role of the Bible in Book I, is the Aristotelian ethical tradition. That this tradition
is, indeed, of central importance to the book could not be made more clear. In the second canto, the title
hero, Guyon, finds himself in an allegorical imagining of the golden mean. He comes to a Castle “of
antique fame.”
Therein three sisters dwelt of sundry sort,
  The children of one syre by mothers three;
  Who dying whylome did diuide this fort
  To them by equall shares in equall fee:
  But stryfull mind, and diuerse qualitee
  Drew them in partes, and each made others foe:
  Still did they striue, and daily disagree;
  The eldest did against the youngest goe,
And both against the middest meant to worken woe. \((FQ\) II.ii.13)

If we needed more to tip us to the allegorical significance, the name of the middle sister, Medina, no
doubt, does the trick. This is the “middle way” of Aristotle’s Nichomachean ethics.

But this does not appear until the second canto. Unlike the canonical alterations of Book I,
Canto i, the Aristotelian ethic does not provide the opening lens of this book. But if it doesn’t, what
does? Turning to the first canto, we find a brief transitional interlude in which Guyon is introduced and
temporarily tormented by Archimago, and then his quest begins. And it is here, at the beginning of his
quest, that we find what is, I suggest, the actual dominant discourse of the book—the life of Moses and
the biblical Law.

This discourse is signalled initially in two ways. First, it is signalled in the figure of the Palmer.
From the outset, our hero is accompanied by a guide described as:

  A comely Palmer, clad in black attyre,
  Of rypest yeares, and heares all hoarie gray,
  That with a staffe his feeble steps did stire,
  Least his long way his aged limbes should tire:
  And if by lookes one may the mind aread,
  He seemd to be a sage and sober syre \((FQ\) I.i.7.2–7)

The staff already perhaps would suggest the figure of Moses to a reader looking for biblical imagery, but
this is not the extent of the connection. For, the staff is specifically the staff of a palmer—that is, of a
pilgrim who has walked the Exodus route from Sinai through the desert to the banks of the Jordan, and
then across to Jericho and, finally, on to the city of Jerusalem itself.
As John Demaray puts it: “The regenerated pilgrim—having by tradition converted his soul from sin to grace on the Sinai Exodus pathway, and then having entered the Holy Land by crossing the River Jordan—has ‘taken the palm’ near Jericho, thus becoming a Palmer, and is at last spiritually ready for entrance into Jerusalem.”

This journey of the soul is, of course, based on very old readings of the Exodus narrative. But it should be noticed that the journey of the Palmer does not end there. We do not find Guyon’s Palmer still in Jerusalem, but gone out from there into the world, in this case, into Faerie Land. With this last stage of the journey, the Palmer has retraced the steps not only of the people of Israel, or their guide, Moses, but of the Mosaic law as viewed in a canonical perspective.

In the books of Exodus and Leviticus, we see the Law given at Sinai and placed in the Ark of the Covenant. In Numbers, we see it go through the desert to the eastern banks of the Jordan, and in Joshua, we see it cross over and make its famous trips around the walls of Jericho. In Samuel, we see it finally brought into Jerusalem, and in 1 Kings, into the Temple itself. But like the pilgrimage of the Palmer, the Law’s journey does not end there. In Isaiah 2:2–4, we read:

> It shalbe in the last daies, that the moũtaine of the houſe of the Lord ſhalbe prepared in the top of the moũtaines, & ſhal be exalted aboue the hilles, & all nacions ſhal flowe vnto it. 3 And manie people ſhal go, & ſay, Come, and let vs go vp to the mountaine of the Lord, to the houſe of the God of Iaakób, & he will teache vs his waies, and we will walke in his paths: for the Law ſhal go forthe of Zíon, and the worde of the Lord from Ieruſalém, 4 And he ſhal iudge among the natiõs, & rebuke manie people: thei ſhal breake their ſwordes alſo into mattockes, & their ſpeares into fithes: nacion ſhal not lift vp a ſworde against nacion, nether ſhal they learne to fight anie more.

Here, we find not only the fate of the Mosaic Law, but also a prediction of the palmer’s own pilgrimage. The people of the nations have come to Jerusalem, but more than that, the Law of the Lord has gone out from there as well. Seen in this canonical perspective, a Palmer as a figure of the Law is a natural fit.


But what, in that same canonical perspective, would we expect the function of such a figure to be? The answer to this, we find in the New Testament passage, Galatians 3:24: “Wherefore the Law was our šcholemaſter to bring vs to Chriſt, that we might be made righteous by faith.”

The Law, then, serves as a “šcholemaſter” who serves as a guide to Christ. It is perhaps worth noting that Paul’s own description of the Law is evocative of the figure of Moses, who leads the people of Israel into the presence of God and the Promised Land. Such is, I suggest, the significance of Guyon’s aged guide. What I am not suggesting, however, is that the reader must necessarily depend merely upon the scant evidence for this significance in *The Faerie Queene* so far suggested. Of course, this significance would not have seemed far-fetched to early modern canonical readers familiar with the pilgrimage tradition. And it is possible that the bare description of a Palmer carrying a staff, acting as a guide, and instructing our hero as he often does would have been enough. But there is, naturally, more evidence to be had that can lead us to this identification.

Turning to the end of Book II, we find Guyon and the Palmer nearing the end of their quest. They are off in search of the Bower of Bliss to rescue a captive knight from the clutches of a wicked sorceress, Acrasia. And it is on this journey that we find the identity of the Palmer most clearly revealed.

In a boat on the open sea, our hero and his guide see the waves around them explode suddenly with “thousand thousands many more/ and more deformed monsters thousand fold” (*FQ* II.xii.25.1–2). Faced with this horrifying sight, the Palmer declaims before anyone even has time to fear:

Feare nought, then saide the Palmer well auiz’d,
For these same Monsters are not these in deed,
But are into these fearefull shapes disguiz’d
By that same wicked witch, to worke vs dreed,
And draw from on this iourney to proceed.
Tho lifting vp his vertuous staffe on hye,
He smote the sea, which calmed was with speed,
And all that dreadfull Armie fast gan flye
Into great Tethys bosome, where they hidden lye. (FQ II.xii.26)

Biblical resonances abound in this passage, all tied to the figure of Moses and, I suggest, to the Mosaic Law. The association with Moses is clear enough—in a biblical culture, no one lifts a staff and smites the sea without being seen as, in some way, connected with Moses at the Red Sea. If he does it at the sight of an on-coming enemy and accompanies it with the cry “Feare not,” the connection becomes absolutely inescapable.30

The Palmer, then, is to be connected with Moses. That he is not merely Moses, but, in some way, also the Mosaic Law is to be seen, I suggest, in his ability to discern. We have already seen in chapter II that the Law of the Lord is connected with Light. In Psalm 19, it is likened to the sun. In Psalm 119, it is a lamp that lights the singer’s path. It is that which provides guidance to the believer, which allows them to see (Ps 119:105). So, also, in this passage and myriad others, it is the Palmer’s special gift to be able to see the true nature of things. Here, he sees through the illusions of Acrasia, that “same wicked witch.” Elsewhere, he sees first the identity of the Red Crosse Knight, the true nature of cursed wells and magic spears and other things besides. But in all these cases, it is his ability to see and to instruct others that, I suggest, marks him out not merely as Moses, but the Mosaic Law.

There is another piece to this puzzle, though—for, the journey over the sea seen here is not the end of Guyon’s quest. There is yet the Bower of Bliss. Guyon’s reaction to the Bower has proven a point of discomfort, if not contention for scholars.31 Confronted with the witch’s beautiful garden under the

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30. Cf. Exodus 14:13, “Then Moſes said to the people, Feare ye not, ſtand ſtil, and beholde the faluacion of the Lord which he wil fewe to you this day. For the Egyptians, whome ye haue ſene this day, ye ſhal neuer ſe them againe.” Of course, there is another, New Testament incident which is also in the background here—Jesus’ calming of the storm on the sea of Galilee. Fittingly, that story, too, is followed by entry into an unclean land (the region of the Gerasenes), where the hero sets a captive free—in this case, from the clutches of the legion of demons. See n33 below.

Palmer’s watchful, approving eye, Guyon launches into an unrestrained, even savage destruction of that beautiful place, smashing and breaking everything in sight until, at last, he has captured the witch, set her captives free, and lain waste her home. To the reader of the Bible, this situation will sound rather familiar. For, in the Bible, indeed, in the biblical journey of the Law just described, there is a similarly savage and contentious incident to be found—the conquest of the Holy Land.

It will be recalled that the Israelites, after their long sojourn in the wilderness, make their way through the desert, over the Jordan and into the land of Canaan. This land has been described as both beautiful and dangerous. It is the land flowing with milk and honey, but, at the same time, it is a land of temptation. There, the people of God are warned, they will find foreign peoples—and especially foreign women—who will seek to lead them astray, diverting them from the worship of God alone into the depths of idolatry. So, we read in Deuteronomy:

16Thou shalt therefore consume all people which the Lord thy God shall give thee: thine eie shalt not spare them, nether shalt thou serve their gods, for that shall be thy destruction.... 20Moreover, the Lord thy God will send hornettes among them vntil they that are left, and hide them selues from thee, be destroied. 21Thou shalt not feare them: for the Lord thy God is among you, a God mighty & dreadful. 22And the Lord thy God wil roote out these nacions before thee by litle and litle: thou maift not consume them at once, left the beastes of the field increas vp vp thee. 23But the Lord thy God shall give them before thee, and shal destroy them with a mighty deſtruction, vntil they be broght to noght. 24And he shall deliuer their Kĩgs into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from vnder heauen: there shal no man be able to ſtand before thee, vntil thou haſt deſtroied them. (Deut 7:16, 20–24)

The savagery of this response has bothered readers for millenia, bothered them so much that some, like the second-century heretic, Marcion, have seen in it (and a few other passages) grounds for rejection of the Old Testament as part of the Christian canon. As the Spenserians could not accept the destruction of the Bower, so the biblicists have long recoiled from the conquest of the Holy Land. The moral value of these responses, especially the latter, cannot detain us here. Our point is simply that the
two incidents do bear striking resemblance to one another both in content and, in some ways, in theme. For, just as the Holy Land was a place of beauty and of danger, plenty and temptation, so, too, the Bower of Bliss. The witch Acrasia sought to ensorcell passing knights, playing upon their basic urges to lure them into lust, and ultimately to reduce them only to brutes driven by instinct, this moral change being solidified with physical transformation into beasts (*FQ* II.xii.81–86).32

Thus, in rejecting these temptations and destroying the Bower, Guyon reenacts the conquest of the Promised Land and the destruction of its idolatrous occupants. Of course, there is a difference. For the people of Israel, the destruction was only the first phase of occupation. They were not destroying the land itself, but its inhabitants and their way of life. Guyon, on the other hand, has no intention of staying on the island of the Bower. His goal is, rather, after plenty of adventures and glory seeking, to return to the court of the faerie queen, Gloriana.33 And perhaps in this, there is a clue. For, already in Book I.x.53–59, that court has been compared with the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, the name of the queen suggests as much. For, just as the Temple had at its heart the Holy of Holies filled with the glory of God (1 Kgs

32. Of course, the figure of Homer’s Circe is lurking in the background here, but at the same time, there is something of the biblical tradition, too. First, we are reminded again of Jesus in the region of the Gerasenes when he sent Legion into a herd of pigs (Mark 5:11–13). But beyond that, and more pertinent to our present argument, there is perhaps a resonance of ancient Christian allegorizations of the biblical food laws. See, for example, the Epistle of Barnabas:

1 Now, in that Moses said, “Ye shall not eat swine, nor an eagle, nor a hawk, nor a crow, nor any fish which has no scales on itself,” he included three doctrines in his understanding. 2 Moreover he says to them in Deuteronomy, “And I will make a covenant of my ordinances with this people.” So then the ordinance of God is not abstinence from eating, but Moses spoke in the spirit. 3 He mentioned the swine for this reason: you shall not consort, he means, with men who are like swine, that is to say, when they have plenty they forget the Lord, but when they are in want they recognise the Lord, just as the swine when it eats does not know its master, but when it is hungry it cries out, and after receiving food is again silent. (10:1–3, Lightfoot)

What the Christian allegorist has done here is equate the swine of the food laws, for instance, not with literal swine, but with the inhabitants of the holy land, making it an image of a particular moral failing. This understanding of swine, and of beasts in general, as symbols of moral degeneracy finds analogy, too, in the Classical ethical tradition and, specifically, in the allegorizations of Homer’s *Odyssey*. So, for example, Boccaccio in his *De Mulieribus Claris* XXXVIII similarly allegorizes Circe’s transmutation of her victims by means of magical feats into sensual enticements. Thus, again, we can see Spenser entwining the analogous stories of the Classical and biblical tradition—in this instance, the allegorized reading of the food laws (and by extension, of the conquest) and the allegorical understanding of the witch, Circe.

8:11), so at the heart of the faerie court stands the faerie queen, Gloriana.\(^{34}\) In this sense, then, perhaps we can see the Bower of Bliss as only one stop on the journey of the Law into Jerusalem, that stop where, in fact, the pilgrim becomes a Palmer, taking the staff and making his way toward the holy city. Given that it is at this point that Guyon earns his status as the Knight of Temperance, patron of that virtue in which the Palmer has sought to instruct him, this seems not an entirely unlikely possibility.

Two things need be addressed briefly before we turn from Temperance to Chastity. First, there is the matter of the beginning of the book. What has it, aside from the Palmer, to do with Moses or the Law? The opening incident of Guyon’s quest is perhaps one of the most mysterious in the whole poem, and as such, even cursory treatment of it is precluded here. But what we can say is that it includes an orphaned child adopted in due course by the lady Medina. And this much, perhaps, is meant to remind us of baby Moses abandoned in the Nile, only to be adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. In this connection, it is perhaps also worth pointing out that the result of that adoption was, in part, education. In Acts 7:22, we are told, “Moſes was learned in all the wisdome of the Egyptians, and was mightie in wordes and in dedes.” Likewise, little Ruddymane, we read, Guyon entrusted to Medina—that figure for Aristotle’s golden mean—that she might, “In vertuous lore to traine his tender youth, / And all that gentle noriture ensueth” (\(FQ\) II.iii.2.4–5).

Note that not only are these two babes educated, but they are educated under the auspices of foreign cultures—Moses trained in the arts of Egypt, Ruddymane in the art of Classical ethics. And in both cases, too, the adoption comes with a separation from the Israelite tradition—in Moses’ case, seen

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34. Cf. *The Faerie Queene* II.proem.4–5; “Of faery lond yet if he more inquyre / By certein signes here sett in sondrie place / He may it fynd; ne let him then admyre / But yield his sence to bee too blunt and bace / That no’te without an hound fine footing trace. / And thou, O fayrest Princesse vnder sky, / In this fayre mirrhour maist behold thy face / And thine owne realmes in lond of Faery, / And in this antique ymage thy great auncestry. / The which O pardon me thus to enfold / In couert vele and wrap in shadowes light, / That feeble eyes your glory may behold / Which ells could not endure those beames bright / But would bee dazled with exceeding light. / O pardon and vouchsafe with patient care / The braue adventures of this faery knight / The good Sir Guyon gratelyus to heare / In whom great rule of Tem’raunce goodly doth appeare.”
in separation from his actual Israelite parentage, in Ruddymane’s, in his separation from Guyon and his Palmer. And if in these small but suggestive parallels we are intended to see reminders of the beginnings of Moses’ life, then we have seen at the beginning of Book II the action of the poem move from that dominated by Genesis—as seen through the Gospels and Revelation—in Book I, to the beginning of the book of Exodus in Book II. Moreover, in the end of Book II, we have seen typological recreations of both the crossing of the Red Sea—and the Sea of Galilee, and, no doubt, of the River Jordan, too—and of the conquest of the Promised Land. Which is to say, as Book I moved from the beginnings of the two testaments to their shared end, Book II moves from the beginning of the life of Moses to the end of his career, and beyond, to the conquest of the Promised Land. This begins, I think, to suggest some canonical shaping is, indeed, at work.

The second thing that needs be addressed is that, once again, the biblical tradition is not the only one active in this book. There is also, of course, the Aristotelian ethical tradition already mentioned. It is perhaps worth noting that this ethical tradition was often viewed by Christians as the result of reflection upon the natural law. That is, the notion that God’s ethical requirements were not only built into nature, but discernible from it as well. Moreover, some theologians, Calvin among them, associated the natural law with the biblical concept of wisdom.35 We have seen already, in chapter II, that the Law of God came to be associated with the concept of Wisdom in the biblical tradition. And by putting the Palmer, a figure for that Law, at the beginning of this book about Classical ethics, Spenser seems to mean for us to identify the Law of God—that “ſcholemaſter” and guide—with the natural law and so, too, with the truth to be found in that Classical ethical tradition. If this is correct, then we have here what appears to

be an attempt not only to reconcile, but to subsume this part of the Classical tradition within the biblical one.\textsuperscript{36}

With that, our discussion returns to familiar ground—the opening canto of the Legend of Chastity. As we have already treated much of this material at length, we need not repeat ourselves here. Rather, we need only remind the reader that it is in this canto that Britomart is found reenacting a scene from the book of Ruth, a book set “in the time that the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). That is to say, the typological connections to the Bible pick up in Book III where they left off in Book II. For, with the conquest of the land complete, the book of Joshua soon gives way to the period of the Judges as recounted not only in Ruth, but in the book of Judges.

In addition to the typological connection with Ruth, the association of Book III with the period of the Judges can be seen in two other ways. First, there is the matter of apparently contradictory accounts. The Legend of Chastity begins:

\begin{quote}
The famous Briton Prince and Faery knight,
  After long wayes and perilous paines endur’d,
  Hauing their weary limbes to perfect plight
  Restord, and sory wounds right well recur’d,
  Of the faire Alma greatly were procur’d,
  To make there lenger soiourne and abode;
  But when thereto they might not be allur’d,
  From seeking praise, and deeds of armes abrode,
  They courteous conge tooke, and forth together yode. (FQ III.i.1)
\end{quote}

But in \textit{The Faerie Queene} II.xi.5, we were told that Guyon and the Briton prince had parted ways, Guyon having gone off to seek the Bower of Bliss while Arthur stayed behind. The sudden and unqualified notice of their reunion in the house of Alma has bothered some scholars, and some have even seen in it evidence of poor editing on Spenser’s part. It is interesting to note that several similar instances of apparent

\textsuperscript{36} I will return to this point at length in chapter V.
contradiction are to be found in the opening chapter of Judges. For example, Judges 1:8 reads: “now the children of Iudáh had fought against Ierusalém, and had takē it & ſmitten it with the edge of the ſword, and had ſet the citie on fire.” But soon after, in 1:21, we find a problem: “but the children of Beniamín did not caſt out the Ieſuſiſtes, that inhabited Ierusalém: therefore the Ieſuſiſtes dwel with the children of Beniamín in Ierusalém vnſto this day.” But if the Judahites had already destroyed Jerusalem, the attentive reader will ask, how, then, can the Jebusites have dwelt there—much less, the Benjamites have failed to remove them? Modern Bible scholars have seen in this evidence of multiple, contradictory traditions being combined into a single document, but such an interpretation was not an option in Spenser’s day. The Bible was a unity ensured by God, and so, any contradictions to be found there were only apparent and in need of explanation. One such explanation was provided by the glossators of the Geneva Bible. At verse twenty-one, we are told, “for after the tribe of Iudáh had burnt it [i.e. Jerusalem], they built it againe.” Thus, the problem is resolved by providing information that has been omitted from the narrative.

At the outset of the Legend of Chastity, Spenser sets his readers a similar challenge, which has been met in similar ways. Modern scholars, as already noted, have seen this opening as a product of poor editing, or, if you will, of two “traditions” of the event that have been carelessly combined. But they have also, since Upton in 1758, seen it not as a contradiction, but as a case of omitted information. Citing Upton, the standard scholarly edition of the poem today notes at this point: “Guyon, having captured Acrasia, returned to the castle of Alma where Arthur was recuperating after having slain Maleger.” I cannot help wondering if Spenser has not set us this little interpretive riddle intentionally, in the interest of mirroring the same sort of feature in the biblical book of Judges.

37 Hamilton 2001, 289.
Another feature that distinguishes the third book of *The Faerie Queene* is its structure. Unlike Books I and II, which have been devoted, in the main, to the actions of a single knight on a single quest, Book III is a more scattered affair that weaves together with the story of Britomart, stories of Prince Arthur, of his squire Timias, of the fair Florimell, and others besides. The primary and long-accepted explanation for this fracturing of the poem’s plot comes from Spenser himself. Among the models he lists for his poem in the “Letter to Raleigh” is the Italian epic poet, Ludovico Ariosto. Now, the Italian poets and literary theorists of the Renaissance were engaged in an ongoing debate as to the characteristics of the epic form. Some, under the influence of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, maintained that the epic must possess a unified plot, while others qualified this requirement or rejected it outright.\(^3\) Ariosto’s poem was embraced by those at the latter end of that particular spectrum. His *Orlando Furioso* is given to myriad plots and subplots, digressions abound, and the work as a whole, though enormously fun, is anything but unified.

In Book III and the closely related Book IV, we find Spenser clearly imitating, indeed, attempting to “overgo” his Italian model in this way. But as with Britomart’s lion, perhaps there is a double-significance to this structural feature. After all, why should this transition have taken place at just this point? It need not have come here, I suppose. The influence of the Italian tradition began in the very first canto of *The Faerie Queene* with the appearance of that wizened old man in the woods. Why not have fractured the narrative then and there in imitation of his Italian source? A possible solution to this problem can be found in the canonical structure of the poem that we have been attempting to trace.

Up to this point, the overarching narrative of the Old Testament has followed a single storyline. With the small exceptions of the digressions to Lot and the division of the story into two strands in

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the Joseph story, the narrative has moved forward in steady, relatively unified chunks devoted in long stretches to a stable set of characters. With the birth of Moses, this stability becomes extremely reliable as the story follows the life of Moses in increasing detail. And with the passing of Moses, Joshua takes up this unifying position at the head of the people of Israel. But with the death of Joshua and the beginning of the period of the Judges, all that changes, and the storyline fractures. Not only is there not a single storyline, there is not a single hero—no Joshua or Moses or Samuel to bind this long stretch of narrative together—nor is there always a chronological continuity. (Note that the closing chapters, 17–21, occur in the third generation after the Exodus.39) In addition, the story of the period is not even contained within a single book, but is divided between Judges, Ruth, and the opening chapters of 1 Samuel. It seems fitting, then, that the attempt to overgo Ariosto should begin at this particular point in the poem, for, it is at this point that the biblical narrative, too, fractures and becomes a patchwork of interconnected, but disparate stories.

Ordinarily, the next step in our discussion would be to turn to the end of the book to see what evidences were to be found for our thesis. But this, we will not do for two reasons. First, the concluding incident of Book III will be the subject of chapter VI. Second, we should not necessarily expect to find the end of the period of the Judges marked out by the end of the third book of The Faerie Queene. The reason for this, too, is twofold. First, the period of the Judges itself does not end with the book of Judges, but continues on in Ruth and 1 Samuel. And second, a strong scholarly consensus sees Books III and IV of the poem as intimately connected halves of a single whole.40


Given that, perhaps we need not be surprised to find little that is new in Book IV, the Legend of Friendship, in the way of biblical imagery. The themes and texts active there, those of the Strange Woman, of idolatry and loyalty that we have seen already in Book III remain. To them, though, is added the notion of Friendship. Now, in the biblical canon, there really is only one place, one story to which one goes when discussing this topic, and that is to the story of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel. In the canonical ordering we have been discussing, this is almost exactly the right place to be. I say almost, because the story of Jonathan and David occurs after the end of the period of the Judges, during the monarchy of Israel’s first king. Now, this may be a distinction without much of a difference. The ordering is correct. The book devoted to Ruth and the period of the Judges is followed by a book devoted to a topic found prominently in 1 Samuel. The trouble, if there is any, is that the story of kingship in the Bible is the subject of the next book in The Faerie Queene, the Legend of Justice.

However, this, too, is really no trouble. First, if the topic of kingship is deferred on this basis, we can hardly quibble too much as the basic continuum of the canonical texts has been maintained. Further, as we will see below, the kingship in view in Book V is not just any kingship, but the kingship of the messianic line of David as figured in the person of Artegall. In light of this, perhaps it is, in fact, in keeping with the canonical plan to have this book, which draws upon the days of Saul’s reign, so tightly bound up with the period of the Judges, and preceding that which takes its cue from the Davidic monarchy. In this light, it is perhaps fitting that Artegall, the figure of David’s line, actually makes his first appearance, here, in Book IV, though his status as the Knight of Justice is not revealed until the following book.41

41. He first makes his appearance on the poem’s stage in The Faerie Queene IV.iv.39–44. Of course, he makes a cameo before this in Britomart’s father’s magic mirror (III.xi.17–25). Cf. the proleptic mention of David in the concluding genealogy of Ruth 4.
Given that, let us turn now to the beginning of that book, the Legend of Justice. Here, the figure of Artegall appears, positively dripping with imagery associated with the kingly line of David, and ultimately with Christ himself as the pinnacle of that line. In demonstration of this, let us take what is perhaps the least obvious, though perhaps most telling example. Near the beginning of his Legend, we are told the story of Artegall’s upbringing:

For Artegall in justice was vpbrught
   Euen from the cradle of his infancie,
   And all the depth of rightfull doome was taught
   By faire Astrea, with great industrie,
   Whilst here on earth she liued mortallie.
   For till the world from his perfection fell
   Into all filth and foule iniquitie,
   Astrea here mongst earthly men did dwell,
   And in the rules of justice them instructed well. (FQ V.i.5)

Astrea is, of course, a Greek goddess of justice who, seeing the world unjust, retreated to the heavens, leaving humanity to its fate. Her return, though, is “foretold” in Virgil’s fourth eclogue, in the lines:

   The new order of centuries is born;
   The Virgin now returns, and the reign of Saturn;
   The new generation now comes down from heaven.42

This line, in Christian tradition, came to be read as a prediction of the virgin-birth of Christ, the Virgin here named, of course, being identified as Mary.43 Thus, Spenser’s character being raised by Astrea links him not only with the Classical tradition’s discourse regarding justice and kingship, but with the biblical tradition as well. That such a reference to Christ by way of Classical tradition should suggest to the canonical reader not only Christ, but the entire Davidic line should not surprise us at this point. And even if the reader is tempted to doubt it, he need not look far for further indications that it is the Davidic line that is in view. Our demonstration of that claim will have to be found in the final stanzas of the book,

but the reader determined to see evidence more proximate to the beginning of this section is invited to examine the Solomonic judgement of Arthegall in *The Faerie Queene* V.i.26 as one small example.

Turning, then, to the end of the book, we find our triumphant hero, Arthegall, beset in his hour of victory by two “ill fauour’d Hags” named Enuie and Detraction. As the Knight of Justice goes upon his way, we read:

> And *Envie* first, as she that first him eyde,  
> Towards him runs, and with rude flaring lockes  
> About her eares, does beat her brest, and forhead knockes

Then from her mouth the gobbet she does take,  
> The which whyleare she was so greedily  
> Deuouring, euen that halfe-gnawen snake,  
> And at him throwes it most despightfully.  
> The cursed Serpent, though she hungrily  
> Earst chawd thereon, yet was not all so dead,  
> But that some life remayned secretly,  
> And as he past afore withouten dread,  
> Bit him behind, that long the marke was to be read.

Then th’other comming neare, gan him reuile,  
> And fouly rayle, with all she could inuent;  
> Saying, that he had with vnmanly guile,  
> And fould abusion both his sword of Iustice lent,  
> Had stayned with reprochfull crueltie,  
> In guiltless blood of many an innocent:  
> As for *Grandtorto*, him with treacherie

And traynes havuing surpriz’d, he fouly did to die. *(FQ V.xii.38.7–40.9)*

Notice, first, that the half-eaten snake which bites our hero “behind” as he walks by is a clear allusion to Genesis 3:15, where God says to the serpent, “I wil alſo put enimitie betwene thee and womã, & betwene thy fede & her fede. He ſhal breake thine head, & thou ſhalt bruife his heele.” This verse, from very early on, was read as a prediction of the coming of Christ. The Geneva Bible goes so far as to put this notion into the argument of the chapter: “15 Chrift is promifed.” Thus, the snake that Enuie hurls at our hero to assault him, at the same time, marks him out, in light of the biblical resonance, as a type of Christ.
Meanwhile, the other Hag’s verbal assault suggests another biblical incident. In 2 Samuel 16, we find David similarly accosted as he marches along the road. Importantly, it is a road into exile from Jerusalem that he is walking as he flees before the coming of his rebellious son, Absalom. We will return to this shortly. But for the moment, let us look at the biblical passage itself:

5And when Kind Dauid came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the familie of the house of Saúl, named Shimeí the fonne of Gerá: and he came out, and curſed. 6And he caft ftones at Dauid, and at all the seruants of King Dauid: and all the people, and all the men of warre were on his right hand, and on his left. 7And thus faid Shimeí when he curfed, Come forthe, come forthe thou murtherer, and wicked man. 8The Lord hathe broght ypon thee all the blood of the houſe of Saúl, in whose ftead thou haft reigned: and the Lord hathe deliuered the kingdome into the hand of Abſalóm thy fonne: and beholde, thou art taken in thy wickednes, becaufe thou art a murtherer. 9Then faid Abiſhái the fonne of Zeruiáh vnto the King, Why doeth this dead dogge curſe my lord the King let me go, I pray thee, and take away his head. 10But the King faid, What haue I to do with you, ye fonnes of Zeruiáh: for he curſeth, euen becauf[e] the Lord hathe bidden him curſe Dauid: who darre then ſay, Wherefore haſt thou done ſo? 11And Dauid ſaid to Abiſhái, & to all his fereum: Beholde, my fonne w came out of mine owne bowels, faketh my life: then how muche more now may this ſonne of Ieminí? Suffre him to curſe: for the Lord hath bidden him. 12It may be that the Lord wil loke on mine affliction, and do me good for his curſing this day. 13And as Dauid and his men went by the way, Shimei went by the moutaine ouer againſt him, and curſed, and threwe ftones againſt him, and caſt duft.

Notice that the accusations here have a similar ring to them as those hurled at ArtegaIl. Like the Knight of Justice, David is blamed for his past actions—specifically the death of his predecessor, King Saul and his household—as ArtegaIl is blamed for the death of Grandtorto. Note, too, that neither David, nor ArtegaIl responds to these accusations. David restrains his servant from silencing his accuser and carries on, ignoring insults and stones alike. Similarly, we read that ArtegaIl restrained his companion, Talus, who “hearing her so lewdly raile, / And speake so ill of him, that well deserued, / Would her haue chastiz’d with his yron flaile, / If her Sir ArtegaIl had not preserued, / And him forbidden, who his heast obserued (FQ V.xii.43.1–5).” Thus, the scene at the close of the Legend of Justice weaves together two biblical passages associated with the messianic line of David and applies them both to ArtegaIl.

Now, the reader may be tempted to protest here that David’s retreat from Jerusalem is not the
end of his career in the Bible. And this is true. In order to understand why Spenser chooses to end the
Book of Justice at this point, we must look to next book of the poem—the Legend of Courtesy. As we
do so, though, the nature of the case only becomes more strange. Here, following now Callidore, the
Knight of Courtesy, we are confronted with another incident from the story of David, but not, oddly,
one from his later career. Rather, we are suddenly thrown back to the beginning, to his famous confron-
tation with Goliath.

This, we find in the second canto of the book, in the story of young Tristram. Callidore, riding
over the plains, sees an armed and mounted knight doing battle with an unarmored youth. Appalled
at the sight, he rides quickly toward them to put a stop to the fight, but before he can reach them, and
much to Callidore’s surprise, the youth slays the mounted knight with a spear. This surprising young
man is then described:

A goodly youth of amiable grace,
Yet but a slender slip, that scarce did see
Yet seenteene yeares, but tall and faire of face
That sure he deem’d him borne of noble race.
All in a woodmans iacket he was clad
Of Lincolne greene, belayd with siluer lace;
And on his head an hood with aglets sprad,
And by his side his hunters horne he hanging had.

Buskins he wore of costliest cordwayne,
Pinckt vpon gold, and paled part per part,
As then the guize was for each gentle swayne;
In his right hand he held a trembling dart,
Whose fellow he before had sent apart;
And in his left he held a sharpe borespeare,
With which he wont to launch the saluage hart
Of many a Lyon, and of many a Beare
That first vnto his hand in chase did happen neare. (FQ VI.ii.5.2–6.9)

Several features of this description are meant, I suggest, to remind us of young David. Notice, first, the
description of him as a boy of only seventeen years. In the Bible, it is unclear just how old David was
when he faced Goliath, but what is clear is that he was not a fully grown man. Further, notice that, like Tristram, David is described as “yong, ruddy & of a comely face” (1 Sam 17:42). Beyond these shared features, there are all the similarities between the battles. Like Tristram, David goes into battle without armor. Each faces an opponent who seems to have him overmatched, one a seasoned veteran some nine feet in height, the other an armored knight on horseback. Further, both young men are described as having slain lions and bears (cf. 1 Sam 17:36).

In light of all of these similarities, perhaps we can take the connection as established. But we are still left to wonder at what it is doing here, as the first biblical passage to mark the transition from the incident with Shimei and the subject of kingship, in the Book of Courtesy. This will perhaps become more clear, though, if we recall a few details that have yet gone unmentioned.

First, let us mention that while Spenser calls Book VI the Book of Courtesy, it is almost as often referred to among scholars of the poem as the book of pastoral, for, this strand of the poetic tradition makes its presence strongly felt in this section of The Faerie Queene. It should, likewise, be remembered that pastoral was from its very beginnings associated with the theme of exile. So, we read at the beginning of Virgil’s Eclogues:

Tityrus, there you lie in the beech-tree shade,
Brooding over your music for the Muse,
While we must leave our native place, our homes,
The fields we love, and go elsewhere; meanwhile,
You teach the woods to echo ‘Amaryllis.’

We might, then, characterize the transition between Books V and VI not merely as the transition from justice to courtesy, but also as one from kingship to pastoral, and at the same time, to exile.

44. See, for example, Lewis, Allegory of Love, 350, who puts the pastoral vision of canto x “at the core of the book.”
45. Virgil, Eclogues, 3.
Secondly, we should recall that David, before he was a king, was both a shepherd and a poet. That he was a shepherd has already been alluded to. The lions and bears he killed were done so in defense of his father’s flocks, after all. That he was a poet is seen most prominently in the book of Psalms, where nearly half of that collection of poems is attributed to him. Thus, it was only natural for those Christians familiar with the Classical tradition of pastoral poetry to see in David not only a poet, but a pastoral poet. And in fact, by Spenser’s day, David, as a singer of divinely inspired songs, had come to be regarded as the pinnacle example of such poetry.\footnote{46. Lewalski, \textit{Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 7–9; Hannibal Hamlin, \textit{Psalms Culture and Early Modern English Literature} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147.}

The incident with Shimei already begins to look like rather a decent transition from the book of kingship to the book of exile. There is, then, only one more piece of the puzzle to notice. The superscription of the third biblical Psalm, which is the first directly attributed to David, reads as follows: “A Psalme of Dauid, when he fled from his fonde Abéalom.” That is to say, the very first Davidic Psalm in the canonical ordering—the very first example of Davidic pastoral poetry in the Bible—was occasioned by that very walk into exile which ArtegaIl imitated at the close of Book V. The choice, then, to transition the biblical typological structuring in this way between the books of kingship and pastoral is not troublesome at all, but, in fact, reflects a subtle response to the shape of the canon, and the themes associated with and instantiated in the figure of David, the sweet singer of Israel.

However, this does still leave open the question, what of all those other kings in the biblical narrative? We alluded briefly to the reign of Solomon, but what of all the others that occupy the pages of both books of Kings? Where are they to be found in the poem’s apparent effort to track with the storyline of Scripture? We can only speculate. It seems to me that either Spenser was not done with the line of kings and meant to return to it in later books, in which case, the book of pastoral and exile was only
a well-timed digression into that other facet of the davidic tradition. Or else, Artegałl really was meant as an amalgam of all the Davidic line, from David all the way down to Zeđekiah. In which case, the invocation of the episode with Shimie provided merely a convenient transition from kingship to the next phase of the Old Testament story, exile, and the accompanying theme of pastoral poetry that it suggests.

Unfortunately, *The Faerie Queene* was left unfinished, and so, we will never really know which of these two options, if either, was really Spenser’s intention. However, if we turn to the end of Book VI, we may perhaps find a clue to point us in the right direction.

By the time the reader reaches the final canto of this book, he has recently seen a story of exile, imprisonment and return play out in the story of Pastorella, Calidore’s lady love, and her community. Having rescued her from bondage and restored her to her long-lost parents in her native land, Callidore leaves his love behind to take up again the quest to quell the Blatant Beast. Having ransacked monasteries and cloisters, the monster proceeds to the final stronghold of Christian devotion.

From thence into the sacred Church he broke,
And rob’d the Chancell, and the deskes downe threw,
And Altars fouled, and blasphemy spoke,
And th’Images for all their goodly hew,
Did cast to ground, whilst none was them to rew;
So all confounded and disordered there.
But seeing Calidore, away he flew,
Knowing his fatall hand by former feare;
But he him fast pursuing, soone approched neare. (*FQ* VI.xii.25)

Here, perhaps we find a clue. For, in this rampage through the sacred precincts, we detect an echo of the prophecy in Daniel 11:3: “And armes ſhal ſtand on his parte, and thei ſhal pollute the Sãctuarie of ſtrẽgth, & ſhal take away the dailie ſacrifice, & they ſhal fet vp the abominable deſolation.” This prophecy was spoken by one of the latest of the biblical prophets. Set in the Persian period, this chapter in Daniel speaks to a community which has, in part at least, returned from Exile to find their expectations for that
return unfulfilled. The heir of David has not yet come to throw off the yoke of foreign rule. The Temple in Jerusalem is not what it once was, and is barely a shadow of what Ezekiel said it would be. Thus, perhaps the fact that the echo of this sacrilegious defilement comes here, at the end of the book of exile, is meant to suggest that Spenser has finished with this period of Israelite history, from the fall of Jerusalem to the return, and means to leave us here, at the end of the second installment of his masterpiece, with the same feelings of expectation—and perhaps disappointment—that the Israelites themselves experienced in awaiting the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age. That is to say, perhaps he means to leave us here, halfway through his twelve-book plan and at the end of the narrative of the first of two Christian testaments, waiting. And if so, perhaps we can surmise that the next six books would have concerned themselves with the narratives of the New Testament, as the first six did the Old. Perhaps.

This brings us to the end of our rapid survey through the biblical structure of *The Faerie Queene*. Too little is left of the Mutabilitie Cantos to include them here, especially since what we do have appears to be not the beginning or the end of the seventh book—where we have found Spenser’s canonical structural markers—but its center. What we have been able to do in the other six books, though, I hope will be enough to carry the point. Spenser’s poem, contrary to the opinion of Kaske and many others, does not abandon the Bible at the end of Book II, still less at the end of Book I. On the contrary, the canon continues to exert its force on the structure and content of the entire poem as we have it. This, of course, is not to deny the real presence and relevance of other sources. Far from it. We have seen, at every turn, that the biblical tradition is freely intermingled with other traditions, whether Classical, English, or otherwise. In fact, often, the very point of what Spenser is trying to do is to show how the biblical tradition does not preclude, but prefigures the Classical, identifying and, therefore, subsuming the extrabiblical within the biblical, so that the poem becomes one grand synthesis of cultures ancient and modern,
pagan and Christian. Or, as perhaps Spenser would prefer, the whole is shaped into a “moniment,” a message from a complex, but, in some way, now unified past, speaking to the reader in the present. At its foundation is Holiness—that virtue which we saw expressed in terms of the entire Christian canon—and on top of that is layer after layer of Old Testament narrative fused with the various discourses and traditions of pagan antiquity—“Egyptian gold” now forged into a biblical mold.
Thus far, we have spoken of the relationship between Classical and biblical traditions as a problem to be solved—as separate, fundamentally different entities that need be reconciled through interpretation and alteration. And this is, from one perspective, certainly true. But I am not sure this is quite the perspective we find in Spenser. For him, and Renaissance humanists like him, the Classical tradition was not something set apart from the Bible, nor was their relationship a problem to be solved; rather, it was a reality to be revealed. As we have seen already, elements of divine truth were to be found not only in the Christian canon, but in the Classical and pagan traditions, too. Genesis, Revelation, The Aeneid—each in its own way contributed a verse to the ongoing process of revelation, each pointed in varying degrees to the same Reality, and therefore, all were diverse parts of the same unified whole that was (or is) Christian Truth.

As such, Spenser’s efforts to rewrite the canon and Classical and pagan traditions into a single unified work1 were not interpretive efforts to reconcile essentially conflicting materials, but were instead revelatory efforts bent on exposing the unity that already existed, however concealed, within them. Or, to put it another way, The Faerie Queene does not seek to present a Maronem mutatum—a “Virgil changed”—nor even a Virgil mutatus in melius—“changed for the better”—as one anonymous scribe

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1. There has been some debate among Spenserians regarding the unity of The Faerie Queene. The argument for the canonical structure of the poem suggests a new basis upon which to found the notion of the poem itself as a unified whole, a unity not in narrative plot, but in typological structure.
said of Proba’s cento. Rather, Spenser’s poem, as Proba said of her own, seeks to show that Virgil “sang of the holy gifts of Christ.” They were efforts to see in Virgil, as in Genesis and Revelation, a verse in the ongoing process of revelation—each a part of the unified whole that was divine Truth.

Here, we have slipped into a metaphor that needs be noticed. The notion that these are “verses” in ongoing revelation—that revelation is itself poetry and, therefore, God a poet—is not one merely of convenience. It was a notion actively theorized upon and widely embraced within the world of Renaissance humanists like Spenser. In a tradition going back to Plato’s Timaeus, creation had been conceived as a work of art, the creator god an artisan—ποιητής καὶ πατήρ τοῦ παντός (“the maker/poet and father of all,” Timaeus, 28C). It was only a short step from god as maker (ποιητής), as seen here, to God as poet, a move made very early on by a Christian tradition whose canonical texts included the likes of Genesis 1 and John 1. Here, the creation through speech, through the λόγος (“Word”), only seemed to confirm the mysterious truth of this suggestive metaphor. God was a poet. And what is more, among his collected works was that grand poem, the unfolding unity in diversity that was the history of the cosmos itself.

With this metaphor in place, God became not only a poet, but the poet—the template upon which all poets should model themselves, and his works, moreover, the definitive works of art. These works included history and the world, but, naturally, they also included the Christian canon. Here, too, all of the divine plan was encompassed from creation to the apocalypse, and here, too, unity was comprised of seemingly endless diversity. This divine work of verbal art became in the sixteenth and

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3. Ibid., 175.

seventeenth centuries the model for much Christian poetry. It was the storehouse of images, forms and content for some of the greatest early modern poets, Spenser among them.5

We will return to this tradition and its role in *The Faerie Queene* in our concluding chapter, but we mention it here for two reasons. First, it needs be noted that for all that Spenser’s poem has received its structure from the biblical tradition, the conception of the poet and poetry—indeed, of the canon itself—that prompted such an effort, seems to have come ultimately from the Classical, that is, pagan tradition. It is true that notions of God as artisan are to be found in the Hebrew Bible,6 and there are even examples of divine literary production.7 But the theorizing of this notion, its expression in terms of discursive analysis comes, naturally, from the Greeks. And it is this analytical, theorized tradition, no doubt, with biblical underpinnings, that found expression in early modern conceptions of poetry.8

All this is to say, even where Spenser is rewriting the Bible, even where he seems most dependent upon the biblical tradition, the influence of the Classical is to be felt. For, just as Christian tradition had come to influence the way Christians viewed Classical literature—to see it as a storehouse of “Egyptian gold”—so, too, in some ways, the Classical tradition had come to affect the way that Christians viewed the Bible and, indeed, God himself. The mutual influence and ultimate unity of these traditions must be borne in mind if we are to correctly understand their roles within *The Faerie Queene*.

The second reason to raise this discussion here is simply this: it prepares us to ask some fundamental questions that were left unaddressed in the preceding chapter. Namely, if Spenser really is rewriting...

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6. See, for a start, the ongoing comparison of God with idol-makers in Isaiah 40–66; cf. his “building” of Eve in Genesis 2:22, as well as the role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:30.

7. See, most famously, Exodus 31:18 and the Ten Commandments, written by “the finger of God.” But see, also, Ezekiel 3:1ff. and Zechariah 5:1–9.

ing the canon, what was his conception of that canon? How was this canon meant to be read, and how, in turn, does his poem ask to be read? In some sense, this is the very question which we have been trying to answer all along. The typological, allegorical, and canonical modes of reading that we have explored already, of course, form a part of that answer. But there is, at the same time, another element to this. For, in fact, there are several places within the poem where we see Spenser not only alluding to the Bible, but actually depicting instances of characters reading it. And as we will try to show, these instances provide a model for the reader—not only a model of reading the Bible, but one for reading the poem itself. It is to this attempt that we now turn.

Confronting Errour and the Dangers of Reading in The Faerie Queene I.i

By the time the reader reaches the mouth of Errour’s cave, this poem is, in some way, about reading. The story is, as we have seen already, deeply indebted to other stories—stories from the Gospels, from Virgil’s Aeneid, from Genesis, as well as the poetry of Chaucer and the long tradition of romantic quests. All of these have been invoked within the first ten stanzas of the poem, and so, already the poem seems to presuppose the reader’s familiarity with these texts. That is, this reading experience seems to be, in some way, dependent upon these other, prior reading experiences. Exactly what the nature of this dependency, whether and what sort of significance it will hold, has not yet been made clear. Neither has this present poem’s position toward the act of reading itself come to light. But from the moment the reader begins to read The Faerie Queene, these issues begin to press in upon him.

With the emergence of Errour from her den, though, and the first expulsion of her draconic breath, these issues cease to be a mere pressure on the edges of our reading experience and become an active element within the story itself.
Therewith she [Errour] spewd out of her filthie maw
A flood of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slack,
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. (FQ I.i.20)

Everyone knows that dragons’ breath is dangerous. More commonly, it takes the form of fire, as the
great dragon’s in Eden does in *The Faerie Queene* I.xi.26. But here, the expulsions of Errour’s mouth take
another form. It is a noxious, poisonous filth besmattered with bits of meat and “gobbets raw,” toads and
frogs, and, in the midst of it all, “bookes.” In the course of the allegorical “game” suggested by the mon-
ster’s very name, the reader cannot help pausing over this unexpected detail to try and figure out what
this “figure” might mean.9 Bits of meat and frogs and toads, these could be only the vile remnants of the
monster’s last meal—but books? What sort of monster eats books? The “conspicuous irrelevance” of the
image, like the biblical text itself, seems to cry out “interpret me!”

The reader, no doubt, willingly complies; though, at this stage, it is perhaps too early for him to
make much of the game. But this need not concern us, for, whatever he comes to make of these “bookes
and papers” in the course of reading and rereading, one thing is clear from the outset—the act of reading
has been allegorically invoked, and more than that, it has been labeled dangerous. Like dragons’ breath
and poisonous vomit, books and the acts of reading they demand are risky, even life-threatening. Which
books are to be viewed in this way—whether all or only some—has not yet been made clear, still less,
how to tell the difference between them. But at this point, the mere notice of the possibility is enough.
The reader has been put on his guard, and in this context, already so entangled with the results of read-

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ing—with allusions to and dependencies on other, possibly dangerous books—these pictures of poison and dragons’ fire cannot go unheeded.

The topic of reading has been signalled in another way here, too. The very next stanza reads:

As when old father Nilus gins to swell
   With timely pride aboue the Aegyptian vale,
   His fattie waues doe fertile slime outwell,
   And ouerflow each plaine and lowly dale:
   But when his later spring gins to auale,
   Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherein there breed
   Ten thousand kindes of creatures partly male
   And partly femall of his fruitful seed;
   Such vgly monstrous shapes elswher may no man reed. (FQ I.i.21)

It is the last word, “reed,” that concerns us. It is clear that Spenser must mean by this something like “see.” But as A.C. Hamilton notes, this usage is unique to Spenser and, thus, would arrest the attention of even an early modern reader. As far as possible puns that could motivate the word-choice, there are perhaps a couple of candidates. There is, of course, “reed” in the sense of the hollow, tube-like plant, which is somewhat fitting for this context concerned with the Nile River. But it is hardly employed in such a way as to warrant this innovative usage. There is also the homonym, “rede,” which can mean anything from “to rule, direct, guide,” to “to give advice or instruction” or “to warn.”10 Perhaps one might think of man here, given the Edenic context, as the ruler over creation (see Gen 1:28). And I would not deny the possible relevance of that text in this passage. But it seems to me that, in light of the central place given to “bookes and papers” in the preceding stanza, the more obvious homonym is the dominant one—namely, “reading.”

It is no accident, I suggest, that Spenser would put this innovation in the use of the sign, “reed,” in this context. The act of reading has just been invoked, and it is at just this point that that word-sound

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signifier is given a new meaning—to see. It is as if Spenser wants for us to realize early on in his poem a link between the act of reading and the act of seeing, perhaps even to come to associate the interpretive task of reading the poem with the interpretive task of viewing the “real” world. Or as Hamilton puts it, that “to read is to see.”

In any case, as the reader moves on from the cave of Errour to the next episode in the poem, he takes with him a newly realized set of questions, questions about books, the dangers of reading them, and now, too, the relationship between the act of reading and the act of seeing. And lingering in the background must surely be the nagging anxiety over how these unprovided answers ought to inform his own reading, both in the past and especially in the present experience of reading-seeing *The Faerie Queene*. The reader, so afflicted, cannot help feeling as his eyes move forward across the page that both he and the character he follows are walking into a trap.

At length they chaunst to meet vpon 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. (*FQ* I.i.29)

So the next episode begins, and already the trap seems poised to close. In light of what we have just said, the detail that leaps at us most strikingly is surely the book at Archimago’s belt—for, that is who this wandering old hermit turns out to be. And at the belt of one dressed in such “weedes,” the reader is naturally tempted to assume the book is a Bible. But this assumption is immediately called into question, if not by the name given this old man in the canto’s argument—that is, “hypocrisie”—then

by all the little words of qualification scattered throughout the present description. He “Seemde” sober, was simple “in shew,” and “knockt his brest as one that did repent.” Each one of these hedges opens the door for doubt as to the description’s veracity—each one raises the possibility that the Red Crosse Knight, confronted with the sight of this old man, will “reed” his appearance in error.

The attentive reader will have detected the trap and, further, will not have missed that it has once again come in association with a book—perhaps even the Bible itself. The Red Crosse Knight, though, has not the benefit of Spenser’s qualifying descriptors. He sees the old man before him and accepts him as he “seemde” to be. And so, he and Una follow their would-be host home to rest for the night. It is not until the errant couple has fallen asleep that the theme of reading resurfaces. For, after the sun has set, the old man returns to his books, now revealed for what they truly are:

Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe he findes,
He to his studie goes, and there amiddes
His magick bookes and artes of sundrie kindes,
He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy minds.

Then choosing out few words most horrible,
(Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,
With which and other spelles like terrible,
He bad awake blacke Plutos griesly Dame,
And cursed heuen, and spake reprochful shame
Of highest God, the Lord of life and light,
A bold bad man, that dar’d to call by name
Great Gorgon, prince of darknes and dead night,
At which Cocytus quakes and Styx is put to flight.

And forth he cald out of deepe darknes dredd
Legions of Sprights, the which like litle flyes
Fluttring about his euerdammed hed (FQ I.i.36.6–38.3)


13. Of course, the dangers of “reeding” have continued all through the episode, from the idyllic description of the hermits abode with its “holly chappell” and “christiall streame” to the “pleasing wordes … smooth as glas” of the old man himself (FQ I.i.34–35).
These books, at least, are not Bibles—or even biblical commentaries or theological treatises—but “magick bookes.” But perhaps the difference is really not so clear. For, in the course of the Reformation-era’s efforts to interpret the Catholic past, some explanation had to be provided for the ongoing occurrence of miracles in the hagiographic tradition. If these Catholic saints, embodiments of a faith the Protestants had come to reject, had been empowered by God to work miracles, surely this meant that God approved their faith. But this could not be. And so, the events were reinterpreted not as miracles, but as magic and illusion.14 This association with magic was also applied to Catholic rites, especially to the Mass (to which we will return in chapter VI) and the rite of exorcism.15 This would not have escaped the early modern reader, and thus, it must not be overlooked here, either.

It is in connection with exorcism that Archimago begins to come into focus. Note that he summons “Legions of Sprights,” a clear echo of Jesus’ confrontation with “Legion” in the Gospels.16 As Nohrnberg points out, “It was the Word of God that exorcised the demons who were ‘Legion.’”17 This summoning rather than rebuking of “Legion,” sets the magician up as a parody of Christ (and David, his forebear in casting out demons), and his books as hellish doppelgangers of that other Word of God, the Bible. The reader, then, wary of issues of reading and the possibilities of errors therein, has been warned here, I suggest, that not all that appears to be true is so—but more pressingly, not all that appears to be the Bible really is.18


16. See Mark 5:9 and parallels.


18. It is perhaps worth noting that this mode of parody helps, also, to support our earlier claim in chapter IV that this episode is to be taken as a transmuted retelling of Joseph’s dream, sent here not from God through an angel, but through this parody of Christ and his demons.
The mode of reading here, too, needs comment, for, it is not merely reading for entertainment or edification that is in view; rather, here is Eroour in another form. This act of reading is an invocation within a magical rite, but specifically a magical rite designed to lead Red Crosse Knight astray, to foster in him a deliberate “mis-reeding” of reality. For, the spells worked here summon up the dreams spoken of early in chapter IV—night visions of Una’s unfaithfulness and, ultimately, illusions that walk within the “real world” of the narrative and cause the separation of George from Christian Truth. This, it seems, is the end goal of Catholic rhetoric according to Spenser—to, as Shakespeare’s Brabantio put it, ensnare the unwary in “chains of magic … gross in sense.” And as such, the reader cannot help but get the message that Catholic books, indeed, Catholic reading itself is to be rejected.

But a moment should be taken to linger over the nature of that reading. We have spoken thus far of the books themselves and of the aims of reading those books, but what of the nature of the reading? In what disposition is it taken? This is captured for us in a single word—“bold.” We will see this word again when it appears prominently in the House of Busirane, and, in fact, it will appear in a very similar context. For, here and there, we are faced with a wicked magician, and, likewise, each describes someone as daring to challenge the Christian God himself. We will leave that instance in Book III aside for now, but it should be noted here that “bold” seems to have acquired a particular set of connotations for Spenser, connotations redolent of apostasy, idolatry, and the hubris to challenge the divine. And it is in this manner—in bold, perhaps better, “over-bold” assurance in the self over against God—that this magical, Catholic reading is undertaken. That it is a “bold bad man” that reads in this way surely suggests, too, that this mode of reading is to be rejected.

Thus, as the first canto of the poem ends, the reader has already received a great deal of implicit instruction and subtle guidance on the practice of reading. We know already that reading is dangerous, and we have been given some idea of what those dangers are. Some books, it seems, are dangerous in themselves—so dangerous that Spenser can say, “let none them read.” More than that, we have been told that there is an improper way to read—that “bold” reading is, at least as a start, associated with magic and apostasy and, therefore, with Catholicism and, as such, is to be rejected. Finally, we have been led to reflect upon the act of reading more generally—to associate it not only with the reading of the poem, but with all books, including the Bible itself—and we have even begun to view our interaction with the world around us as a kind of “reeding.”

And yet, questions linger. If some books are dangerous, which ones? Are all Catholic books to be shunned? What of other pagan and Classical books? Further, if reading boldly is to be avoided, what is the correct demeanor in which one should read (and so, interact with the world)? Most importantly, what of the Bible? Is the canon itself dangerous, as we have seen implied above? If so, in what way? For answers to these questions, we must skip ahead in the Legend of Holiness to Canto ix. For, while the themes of false appearances, “shew,” and misinterpretation of signs continue unabated through the intervening episodes, it is not until that canto that we find the appearance of another book—and this time, it is one unmistakably associated with Christian Scripture.

*Law, Grace, and the Christian Canon in The Faerie Queene I.ix*

When we pick up again in Canto ix, the Red Crosse Knight has been reunited with his lady love after long imprisonment in the dungeons of Orgoglio, Spenser’s second allegorical personification of pride—which is to say, of “boldness” in the sense we have seen above. Falling prey to the misreadings

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forced upon him by Archimago, our hero has come in course of time to adopt not only the content, but the manner of the arch-deceiver’s reading, imprisoning him in the dungeon of this particular moral error. From this dungeon, he is rescued by Prince Arthur, who is here and frequently throughout the poem a figure for Christ. So, like Christ in his harrowing of Hell, Arthur storms the castle of Orgoglio and sets the captive free. In the wake of this deliverance, the two knights become friends, exchange stories of their personal quests, and finally exchange gifts in preparation of their parting. It is here that we find our theme of reading taken up again:

Prince Arthur gaue a boxe of Diamond sure,  
    Embowd with gold and gorgeous ornament,  
    Wherein were closd few drops of liquor pure,  
    Of wondrous worth, and vertue excellent,  
    That any wound could heale incontinent:  
    Which to requite, the Redcrosse knight him gaue  
    A booke, wherein his Saueours testament  
    Was writt with golden letters rich and braue;  
    A worke of wondrous grace, and hable soules to saue. (FQ I.ix.19)

Right away, it seems that something is amiss in George’s gift. It is ironic, after all, that he should give “his Saueours testament” to this, his recent savior. The irony is only enhanced for the reader in light of the clear association between Arthur and Christ. Again, it seems, George has failed to read the reality of his situation correctly, this time by failing to recognize the identity of his savior.21

21. The irony is heightened further by the nature of Arthur’s gift of the “liquor pure.” As has often been noted, the language used here is strongly suggestive of the Eucharist (e.g. Maclean 1968, 102; Kellogg & Steele 1965, 179). The word “liquor” itself, Spenser frequently uses in sacramental contexts—see, for instance, Pyrrochles’ failed baptism in Idle Lake at II.vi.44.4 or the “sacrament prophane in mistery of wine” at III.ix.30.5, both of which are described in terms of “liquor.” Further, the description of this liquor’s “vertue” is notably similar to the balm that flows out of the Tree of Life in I.xi.46–48, which also has been regularly and, I think, correctly identified as a symbol of the Eucharist (Hamilton 2001, ad loc.). The significance of the gift as a symbol of the Eucharist, then, is fairly secure. The irony, though, is revealed only in light of the episode we will discuss next, the encounter with Despayre, where it proves entirely ineffectual because it—and its symbolic significance—is completely forgotten. As we will see, the gift of sacramental grace is one that the Red Crosse Knight is not yet prepared to recognize and accept for what it is, any more than he is prepared to recognize his “Saueour” when he sees him. This is the reason for the incongruity of this “eucharistic analogy” noted by DuRocher—the gift is “premature and dramatically anticlimactic,” as he says, but because George is not ready to receive it, not because the analogy is misplaced. (DuRocher 1984, 186).
Perhaps, then, we might expect to find some reason for this failure in the context, and, here, I suggest the answer is to be found in the description of the book itself. For, it is not the whole of the Christian canon that is described here, but, rather, only the New Testament—and perhaps only the Gospels. For, as the fourth evangelist wrote, “the Lawe was giuen by Moſes, but grace and trueth cam by Iefus Chrift” (John 1:17). Or as Paul put it, “by grace are ye faued through faith, and that not of your felues: it is the gifte of God” (Eph 2:8).

In the Christian tradition, the language of “grace” and the “Saueour” were markers of the New Testament and the Gospel of Christ. What is left out of this golden-lettered book, then, is the Law—which is to say, the Old Testament. Here, we are not given indications of anyone’s reading of this limited Christian canon, and so, we can receive no further answers to those questions. But we are prepared to see whatever follows as an experiment in living the Christian life—remember, George has been newly delivered from the dungeon of pride by Arthur, “the Prince of Grace” (FQ III.i.5.2)—without knowledge of or reference to the contents of the Old Testament.

And, in fact, this is precisely what we receive. For, immediately upon parting company with Arthur, our hero and his lady love are met with a frantic knight riding terrified across the plain, helmet gone and a noose wrapped around his neck, the loose end of the rope trailing behind him in his flight. This knight, Sir Treuisan, it turns out, is fleeing the den of a “villen,” and not only that, but “[a] cursed wight ... A man of hell, that calls himself Despayre” (FQ I.ix.28.3–5). This strange villain, it seems, convinced the terrified knight’s companion, Sir Terwin, to prefer death over life, and so, to kill himself and nearly did the same with Sir Treuisan, too. Hearing this, the Red Crosse Knight takes it upon himself to confront this “man of hell” and convinces Treuisan to show him the way.

22. Of course, the phrase in John 1 is a quote of the familiar language of the Old Testament found most prominently in Exodus 34:6–7 and the declaration of the divine name. The point, though, is that, for John, the language of “grace” (םְנוּל) is a pointer to the ministry of Christ.
The newly met knight reluctantly leads him back the way he had come until they arrive at the “cursed wight’s home.”

Ere long they come, where that same wicked wight
    His dwelling has, low in an hollow caue,
    Far vnderneath a craggy clift ypight,
    Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a greedy graue,
    That still for carrion carcasses doth craue:
On top whereof ay dwelt the ghastly Owle,
    Shrieking his balefull note, which euer draue
    Far from that haunt all other chearefull fowle;
And all about it wandring ghostes did wayle and howle.

And all about old stockes and stubs of trees,
    Whereon nor fruitie, nor leafe was euer seen,
    Did hang vpon te ragged rocky knees;
    On which had many wretches hanged beene,
    Whose carcasses were scattred on the greene,
    And throwne about the cliffs. Arriued there,
That bare-head knight for dread and dolefull teene,
    Would faine haue fled, ne durst approchen neare,
    But th’other forst him staye, and comforted in feare. (FQ I.ix.33–34)

The reader will no doubt have noticed that the setting here is an only slightly altered reiteration of the home of Errour. Like that draconian lady’s den, Despayre lives in a cave in the middle of a forest. And so, as George makes his way inside alone, we are prepared for yet another confrontation with error and the dangers of reading. And we are not disappointed. George soon meets the corpse of Sir Terwin, lately deceased, and then, confronted with the perpetrator of that crime, he sentences him to death. But the villain is unimpressed:

What franticke fit (quoth he) hath thus distraught
Thee, foolish man, so rash a doome to giue?
What iustice euer other judgement taught,
But he should dye, who merites not to liue?
None els to death this man despayring drive,

23. It is perhaps worth noting, in light of our discussion above, the subtle allusion to the Jesse Tree in the "old stockes and stubs of trees" of I.ix.34.1–2. In this context, as we will see, the hope of Christ revealed in the New Testament has been omitted—or "cut off," as it were—from the canon. And so, too, have the rods and blossoms been shorn from the trees around Despayre’s den. A more fitting picture of what awaits our hero in this new Errour’s den is difficult to imagine.
But his owne guiltie mind deseruing death.
Is then vniust to each his dew to giue?
Or let him dye, that loathen liuing breath?
Or let him die at ease, that liueth her vneath? (FQ I.ix.38)

Already we can see the influence of the Pauline conception of the Law upon this speech. For, it is, according to Paul, “by the Lawe commeth the knowledge of ſinne” (Rom 3:20b); and further, “For the wages of ſinne is death: but the gifte of God is eternal life through Ieſus Chrift our Lord” (Rom 6:23)
Which is to say, for Paul, the Law brings consciousness of sin, and sin, in turn, is the source of death, the sinner deserving of death. Thus far, then, Despayre’s defense of his own act is entirely scriptural.
But there is something missing. Despayre has omitted from his speech the New Testament’s notion of grace and hope through the Gospel.24 And as the encounter continues, this omission of the New Testament—that is, this failure to read “canonically”—becomes all the more marked, as Despayre attempts to convince George to take his own life, too.

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 auengement,
Now praysd, hereafter deare thou shalt repent:
For life must life, and blood must blood repay.
Is not enough thy euill life forespent?
For he, that once hath missed the right way,
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray. (FQ I.ix.43)

This is enough, I hope, to show the ongoing efforts to pervert the message of the Law as the New Testament conceived it.25 (And if not, the reader need only look to the end of this encounter, The Faerie Queene I.ix.50.3, where the source of George’s troubles and Despayre’s teachings both are labeled

24. Note, Treuisan was “bare-headed,” that is, he was without the “helmet of salvation” that Paul commended in Ephesians 6:17; See Nohrnberg, Analogy, 152.

“th’Almighty’s law.”) And it is in this sense that Nohrnberg can call Despayre “a teacher of the Law.”\footnote{Nohrnberg, Analogy, 152.}

The problem here, then, is a failure to accord the Law its place within the Christian canon. In a religion which reads canonically, error cannot help arising when the whole of the canon is not consulted. For, as we have already seen, the Law is intended to fulfill a specific function within the Christian life—to provoke a consciousness of sin. And from that consciousness is meant to arise the awareness of a need for a savior. In this way, the grace and salvation offered in the New Testament, that golden-lettered book, are given meaning and purpose.

That the Red Crosse Knight would have failed in precisely these aspects of Christian reading is entirely unsurprising in light of his gift to Arthur above. His own canon, it seems, did not include the Old Testament, and so, it is no surprise that he was unprepared to grapple with its message of sin and death. And were it not for the arrival of Una, our hero would have succumbed to the same fate as Sir Terwin. But with the intervention of the one Christian Truth, he is saved again. Now, these failures have been revealed not only to Una, but to George and the reader, too. And it is to the mending of these oversights in Red Crosse’s reading and character that Una immediately turns.

\textit{Red Crosse and the Reader in the House of Holiness}

For this remedy, Una leads her champion to the House of Holiness. And here, in this monastic house, we find if not the climax, then surely the imaginative core of the book. For, it is within these walls that the Red Crosse Knight undergoes the process of conversion that, appropriately, includes sanctification (i.e. the process of “making holy”). There is a long Christian tradition of describing this process that finds its foundations in the letters of Paul and its most influential form in Augustine’s \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}. In this manual of hermeneutics and Christian education, this Doctor of the Church de-
scribes seven stages through which the would-be believer must pass. This tradition received further elaboration in the Reformation era, as Barbara Lewalski has discussed, and these Protestant expansions, likewise, have found their way into Spenser’s poem. But the Augustinian model lies clearly at the root of the episode, and so, it will provide the primary point of reference for our discussion.

In fact, by the time St. George reaches the door to the House of Holiness, this seven-stage process has already begun. For, the first stage is the realization of sin, fear of judgement, and the pressing awareness of mortality—the very things George encountered in the cave of Despayre. Thus, as Canto x begins, our hero is ready to progress to stage two, that is, to meekness and humility. And this is precisely what one finds.

Arriued there, the dore they find fast lockt;
For it was warely watched night and day,
For feare of many foes: but when they knockt,
The Porter opened vnto them streight way:
He was an aged syre, all hory gray,
With lookes full lowly cast, and gate full slow,
Wont on a staffe his feeble steps to stay,
Hight Humiltá. They passe in stouping low;
For streight and narrow was the way, which he did shew. (FQ I.x.5)

The low door here, for any reader familiar with Augustine, cannot help suggesting the notion of reading the Bible—in more than one instance, Augustine used this image to describe his own approach to the Christian Scriptures. Thus, from the outset, this canto, too, promises to be, in some way, about the act of reading, and especially the act of reading sacred Scripture.

29. De Doctrina Christiana, 2.7.1–4; Stock, Augustine the Reader, 199.
30. E.g. Augustine, Confessions, 3.9.
Having stooped and entered in behind the humble porter, our hero soon encounters those Protestant expansions of the salvation process—Zele and Reverence. That these are specifically traceable to Protestant expansions of the tradition need not concern us here; rather, for our purposes, what needs most to be noted is that once again in this context we are confronted with the question of the disposition of the reader. In Archimago, we met the “bold” reader; here, in this Augustinian hall, we meet the opposite—a reader who must be, first of all, humble. This humility will give way to zeal and reverence in due course, followed, too, by Obedience, the name of the house’s meek “groome” who leads George to his bed for the night. All of these personifications point to the deep concern that Spenser, and the Christian tradition more generally, had for the appropriate way to approach Scripture.

The subject of reading, though, has been broached by more than merely the image of the low door. In fact, as Stock points out, the whole program of conversion is conceived of by Augustine as one of biblical study. But it is at stage three that the Bible’s presence is most centrally felt. This stage is the acquisition of knowledge. For Augustine, knowledge of the whole of Scripture is essential. The would-be convert—as he calls him, “the careful inquirer”—will have read the entire canon for himself, and, in this way, become familiar with its contents. But it must immediately be noted that the convert is not expected to understand all that he reads. No, in truth, it is certain that he will not have done.

To this stage, George turns upon awakening the next day. But he will not embark on it alone—he will have an instructor. The House of Holiness is overseen by an “ancient Dame” who had three daughters, Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa—the three greatest spiritual gifts. It is into the charge of the eldest of the three, Fidelia, the personification of Christian faith, that our hero is entrusted. She is described as:

32. Stock, Augustine the Reader, 198.
Like sunny beames threw from her Christall face,
That could haue dazd the rash beholders sight,
And round about her head did shine like heuens light.

She was ariad all in lilly white,
And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,
With wine and water fild vp to the hight,
In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold,
That horour made to all, that did behold;
But she no whitt did chaunge her constant mood:
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 vnderstood. (FQ I.x.12.7–13.9)

Echoes abound in this of our discussion of Wisdom, the Woman of Vertue, and the Law, but
these need not detain us here. Rather, our present concern must fall upon the bloody book that George's
schoolmaster carries. The reader will, no doubt, have detected the allusion to 2 Peter 3:16, “As one,
that in all bis Epiftles ſpeaketh of these things: amōg the which some things are hard to be vnderſtant,
which they that are vnlearned and vnſtable, peruert, as they do alſo other Scriptures vnto their owne
deſtruction.” And having done so realizes, if it was not already clear, that the book is at least a part of the
Christian canon. But which part? In 2 Peter, the reference is to the letters of Paul specifically, but also to
“other Scriptures.” Are we to understand, then, that the book matches these parameters? It is unclear at
this point, but the situation is soon clarified when George's education begins:

Now when their wearie limbes with kindly rest,
And bodies were refresht with dew repast,
Fayre Vna gan Fidelia fayre request,
To haue her knight into her schoeleous plaste,
That of her heauenly learning he might taste,
And heare the wisedom of her wordes diuine.
She graunted, and that knight so much agraste,
That she him taught celestiall discipline,
And opened his dull eyes, that light mote in them shine.

And that her sacred Booke, with blood ywritt,
That none could reade, except she did them teach,
She vnto him disclosed euery whitt,
And heauenly documents thereout did preach,
That weaker witt of man could neuer reach,
Of God, of grace, of justice, of free will,
That wonder was to heare her goodly speach:
For she was hable, with her wordes to kill,
And rayse again to life the hart, that she did thrill. (FQ I.x.18–19)

Here, we find quite clearly the entirety of the Christian canon. For, like “th’Almighties Law” expounded by Despayre, Fidelia’s words drawn from this book can kill. But also, like the golden-lettered Testament, they can raise to life again. Here, the problems of the preceding canto have been resolved, bringing together the conscience-pricking function of the Old Testament with the grace-bestowing teachings of the New.

Beyond solving the problem of the canon, Fidelia provides instruction in its contents, helping to illuminate the mysteries of the faith. And, in this capacity, she acquires a three-fold multivalence of meaning. First, this personification of faith in what is so clearly an Augustinian context must be associated with the regula fidei, the rule of faith; that is, according to T. Grashop, the “Articles of Christian faith, contained in the common Creed … [and the] First and second table of God’s commandments.” From the early Church Fathers on, there had endured a notion that the Creeds and the Ten Commandments provided a framework of basic Christian belief outside of which no legitimate interpretation of Scripture could stray. This was commonly referred to as the regula fidei, and certainly, this idea lies behind this shining paragon of pedagogy, Fidelia.

33. Contra Nohrnberg, who sees it as the New Testament alone. Nohrnberg, Analogy, 156. This identification is strange in the context, for, on the preceding page, he notes that Fidelia also appears to wield “the dart of sinfull guild.” Compare Carol Kaske, “Spenser and the Bible,” in The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser (ed. Richard A. McCabe; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 485–503, whose discussion also takes notice of this book as a dangerous and complete Christian Bible.

34. Further indication of the scope of the book and Fidelia’s provenance can be found in I.x.20, where she is able to “commaund the hasty Sunne to stay,” “Dry-shod to passe, she parts the flouds in tway / and eke huge mountaines from their natiue seat / She would commaund, themselves to beare away.” That is, she is able to do the greatest works of faith found in both Testaments. (Compare Joshua 10, Exodus 14, and Matthew 17:20 (and parallels) respectively).

35. T. Grashop, “How to Take Profit in the Reading of Holy Scriptures.”
But there is also at work, just as clearly, the notion of the appropriate disposition of the reader. For, as the Scriptures themselves put it, “unless you believe, you will not understand.” Here again, it is driven home that the reader needs to approach the text in a certain way—with humility, yes, but also with credulity. Grashop, in line with the general movement of Protestant thinking, goes a step further and suggests that one needs also to pray for God’s help in understanding his Word. He says that the Christian should “earnestly and usually pray unto God that he will vouchsafe to, Teach the way of his statutes, Give understanding ... [and] Direct in the path of his commandments.” That is to say, the act of reading is one directly involved with the dynamic action of God in the present, and as such, is one of direct dependence and submission. This, again, is the opposite of the “bold” reading encountered above.

There is one further signification for Fidelia, and this is not in her capacity as a personification, but in her role as an instructor of the Bible. For, again according to Grashop, the initiate cannot expect to understand everything on his own. Rather, he will need to avail himself of instructors. These may come in the form of commentators and interpreters in books, or in conferring with others more learned in the faith, and especially in the form of sermons, as we saw in chapter I.

In this short stint, then, George undergoes the education of the believer in the Scriptures as prescribed by Protestant tradition, especially. His guide represents not only the necessary guidance of more mature interpreters, but also the disposition of faith and the creedal framework of the Christian tradition. In this way, Spenser begins to provide an answer to our questions about the dangers of reading that have troubled us from the beginning of the poem. The Bible, too, and perhaps especially, is a dangerous book, even a lethal one. Error here can include the failure to approach the canon in light of the whole of

37. T. Grashop, “How to Take Profit in the Reading of Holy Scriptures.”
its contents and, at the same time, to fail to approach it with the correct disposition. But the solution to these dangers, too, is provided in an approach modeled in the humble doorman and in Fidelia.

We should note, too, the purpose of Red Crosse’s reading. Unlike Archimago, whose magical reading was meant to foster misreading, Red Crosse undergoes the instruction of Fidelia to arrive at truth. But more than that, the end of this reading is not merely information, but transformation. The third stage gives rise to a series of psychological effects beyond mere intellection. These include an ascetic response (see *FQ* I.x.21.3–4), followed by awareness of sin and detestation of his own sinful state (see *FQ* I.x.21.5–9) and fear of judgement. This, in turn, leads to repentance and conversion (see *FQ* I.x.29.1–2). It is this transformation that is the real end of reading for Spenser.

Stage four is conversion proper—in George’s case, this is his return to his lady love, Una (i.e. Christian Truth). Stage five, then, is the exercise of love and mercy as reflected by his introduction to Charissa, the youngest of the three sisters of the house, and to her servant, Mercy. Under her (and, in turn, her six servants), Red Crosse is instructed in good works, the details of which need not concern us here. It is, rather, to the sixth stage that we must rush on.

At this point in the process, the believer’s inner vision is clarified, and he becomes a contemplative. And so, fittingly, our hero proceeds from the care of Mercy to the remote abode of an old hermit, “heuenly Contemplation” (*FQ* I.x.46.8). And it is here, under the watchful (if blind) eye of this old man—far more benevolent a host than Archimago had been—that the subject of reading the Bible returns:

That done, he leads him to the highest Mount;
Such one, as that same mighty man of God,
That blood-red billowes like a walled front
On either side disparted with his rod,

Till that his army dry-foot through them yod,
Dwelt forty daies vpon; where writt in stone
With bloody letters by the hand of God,
The bitter doome of death and balefull mone
He did receiue, whiles flashing fire about him shone.

Or like that sacred hill, whose head full hie,
Adornd with fruitfull Oliues all arounnd,
Is, as it were for endless memory
Of that deare Lord, who oft thereon was fownd,
For euer with aflowring girldon crownd:
Or like that pleasaunt Mount, that is for ay
Through famous Poets verse each where renownd,
On which the thristhree learned Ladies play
Their heuenly notes, and make full many a louely lay.

From thence, far off he vnto him did shew
A litle path, that was both steepe and long,
Which to a goodly Citty led his vew;
Whose wals and towres were builded high and strong
Of perle and precious stone, that earthly tong
Cannot describe, nor wit of man can tell;
To high a ditty for my simple song:
The Citty of the greate king hight it well,
Wherein eternall peace and happinesse doth dwell. (FQ I.x.53–55)

The final stanza is, of course, the ultimate subject of the contemplative quest—a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem and, more importantly, the “litle path” that leads, for the determined visionary, into the very presence of God. But this vision has received interesting qualification in the two preceding stanzas. Here, the mount of contemplation is compared with three other mountains. First, in stanza 53, we find quite clearly Mount Sinai, followed by the seat of Christ upon the Mount of Olives, and then, perhaps unexpectedly, a description of what must be Mount Parnassus, the home of the Muses in Classical mythology. Before we turn to the presence of this third mountain, let us reflect for a moment on the significance of the other two.
It is quite clear that these two biblical mountains stand in for the two Testaments of the Christian canon. They are the sites of the revelation of the Law and the Gospel—sites where the Divine Presence was uniquely attained—and in this, these revelations are related to the efforts of contemplation. But in the Protestant tradition, the significance of this comparison takes on a slightly different import. For, in the Reformation era, Protestant efforts to appropriate the contemplative tradition centered on the reading of Scripture. As Darryl Gless has discussed, this tradition is based upon and returns ultimately not to a private, ecstatic experience of the divine, but to contemplation of heavenly realities accessed through the text of Scripture.\(^{39}\) In the light of such a tradition, these grand moments of divine revelation upon Mount Sinai and the Mount of Olives are not to be equated with the contemplative’s quest for the divine presence; rather, they provide the means for that quest. The text of these revelations provides the reader an opportunity to participate in those same divine realities.

With that in mind, we may return to the perhaps unexpected presence of Mount Parnassus in this list. However, it may be hoped that our discussion above will have made its inclusion if not expected, then at least understandable. For, as we have seen, it is not in the text of Scripture alone that the divine Truth has been made available. It is to be found in the writings of the pagan past as well. Thus, the contemplation of the divine can be sustained not only by reading the biblical texts, but also, through extrabiblical texts which, likewise, have been entrusted with this “Egyptian gold.”

But it should be noted that these pagan texts enter into the Christian’s journey properly only with the sixth stage of his development. To this point, his area of proper concern has been specifically limited to the explication of the Bible. But having learned to read in and be transformed by the Scrip-

tures, the remainder of the Christian’s journey is to be sustained in the contemplation of divine truth—a truth found in both the canon and the literature of the Classical, pagan past.

The House of Holiness gives way to the dragon fight, which, in turn, gives way to the Red Crosse Knight’s union with Christian Truth, that is, to his acquisition of the seventh stage and Wisdom. So, as the first book of The Faerie Queene draws to a close, our Knight, and our reader with him, has in some sense attained wisdom. But as we saw in chapter IV, he has also traversed the contours of the canon from the synchronous beginnings of the New and Old Testaments in the Gospels and Genesis to the end of Revelation, here signalled in the pseudo-apocalyptic triumph over the dragon.

But two things should be noted: first, the journey of the Red Crosse Knight does not end here. His union with Christian Truth is only temporary as he must head back out into the world for six more years of service. And so, in this way, his transformation is signalled as incomplete. (This is perhaps confirmed by his struggle with the soldiers of Lust and Catholic Idolatry found at the beginning of Book III, discussed above.) His final transformation into the redeemed “new man” of Christian salvation has been deferred until his final union with Una, and so, presumably to the very end of the poem.

And like the Red Crosse Knight, the reader, too, finds his journey at the end of Book I far from over. He, too, has confronted Errour and encountered the falsities of Archimago, Orgoglio and Despayre; and he, too, stood—in some diminished sense—as the student of Fidelia and her book “with blood ywrit.” But here, the identification of the reader and Red Crosse must be differentiated in very important ways. The education Red Crosse receives from Fidelia is shared with the reader only in outline. It does us little good to hear that she unfolded the great mysteries “of God, of grace, of iustice, [and] of free will,” no matter how “wondrous” it was to hear (FQ I.x.20). (One is reminded of that endlessly tantaliz-
ing, resolutely silent instruction on the road to Emmaus.) And as we saw, it gestured not to any new idea, but only to the common-places of Protestant thought. And, in this way, the answers Spenser provides for us—“pat answers” all—are not very helpful.

But I would suggest that it is not in the direct statement of truths that Spenser’s value, nor even his interest, lies. For, what the reader has learned in the House of Holiness is not merely information; in fact, it has hardly included any of that. Rather, what the reader has been afforded is a mode of “reeding,” or, rather, a set of questions about the act of reading, and the opportunity to play these questions out for himself under the gentle guidance of Spenser’s narrator. It is an opportunity to see these common-places worked out in an uncommonly engaging and brilliant way. And it is this that has brought the reader, along with the Red Crosse Knight, through the House of Holiness with its three—not two—mountains of contemplation, to the fight with the dragon, and to the precipice of the rest of the poem. And there, in the rest of the poem, he will find, as we have already suggested, further opportunities to explore the same—that is, to explore not only the rest of the Christian canon, as modeled by Fidelia, but also that third mountain regarding which Fidelia has not spoken, Mount Parnassus and the body of Classical literature to which it refers.

This oblique reference to Classical literature at the Mount of Contemplation, I suggest, points forward to what awaits the reader beyond the bounds of Book I—engagement with this third tradition worthy of the Christian’s consideration. But notice that this tradition is approached, as we have said in chapter IV, not on its own, but through the lens of the canon. That is, it is read from the perspective of what was learned in the House and Legend of Holiness as a whole. Perhaps it is worth noting, also, that it is at the beginning of this reading journey that we meet the Law, not now as a prod to conscience and harbinger of death and judgement, but as a guide and teacher in the ways of righteousness—that is, in
the role Calvin and others assigned the Law in the life of the Christian after conversion.⁴¹ We set off through the wilds of Classical ethics with the Palmer at our side helping not only Guyon, but the reader to “reed aright.” We have seen already, too, the figure of Britomart as the Vertuous Woman learning to read the signs of character as she moves with the reader toward wisdom. But there is another place in Britomart’s story wherein the “reeding” process we have begun to trace here is picked up again, a place where echoes of Augustine and the correct ways to engage with Scripture once again become the subject of reflection. In fact, the imagery of the Bible, of reading, and of transformation that has been discussed here comes to dominate the conclusion of Book III in a way that seems to have gone largely unnoticed. To that topic we now turn.

⁴¹. See, for example, Calvin’s remark in Institutes, III.19.2 (p.550): “it cannot be rightly inferred … that believers have no need of the law. It ceases not to teach, exhort, and urge them to good, although it is not recognized by their consciences before the judgment seat of God. The two things are very different, and should be well and carefully distinguished. The whole lives of Christians ought to be a kind of aspiration after piety, seeing they are called unto holiness (Eph 1:4; 1 Thess 4:5). The office of the law is to excite them to the study of purity and holiness, by reminding them of their duty.”
Chapter VI. Images of a Jealous God

In order to make good on the claims made at the end of the preceding chapter, we turn our attention now to the concluding episode of the Legend of Chastity, the House of Busirane (FQ III.xi–xii). Few passages in the poem have received more comment than this one, but as I will argue below, its full import, informed by a set of as yet unnoticed biblical allusions, has yet to be explained. At the center of this explanation is the attempt to usurp the place of God and his divine prerogative. Defense of this assertion will form the main burden of this chapter; but before we begin, it is necessary to point out that the attempt to usurp the divine prerogative itself can be expressed in terms of reading—or more properly, misreading. In light of our earlier discussion, it will perhaps prove useful to explore these ideas further before we begin our tour of the House of Busirane.

Signs and Things: Malbecco Misreads Himself

For Augustine, as for so many other Christian thinkers, the world itself is to be seen as a text written by God.¹ But more than that, the world is a metaphorical text, populated with signs that point beyond the world to the eternal reality that lies beyond it—to the Triune God himself. It is the Christian’s task to recognize this metaphorical significance in their world, to read it correctly and, in doing so,
to “use this world, not enjoy it, in order to discern ‘the invisible attributes of God, which are understood through what has been made.’”

But it must be remembered that humans, too, are signs. They were created, in the biblical tradition, in the “image of God,” and as such, they are figures for their Creator in a way not dissimilar to the way Colin Clout is a “figure” for Spenser. Human relations, both with one another and even with oneself, can be expressed in terms of one’s willingness to “read” a person correctly—to see in one another and in oneself not merely a person, but a thing that is also a sign pointing to God. Human love—in the biblical idiom, love for one’s neighbor—is to be, for Augustine, not a thing in itself, but a function of one’s love for God (which is the all-consuming love pursued with “all thine heart, with all thy foule, and with all thy minde” (Matt 22:37)). We are commanded, Augustine says, to love one another and ourselves “on account of God.”

What happens then, if one fails to love in just this way? The consequences here are the same as they are in any other instance of misreading the world text: the second death—that is, separation from God. As Augustine puts it:

One must take care not to interpret a figurative expression literally. What the apostle says is relevant here: ‘the letter kills but the spirit gives life.’ For when something meant figuratively is interpreted as if it were meant literally, it is understood in a carnal way. No ‘death of the soul’ is more aptly given that name than the situation in which the intelligence ... is subjected to the flesh by following the letter.... It is, then, a miserable kind of spiritual slavery to interpret signs as things, and to be incapable of raising the mind’s eye above the physical creation so as to absorb the eternal light. (De Doctrina Christiana 141)

For Augustine, the only “thing” that is to be taken literally in this sense—the only thing that, read in this way, will not lead to spiritual slavery—is the Triune God. And so, to fail to read anything, humans

3. De Doctrina Christiana, I.42
and even the self included, is to, in some sense, commit idolatry—to attribute the status that belongs to God to that which is not God.

Of course, both the world and Spenser’s poem are full of examples of those who would do this very thing. Preferring the self to God, they deliberately misread themselves, seeing in themselves a thing to be taken literally, rather than a sign which is a figure for something, or someone, else. Allusions to this sort of “misreading” of the self are scattered throughout the stanzas leading up to the House of Busirane. One such example—one actually framed as a parody of the Augustinian reading program outlined in chapter V—is to be found in the stanzas immediately preceding our pericope and so, will provide a helpful example that will set the stage for our exploration of the House of Busirane. This example is found in the fate of Malbecco.

We met Malbecco earlier, in chapter IV. He was the impotent husband of Hellenore who—after losing his home and fortune, being cuckolded at the hands of Paridell and, then, a band of satyrs, and finally, being robbed again of his last pennies—found the nearest cliff and flung himself off onto the rocky shores of the sea.

But through long anguish, and selfe-murdring thought
   He was so wasted and forpined quight,
   That all his substance was consum’d to nought,
   And nothing left, but like an acry Spright,
   That on the rockes he fell so flit and light,
   That he thereby receiu’d no hurt at all,
   But chaunced on a craggy cliff to light;
   Whence he with crooked clawes so long did crall,
   That at the last he found a caue with entrance small.

Into the same he creepes, and thenceforth there
   Resolu’d to build his balefull mansion,
   In drery darkenes, and continuall feare
   Of that rocks fall, which euer and anon
   Threates with huge ruine him to fall vpon,
   That he dare neuer sleepe, but that one eye
Still ope he keepes for that occasion; 
Ne euer rests he in tranquillity, 
The roring billowes beat his bowre so boystrously.  

(FQ III.x.57–58)

It is in the last line of Stanza 57 that we see the allusion to Augustine. Here, in the “caue with entrance small” is an echo of the low door of the House of Holiness and, therefore, of Augustine’s notion that one must approach the Word of God in humility. But unlike that early instance, Malbecco’s cave has no book inside, only himself and the mansions he intends to build. So, then, if this is an allusion to Augustine’s practice of reading, where is the text? The answer, of course, is Malbecco himself.

As the image of God and part of the world text, his status as a “text” to be read we have already seen. But, of course, he is also the reader, for, it is the reader who crawls through the small door. And likewise, in Augustine’s conception, it is the reader who undergoes a transformation as a result of his reading. It is, then, no surprise that Malbecco, too, undergoes a transformation. This has begun already before he ever finds the cave (perhaps as the process of conversion began for the Red Crosse Knight before he came to Caelia’s low door). But once inside, this monstrous transformation continues:

Ne euer is he wont on ought to feed,  
But todes and frogs, his pasture poysnous,  
Which in his cold complexion doe breed  
A filthy blood, or humour rancorous,  
Matter of doubt and dread suspitious,  
That doth with curelesse care consume the hart,  
Corrupts the stomacke with gall vitious,  
Croscuts the liuer with internall smart,  
And doth transfixe the soule with deathes eternall dart.

Yet can he neuer dye, but dying liues,  
And doth himselfe with sorrow new sustaine,  
That death and life attonce vnto him giues.  
And painfull pleasure turnes to pleasing paine.  
There dwels he euer, miserable swaine,  
Hatefull both to him selfe, and euery wight;  
Where he through priuy griefe, and horroure vaine,
Is woxen so deform’d that he has quight
Forgot he was a man, and Gelosy is hight. (*FQ* III.x.59–60)

His newly deformed state is the result not only of perpetual feeding upon poisonous fare, but also, upon the continuous contemplation of his own doubts and suspicions, the continual reading of himself as a text. But it is, again, the mode of his reading that is important, and this mode can be seen clearly in the account of his marriage to Hellenore:

For all his dayes he drownes in priuitie,
Yet has full large to liue, and spend at libertie.

But all his mind is set on mucky pelfe,
To hoord vp heapes of euill gotten masse,
For which he others wrongs and wreckes himselfe;
Yet is he lincked to a louely lasse,
Whose beauty doth her bounty far surprasse,
The which to him both far vnequall yeares,
And also far vnlike conditions has;
For she does ioy to play emongst her peares,
And to be free from hard restraynt and gealous fears.

But he is old, and withered like hay,
Unfit faire Ladies seruice to supply;
The priuie guilt whereof makes him alway
Suspect her truth, and keepe continuall spy
Upon her with his other blincked eye;
Ne suffreth he resort of liuing wight
Approch to her, ne keepe her company,
But in close boyre her mewes from all mens sight,
Depriu’d of kindly ioy and naturall delight. (*FQ* III.ix.3.8–5.9)

The nature of their relationship, then, could not be more clear. Malbecco tried to make his wife a prisoner, even a possession, and himself her master. But this is far from the Christian, canonical view of marriage. In chapter II, we caught a glimpse of this view; there, its primary features were as a means for procreation and divine blessing, as well as a source of mutual help in the difficult task of living the life of

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4. Note, the poisonous fare is also the vomit of Errour, “todes and frogs” (*FQ* III.x.59.2); cf. *The Faerie Queene* I.i.20.7.

5. And, in this way, he has failed to read her, too, making of her a thing merely to be enjoyed, not a sign to be loved “on account of God.” *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.39–43.
faith. None of this is evident in Malbecco. For mutual support, or even an inkling of a notion that either of these two is engaged in a life of faith, we look in vain. Similarly, too, the hope of progeny is absent in this sexless marriage. But there is more to the Christian view of marriage than we were able to discuss above. And among the omitted elements, the most pressing to our current discussion is the role of the husband with respect to his wife:

25Houſbands, loue your wiues, euен as Chriſt loued the Church, & gaue him ſelf for it, 26That he might fanctifie it, & elſe it by the waſhing of water through ſe worde, 27That he might make it vnto himſelf a glorious Church, not hauĩg ſpot or wrincle, or anie ſuche thing: but that it ſhulde be holie and without blame. 28So oght men to loue their wiues as their owne bodies (Eph 5:25–28a)

Here, the husband is set up as an authority, but not of the sort Malbecco strives to be. Rather, the husband’s authority is one specifically modeled after Christ—one manifest in a self-sacrificial love for the wife “as Chriſt loved the Church.” This self-sacrifice, too, is difficult to find in Malbecco (unless it be in the failed parody of it that is his attempted suicide). But notice, the role of the husband—like his status as the image of God—is expressed in terms of a figure. As a husband, Malbecco's duty is the imitation of Christ, that is, the conscious effort to be like—better, to be the likeness of Christ. In other words, to be a sign. But this, Malbecco will not do. Rather than give himself up for his wife, he seeks to force this burden onto her—to make her a figure for Christ, who will surrender herself in service to him.

As a husband and a human, Malbecco was intended by God—the author of the world text—to be read figuratively. But Hellenore’s husband insists upon reading himself literally and requires that his wife do the same. And in so doing, he tries to subject Hellenore to that "death of the soul" that Augustine warned awaited those who insist upon reading a figure literally.6 Hellenore refuses to comply and

6. De Doctrina Christiana, III.5.9
escapes. (Whether to a better or worse death of the soul, I cannot say.) But not so for Malbecco, for, the undying second death is precisely what awaits him.

Through his study of the Christian canon, St. George was directed to that Reality to which that text points—the Triune God. And by means of that study, he was transformed into the likeness of that reality, into the image of God, which is found in Christ. Malbecco, though, by devoting himself to the literal reading of a figurative sign has been transformed instead into that to which he has devoted himself—a mere sign. He loses all his substance—even his identity is defaced—and devolves into a mere abstraction that can do nothing but point to itself. And so, in this way, he becomes “Gelosy.” All because he “forgot he was a man,” which is, for Spenser and Augustine before him, as good as saying he forgot he was a sign, and not the reality he read himself to be.

Having undergone the education of Book I, the tutelage of the Law in Book II, and now, the grappling toward wisdom with Britomart in Book III, the reader is expected to read this scene aright—to see the failure of Malbecco not merely as a deviation from the norms of Christian marriage, though it is that, nor even as idolatry, though it is that, too, but like all idolatry, as a failure to “reed” the text of the divinely-authored world correctly. Having done so, the attentive reader will continue into the penultimate canto of the book with these deeply interconnected concerns of marriage, idolatry, reading, and the usurpation of the divine prerogative in mind. And having done so, he will find himself faced with them again immediately—in fact, from the very first line:

O Hatefull hellish Snake, what furie furst
Brought thee from balefull house of Proserpine,
Where in her bosome she thee long had nurst,
And fostred vp with bitter milke of tine,
Fowle Gealosy, that turnest loue diuine
To ioylesse dread, and mak’st the louing hart

7. Ironically, this, too, points to God, who is himself a “ielouse God” (Exod 20:5).
With hatefull thoughts to languish and to pine,
And feed it selfe with selfe-consuming smart?
Of all the passions in the mind thou vilest art.

O let him far be banished away,
And in his stead let Loue for euer dwell (FQ III.xi.1.1–2.2)

Dressed though it is in the guise of Classical myth, this hellish serpent can be none other than that “olde ferpent, called the deuil” who tempted Eve in Eden. It is not only in the association with Hell that this is to be seen, but in the association with “Gelosy.” There is a long tradition in both Jewish and Christian interpretation which sees the devil’s temptation of Eve as motivated by envy. For readers of Paradise Lost, this tradition is quite familiar, a theme that pervades the poem and is seen perhaps most clearly when Milton’s Satan first sets eyes on the primordial couple:

... with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreprov’d,
And meek surrender, half imbracing leand
On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
Naked met his under the flowing Gold
Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil’d with superior Love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles, when he impregns the Clouds
That shed May Flowers; and press’d her Matron lip
With kisses pure: aside the Devil turnd
For envie, yet with jealous leer maligne
Ey’d them askance, and to himself thus plained. (Paradise Lost IV.492–504; emphasis added)

This tradition of a jealous Satan, though, is much older than Milton, finding its first attestation in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, where one reads that “thorow enuy of the deuil came death into the worlde” (Wis 2:24). With this comparison, then, the “Gelosy” of Malbecco takes on a new resonance. For, no longer are we dealing with jealousy in abstraction; now, we have in view the paradigmatic case of the paradigmatic sinner and self-idolator—the Devil himself.
It will become important in our discussion to have noticed a few more details here, as they will resurface below. First, notice that this devilish jealousy is associated with “joylesse dread.” And second, that it is opposed to “Loue”—not just any love, but love with a capital L. In the Christian tradition, and especially in a context so evocative of Satan, this “love divine” cannot help being identified with the Christian God—the God who is himself love (1 John 4:16). To these themes, we will return shortly, but for now, it need only be noticed that they have been invoked, that from the very beginning they form a part of the context of what follows.

The Fire at the Gates: Approaching the House of Busirane

Now, we come at last to the discussion of our passage. And before we begin, I must offer a brief disclaimer. As I said already, few passages in the poem have proven as provocative to scholars as this one. The literature is vast, and from some of it I have learned a great deal. In what follows, I will offer what is, so far as I can tell, a reading with some novel suggestions derived from an emphasis upon the Bible and the discourses of early modern religion, rather than on Ovid and Petrarch and secular love. This is not to say that those other discourses are irrelevant to the passage, or that the treatments of it in light of them need to be cast aside. Far from it. We have seen so many times already that it almost goes without saying that these biblical and Classical readings need not be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, I am confident that Spenser means for them to be seen as part of the same whole. But before we can see the whole, the biblical part must be sketched—and that is the task I have set for myself here.

In *The Faerie Queene* III.xi, we find ourselves reunited with Britomart, the Vertuous Woman to whom we gave so much thought above. When last we saw her, she was seeking refuge in Malbecco’s castle. From there, she parted ways with Paridell, and later with her more faithful companion, Sir Sa-
tyrane, to continue her quest to find her would-be husband. And as we pick up her tale again, we find her confronted with the sad case of Sir Scudamore. This knight, who bears the image of Cupid on his shield, she finds lying disarmed on the ground, mourning the loss of Amoret, his lady love. For, as we soon discover, Amoret has been kidnapped by the wicked sorcerer, Busirane, and imprisoned in his enchanted house. Despairing of ever recovering her, Scudamore tells his sad tale and shakes his fist at heaven and the God whose justice has allowed it. Notice that in questioning the divine plan, Scudamore, like Job long before, flirts with the sin of pride—a pride that would see in the self a match for, even the superior of, the Creator. But it is no voice from the whirlwind who answers him—only Britomart, who, like the Vertuous Woman she is, rallies him with words of wisdom and the affirmation of the “law of grace.”

Ah gentle knight, whose deepe conceiued griefe  
Well seemes t‘exceede the powre of patience,  
Yet if that heuenny grace some good reliefe  
You send, submit you to high prouidence,  
And euer in your noble hart prepense,  
That all the sorrow in the world is lesse,  
Then vertues might, and values confidence.  
For who nill bide the burden of distresse,  
Must not here thinke to liue: for life is wretchednesse. (FQ III.xi.14)

That done, and hearing of the awful power that Amoret’s captor wields, the lady-knight offers Scudamore her aid to “deliuer her fro thence, or with her for [him] dy” (FQ III.xi.18.9). In this offer of self-sacrifice, we can already hear an echo of Christ and the role of the Christian husband. We need not be too harsh with Scudamore on this point, though, I think, for, he stands at the end of the book as the one in need of deliverance. Like Verdant in the Bower of Bliss and the people of Eden before him, Scudamore, too, stands in need of a patron saint—in his case, the saint of Chastity. At the same time, though, it should be noted that it is not merely Amoret that Britomart’s chastity is meant to save, but Scudamore, too—the marital love of both spouses.
With this offer of self-sacrifice on his behalf, Britomart rallies the dolorous knight, and the two make their way to the House of Busirane.

There they dismounting, drew their weapons bold
And stoutly came unto the Castle gate;
Whereas no gate they found, them to withhold,
Nor ward to wait at morn and evening late,
But in the Porch, that did them sore amate,
A flaming fire, ymixt with smouldry smoke,
And stinking Sulphure, that with griesly hate
And dreadfull horror did all entraunce choke,
Enforced them their forward footing to revoke.

Greatly thereat was Britomart dismayd,
Ne in that stownd wist, how her selfe to beare;
For daunger vaine it were, to haue assayd
That cruell element, which all things feare,
Ne none can suffer to approchen neare:
And turning backe to Scudamour, thus sayd;
What monstrous enmity prouoke we heare,
Foolhardy, as the Earthes children, which made
Batteill against the Gods? so we a God invade. (FQ III.xi.21–22)

What are we dealing with? Faced with a wall of sulphurous flames, Britomart asks the obvious and all-important question and, in the same breath, provides her own answer. It is a god. But notice, it is only “a god,” not the Christian God. This possibility, no doubt, has been excluded by Scudamore’s account of Amoret’s abduction. It is an enchanter they face, not the Creator. And yet, Britomart’s conclusion that it is a god after all will not seem amiss to the attentive reader, for, Spenser has already given clues that point, if not to God, then, to an imitation of him.

Note the nature of the wall of flames. Fire mixed with “stinking Sulphure” is one of the most common forms of divine judgment found in the Christian canon. Though the Geneva Bible opts for “brimſtone” rather than “ſulphure,” the two were, indeed, synonymous already in Spenser’s day. And

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8. The underlying Hebrew term is רֶפֶרֶבְרָה.

so, one finds this form of judgment scattered across the breadth of the canon—from Sodom and Go-
morrah where “brimstone, and fire” rained from heaven (Gen 19:24) to that “lake of fyre, burning with
brimstone” which awaits the wicked at the end of time (Rev 19:20). Perhaps also relevant here is the
ultimate fate of the armies of Satan who surrounded the camp of God and were consumed by fire from
heaven (Rev 20:9). Thus, for all that this is a magician’s home, it is guarded by the weapon of God him-
self. And the implication is clear—the magician represents himself as occupying the divine seat, and so,
to challenge him is to face the damnation that comes to all who challenge that seat.

Britomart, though, is not buying it. Undeceived by these magical fireworks, she presses on, urg-
ing Scudamore to give his assessment of how they might best proceed:

Daunger without discretion to attempt,
   Inglorious and beastlike is: therefore Sir knight,
   Aread what course of you is safest dempt,
   And how we with our foe may come to fight. (FQ III.xi.23.1–4)

Note the pun on “read” here. Of course, Britomart is asking him to simply “declare” his thoughts on
their course of action. But just below the surface is the notion that she is asking him to engage in reading
the signs that have been presented to them and, so, to “rede” how they ought to proceed. That this is the
case is subtly indicated in what follows:

This is (quoth he) the dolorous despight,
   Which earst to you I playnd: for neither may
   This fire be quencht by any witt or might,
   Ne yet by any meanes remou’d away;
So mighty be th’enchauntments, which the same do stay.

What is there ells, but cease these fruitlesse paines,
   And leaue me to my former languishing?
Faire Amorett must dwell in wicked chaines,
   And Scudamore here die with sorrowing,
Perdy not so; (saide shee) for shameful thing
   Yt were t’abandon noble cheuisaunce,
For shewe of perill, without venturing:
Rather let try extremities of chaunce,  
Then enterprised praise for dread to disauaunce. (FQ III.xi.23.5–24.9)

Scudamore, it seems, has bought into the show. The fire, for him, is real and impassable. What it threatens, it can perform, and so, the only course of action is to return to the state in which Britomart found him—hopeless, unarmed despair.

Not so, Britomart. She is not willing to accept the “shewe” at face value, but will try its reality with action.

Therewith resolu’d to proue her vtmost might,  
Her ample shield she threw before her face,  
And her swords point directing forward right,  
Assayld the flame, the which eftesoones gaue place,  
And did it selfe diuide with equall space,  
That through she passed, as a thonder bolt  
Perceth the yielding ayre, and doth displace  
The soring clouds into sad showres ymolt;  
So to her yold the flames, and did their force reuolt. (FQ III.xi.25)

Like the bolt of Jove that scattered the Titans, Britomart parts the flames. But this is not the only allusion to be found in this stanza. Notice with what our heroine leads her charge—her shield and her sword. Now, this is hardly noteworthy at the literal level. What else would a knight in a romance such as this do? But we must not forget that in the background of the poem and its knights often lurks the notion of the “armour of God” in Ephesians 6:10–18, mentioned by Spenser in his “Letter to Raleigh.” If one is to see that armor signalled here—and I will let the strength of the whole reading be the evidence that we should—then, Britomart’s cliché action in assaulting the fire takes on another level of meaning entirely.

She throws her shield before her, which is, in Ephesians 6:16, “the shield of Faith, wherewith you may extinguish al the firie darter of the most wicked one.”10 It is with faith, then, that Britomart encoun-

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10. The translation here is taken not from the Geneva Bible, which reads, “Aboue all, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye may quench all the fyrie darters of the wicked,” but from the Douay Rheims New Testament. It is not my contention,
ters this fiery display of magical, God-imitating power. This added context only solidifies what would have already been clear to the early modern reader—the power of this enchanter finds its source not in God, but in demons, even the Devil himself.

We saw this connection in the person of Archimago, the hermit-enchanter of Book I. He, too, dared to represent himself as a perverted image of Christ, summoning, rather than casting out, Legion. And this is what one expects from wizards. For, like the demon who is their ultimate source of power, their magic is all worked in imitation of the divine. God works miracles, but demons work magic—the trick is to be able to tell the difference. Britomart has learned the trick, it seems, and so, responds to this demonic imitation appropriately.

But it is not only her shield with which she leads; she also wields her sword, “the sworde of y Spirit, which is the worde of God” (Eph 6:17). With Fidelia and her bloody book in hand, Britomart parts the flames and passes safely through. But Scudamore is not so fortunate:

\[
\text{Whome whenas Scudamour saw past the fire,} \\
\text{Safe and vntoucht, he likewise gan assay,} \\
\text{With greedy will, and enuious desire,} \\
\text{And bad the stubborne flames to yield him way:} \\
\text{But cruell Mulciber would not obay} \\
\text{His threatfull pride, but did the more augment} \\
\text{His mighty rage, and with imperious sway} \\
\text{Him forst (maulgre) his fercenes to relent,} \\
\text{And backe retire, all scorcht and pitifully brent. (FQ III.xi.26)}
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Note the vast differences in his approach. Scudamore leads neither with shield nor sword, neither with faith nor the Word of God. Instead, he pits his own word against the flames, dabbling in magical com-

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pulsion himself, and bids them let him pass. Further, where Britomart is described only as “resolu’d,” Scudamore acts with “threatfull pride.” He, it seems, has not learned the lessons of the House of Holiness. He leaves aside the instruction of Fidelia and her bloody book, indeed, he foregoes the low door of humility. Having misread the wizard’s “shewe,” he tries to challenge it on those terms. And in this way, the endeavor becomes exactly what Britomart feared it would be—the prideful attempt to challenge a god. Again, we see Scudamore acting in ways all too similar to his foe. The significance of this similarity, for all that the reader, no doubt, sees it already, will have to wait until we have met the magician himself.

_Passing the Porch: Into Cupid’s Tabernacle_ 

Britomart, meanwhile, proceeds into the wizard’s house where she finds a richly decorated room, with tapestries hung on every wall, and, at the far end, a shrine to the god whose place this really is: Cupid.

The utmost rowme, abounding with all precious store.

For round about, the walls yclothed were
With goodly arras of great majesty,
Wouen with gold and silke so close and nere,
That the rich metall lurked priuily,
As faining to be hidd from enuious eye;
Yet here, and there, and euery where vnwares
It shewd it selfe, and shone vnwillingly;
Like to a discolourd Snake, whose hidden snares
Through the greene gras his long bright burnisht back declares. (FQ III.xi.27.9–28.9)

Note the passing reference to a snake here, too. In this context, it is hard to imagine this snake as anything but the Devil in reptilian guise. But as we have already seen, this is not a shrine to Lucifer, but to Cupid, the pagan god of love. The idol at the upper end of the room depicts the winged son of Venus. The tapestries, too, depict the stories of that god’s many triumphs over the rest of the Classical pantheon.

From Jove, down to his own mother, the walls of the room are covered with little monuments “to shew
Dan Cupid’s powre” (FQ III.xi.46.5). And in the Classical context, this litany of victories is quite impressive. But the Christian cannot help noticing that there is one god missing—Christ. However, there are implicit attempts to claim that victory, too. Take the description of the altar, for example:

Blyndfold he was, and in his cruell fist
A mortall bow and arrowes keene did hold,
With which he shot at randon, when him list,
Some headed with sad lead, some with pure gold;
(Ah man beware, how thou those dartes behold)
A wounded Dragon vnder him did ly,
Whose hideous tayle his lefte foot did enfold,
And with a shaft was shot through either eye,
That no man forth might draw, ne no man remedye. (FQ III.xi. 48)

Our interest here lies primarily with the dragon. Situated as he is at the feet of the victor god, this image is a clear allusion to the so-called “Protoevangelion” of Genesis 3:15: “I wil also put enimitie betwene thee and the woma, & betwene thy feule & her feule. He shal breake thine head, & thou shalt bruife his heele.” As we saw above in our discussion of Artegaill, this verse was often applied to Christ. Thus, the idol is here being cast as a parody of the crucified Christ, a veritable Cupid Victor—a portrayal that is underscored by the suggestive inscription at its feet: “And vnderneath his feet was written thus, / Unto the Victor of the Gods this bee:” (FQ III.xi.49.1–2).

The opposition between Cupid and the Christian Savior was not unprecedented in early modern England. It was one played out in the tension between sacred and secular ballads in the latter half of the sixteenth century, where it found no clearer expression than the ringing challenge laid down by William Elderton:

Tell me is Christ, or Cupide Lord?
doth God or Venus reigne?
And whose are wee? whom ought wee serve?
I ask it, answer plaine. 12

The reason for this opposition, though, is given in the title of Elderton’s poem, “The gods of love.” That Cupid is a god of love needs no explanation, and perhaps neither does the Christian God’s claim to the title. For, the phrase of 1 John 4:16, “God is love,” is familiar enough. The question to ask, then, is, what sort of love does each of these represent?

Thus far, we have seen two kinds of love. The first—modeled by Malbecco, Hellenore, Paridell, and a host of others—is idolatrous love. It is characterized by infidelity, mastery and slavery, and ultimately with idolatry. The other—modeled in Britomart, of course, but also in the Red Crosse Knight, Una, and Arthur—is that faithful, self-sacrificing love of a servant. The nature of this love is expressed nowhere more clearly than in the passage we have already mentioned, 1 John 4:7–10, 17:

7Beloued, let vs loue one another: for loue cometh of God, & euerie one that loueth, is borne of God, and knoweth God. 8He that loueth not, knoweth not God: for God is loue. 9In this appeared ý loue of God towarde vs, becauſe God ſent his onely begottẽ Sonne into the worlde, that we might liue through him. 10Herein is loue, not that we loued God, but that he loued vs, and ſent his ſonne to be a reconciliation for our ſinnes.… Herein is the loue perfite in vs, that we ſhulde haue boldenes in the day of iudgement: for as he is, euſe fo are we in this worlde.

Here, again, the pinnacle example and model of love is the sacrifice of Christ. As we will see, the significance of this passage extends beyond this single, though central detail, and so, we shall return to it shortly. But, for now, we should take this opportunity to notice that 1 John has also described something like that other love, the love of Malbecco and Malecasta and all the rest:

15Loue not the worlde, nether the things that are in the worlde, If any mã loue the worlde, ý loue of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the worlde (as the luſte of the fleſh, the luſte of the eyes, & the pride of life) is not of ý Father, but is of the worlde. 17And the worlde paſſeth awaye, and the luſte thereof: but he that fullfillith the wil of God, abideth euer. (2:15–17)

The resonances with the above-mentioned characters hardly need explication. The desire of the eyes and the flesh, the association with pride, the ultimate fate in death—all of these, we have seen again and again. Taken alongside the biblical resonances invoked already in this passage, perhaps these are
enough to associate Cupid with the love of the world. But there is one other piece of evidence that will perhaps convince the unpersuaded, and this is found in the following verse: “Babes, it is the last time, and as ye haue heard that Antichrist ſhal come, euẽ now are there many Antichriſts: whereby we knowe that it is the laſt time” (1 John 2:18).

All the echoes we have seen of Satan in Busirane’s house, along with the parody of Christ found in his image of Cupid, god of love, can only suggest to the canonical reader the picture of the Antichrist—the ultimate opponent and parody of the Son of God, who is also the master of all those who love the world. Ringing in the background, here, are the echoes of the early modern anti-Catholic polemic, but we shall have to fend these off for a little longer as we explore another way in which this passage sets up Cupid as a parody of God and would-be usurper of his throne—the architecture of the magician’s house.

In this, the first room of the house, its walls of embroidered silk and gold cannot help suggesting the walls of the biblical Tabernacle, as only a brief glance at Exodus 25–27 will show. Take, for example, Exodus 26:1: “thou ſhalt make the Tabernacle with ten curtaines of fine twined linen, and blewe ſilke, and purple, & ſkarlet: & in thẽ thou ſhalt make Cherubíms of broidred worke.” Or again in verse 31: “thou ſhalt make a vaile of blewe ſilke, and purple, and ſkarlet, and fine twined linen: thou ſhalt make it of broidred worke with Cherubíms.” Combine this with the eight instances of the word “golde” in this one chapter and one is not far from Spenser’s “walls yclothed ... With goodly arras of great ma-

13. This observation, which has formed the basis of the rest of my analysis, I owe to Lisa Wayland, personal communication. Though no one has, to my knowledge, connected Busirane’s chapel to the Old Testament Tabernacle before, others have seen in it an idolatrous temple. So, Angus Fletcher in his *The Prophetic Moment* can refer to Busirane’s house as a “demonic parody of the temple,” (1971, 37); though, for Fletcher, it is only one of many such parodies to be found in the poem, with no apparent connection to either the Old Testament Tabernacle or Temple. (The latter shrine will be discussed below.) Kenneth Gross, whose *Spenserian Poetics* is deeply engaged with both the Old Testament and biblical scholarship, likewise, makes of the enchanter’s house a temple but, surprisingly, without connecting it to its Israelite model (1985, 162). Finally, Linda Gregerson’s *The Reformation of the Subject* similarly makes of the house a temple and yet fails to make the connection—unless this is what she meant by the laconic remark, “in the House of Busirane, for instance, the Old Testament configuration appears in Ovidian and Petrarchan vocabularies” (1995, 61). But in the context, this extremely apt characterization appears to refer not to the configuration of the Israelite tent-shrine, but to the Old Testament analogy between idolatry and sexual lust.
Woven with gold and silke so close and nere.” In addition to the materials, though, note the shared content of these embroidered cloths. In the one are simply “Cherubim,” in the other, “all Cupids warres.” But note, Cupid is himself a cherub. By this, of course, I do not mean the sphinx-like creatures modern biblical scholars now associate with that word; rather, I mean the little winged angels famously depicted, for example, in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel fresco. And more importantly, though of far less fame, compare the illustration of the Tabernacle tapestries provided in the Geneva Bible. (Figure VI.1)

The little cherub faces that adorn the Tabernacle walls, then, look exactly like the face of Cupid. But where they represent there the heavenly host, the faces of God’s own divine council, in Busirane’s house, they have been perverted to portraits of the winged god’s victories, to his efforts to conquer the pantheon, and so, to rival YHWH himself.

Of course, it will be noted that the allusion does not work perfectly. The cherubim in Exodus 26 do not adorn the outer court of the Tabernacle; that is, they are not found in the equivalent of the outer room. Rather, they are found in the Holy Place. What, then, are we to make of this discrepancy? The similarities between the two structures seem too suggestive, the suitability of the allusion too strong for it to be dismissed on this account, and so, we must look for another answer. And for that, we must seek further on, to see what awaits in the next room of the house.
But before we do, we must simply note in passing the inscription over Busirane’s front door that will become important to our discussion shortly.  

Tho as she backward cast her busie eye,
    To search each secrete of that goodly sted,
Ouer the dore thus written she did spye
    Bee bold: she oft and oft it ouer-red,
Yet could not find what sence it figured:
    But what so were therein, or writ or ment,
She was no whit thereby discouraged,
    From prosecuting of her first intent,
But forward with bold steps into the next roome went. (FQ III.xi.50)

The meaning of the words “Bee bold,” we will explore in our next section. But for now, it should simply be noted that the themes of reading and Britomart as reader have not disappeared from the scene. Note the overt signals to the reading process involved here: the motto is “over-red” to try and puzzle out “what sence” the phrase “figured.” That is, they are grasped as signs, not idols, and so, treated as they ought. And it is true that, at this point, Britomart has not yet been able to reach their signifier, but she is put on the right foot by the mere attempt to do so. And in seeing this attempt, the reader, too, is invited to do the same—though, he is unlikely to fair much better at this early stage. And, I suggest, neither he nor Britomart will be helped in their endeavor when, proceeding “with bold steps” (FQ III.xi.50.9) into the next room, they find: “How ouer that same dore was likewise writ, / Be bolde, be bolde, and euery where Be bold” (FQ III.xi.54.2–3).

Of course, the attempt goes on. Britomart, and presumably the reader, too, tries again to unravel this small mystery, but is again unsuccessful.

That much she muz’d, yet could not construe it
By any ridling skill, or commune wit.

14. Hamilton, 2001 suggests that the words are written over the door that lies in front of Britomart, behind the altar, but surely the justification for looking back that Spenser provides—namely, searching out mysteries—is meant to exclude the notion of doubt from the character of Britomart. For, it seems to me, the line, “Bee bold” is meant to be met by the doubt-ful, backward glance of Busirane’s visitor, and so, to encourage her onward.
At last she spyde at that rowmes uppere end,  
Another yron dore, on which was writ,  
*Be not too bold;* whereto though she did bend  
Her earnest minde, yet wist not what it might intend. (*FQ III.xi.54.4–9*)  

Here, the mystery that has now been named a riddle is complete. The third, and contradictory, installment in the series, too, proves impenetrable at this point for both Britomart and, perhaps still, the reader, too. And before we can begin to unpack it, we must put it aside for a moment and return to our discussion of that other riddle posed earlier—the relationship between the Tabernacle and the House of Busirane.

*The Temple, the Cathedral, and the Search for the Divine Presence*

We saw above that the first room of the enchanter’s house is portrayed as an imitation of the Holy Place of the Israelite Tabernacle, and so, walking into the second room, one might expect to find the innermost room of that tent-shrine, the Holy of Holies, but one looks for that in vain. Rather, one finds something of an altogether different sort:

Much fayrer, then the former, was that roome,  
And richlier by many partes arayd:  
For not with arras made in painefull loome,  
But with pure gold it all was ouerlayd,  
Wrought with wilde Antickes, which their follies playd,  
In the rich metall, as they liuing were:  
A thousand monstrous formes therein were made,  
Such as false loue doth oft vpon him weare,  
For loue in thousand monstrous formes doth oft appeare. (*FQ III.xi.51*)

This description, of course, echoes not the Tabernacle, but the Holy Place of the Jerusalem Temple. For, Solomon, we are told,

couered the houſe within with pure golde: and he flut the paloce of the oracle with chaines of golde, and couered it with golde. 22And he ouerlaied the house with golde, vntil all the hufe was made perfit ... 29And he carued all the walles of the houſe round about with grauen figures of Cherubims and of palme trees, and grauen flowres within and without. (1 Kgs 6:21–22, 29)
Like the Temple’s Holy Place, the inner room of Busirane’s house is overlaid with gold, and, once again, we find the faces of cherubim perverted into an account of the victories of Cupid. And if that weren’t enough, this golden room, as we have seen already, comes complete with another door that was “locked fast” (FQ III.xii.27.7), like the chained door to the Holy of Holies itself. The connections, then, could not be more clear, and once they have been noticed, a further parallel—undoubtedly more tenuous—presents itself.

Look, for a moment, at the illustration of Solomon’s Temple found in the Geneva Bible (Figure VI.2). Notice, at the bottom, that the door to the House of God is blocked by a wall of flames—precisely like the gate to the House of Busirane. Now, in the context of the Geneva Bible, this figure is, of course, intended to be a close-up detail of the entire Temple complex. And in that light, the fire at the gate is clearly the fire of the altar in the outer court and has nothing to do with any enchanted wall of fire. But the reader looking back at Busirane’s front door from the golden-walled inner room, I suggest, cannot help imagining the way Spenser would have viewed this image in his Geneva Bible. The two imposing images of Cupid looming at the upper end, the golden walls, and not least, the displaced sacrificial fire at the bottom—all are suggestive of his enchanter’s house. In that light, it is perhaps worth remembering what we have said above about the two types of love that are being opposed in this passage: the mastering, worldly love of Cupid and the self-sacrificial love of Christ. If the wall of flames at the gate is meant to be not merely a sign of divine judgement, but an echo of the altar of sacrifice, it is not surprising that it was Britomart,
and not Scudamore, who was willing to throw herself upon it in service of her quest to “deliuer [Amoret] ... or with her for [him] dy” (FQ III.xi.18.9).

Whether the Geneva Bible’s illustration was the source of this particular image or not, though, the meaning the source would suggest seems to fit perfectly with the larger point Spenser is driving at in this passage. But what it does not do is resolve our question of what to make of the presence of the Temple’s Holy Place juxtaposed with that of the Tabernacle. But for the canonical reader, the answer to this question will seem perhaps rather obvious. What Spenser appears to be doing is constructing a canonical image of the various biblical loci of the Divine Presence.

Common to the Temple and the Tabernacle, beyond similarity of structure and ritual sacrifice, is that they were both intended as the locus of the Divine Presence for the people of Israel. It was there, in those shrines, that the people could approach God directly. This was ubiquitously the significance of these structures among early modern Protestant authors, but just as pervasive was the interpretation of them as figures for something else. What that something else was exactly developed, but it always began with the incarnation and Christ.

This understanding of Jesus as, in some way, a locus of the Divine Presence is found in the New Testament, where it is already associated with both the Tabernacle and the Temple. In John 1:14, “the Worde was made fleſh, and dwelt [ἐσκηνοσχε] among vs, (and we ſawe the glorie thereof, as the glorie of the onely begotten Sonne of the Father) ful of grace and trueth.” The Greek word translated here as “dwelt,” designates more specifically the image of a tent, as the Geneva gloss to this verse notes, and, in fact, is based on the same root as the Septuagint translation for τεμένος (“the Tabernacle”): σκηνη. Seeing the “glorie” of the “Sonne” of God, thus, “tabernacled” can only suggest to the canonical reader the

15. Naturally, Ismen’s similar spell in Tasso’s demon-haunted wood is to be seen as a source here as well. Again, I do not wish to preclude the influence of non-biblical literature, but only to point out the often-shared role that biblical sources do play.
filling of the Holy of Holies found in Exodus 40:34: “Then the cloude couered the Tabernacle of the Congragacion, and the glorie of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.”

The incarnation of the Word, then, is expressed in terms of the Tabernacle, but, likewise, it is framed in terms of the Temple, and this, according to the Gospels, by Jesus himself. “Deſtroye this temple,” he said to the Jews in John 2:19, “and in thre dayes I wil raise it vp againe.” And here, as the narrator tells us, he was not speaking of the great Second Temple in Jerusalem, but of himself as the localization of the Divine Presence in human form. There are, of course, other texts which the canonical reader would invoke to construct a Christian theology of the Divine Presence,¹⁶ and some of these we will explore shortly. But the immediate point at issue is that in the New Testament, the effort to construct such a theology was already in evidence. This foundational effort spawned an ongoing discourse in Christian theology that developed through the patristic and medieval periods and found new expression, and new controversy, in the Reformation. And it is to this discourse, I suggest, that Spenser is gesturing with these Cupidian parodies of the divine dwelling.

If the reader has not picked up on this point by the end of Canto xi, Spenser has tried his best to drive it home with the opening of Canto xii.

Tho when as cheareless Night ycouered had
  Fayre heauen with an vniuersall clowd,
  That euery wight dismayd with darkenes sad,
  In silence and in sleepe themselues did shrowd,
  She heard a shrilling Trompet sound alowd,
  Signe of nigh battaill, or got victory;
  Nought therewith daunted was her courage prowd,
  But rather stird to druell enmity,
  Expecting euer, when some foe she might descry.

  With that, an hideous storme of winde arose,
      With dreadfull thunder and lightning atwixt,

¹⁶. One example of this ongoing theology in the Middle Ages is to be found on the page of the Biblia Pauperum seen above, chapter III, n8.
And an earthquake, as if it streight would lose
The worlds foundations from his centre fixt;
A direfull stench of smoke and sulphure mixt
Ensewed, whose noyaunce fild the feareful sted (FQ III.xii.1.1–2.6)

Scholars have long seen in these lines an allusion to the theophanies of YHWH depicted in Exodus 19
and 1 Kings 19. The earthquake, the trumpet, the storm, and smoke and lightning—all these are to be
found in those biblical accounts.17 And so, when, in a few stanzas, a “stormy whirlwind” sweeps through
the house and blows open the locked door to what the reader has come to expect is an unholy Holy of
Holies, we are unsurprised to find that it is Cupid himself who emerges (FQ III.xii.3, 22). The blasphem-
ous parody is completed as the “winged god” emerges from his inner sanctum, heralded by the signs
of the coming of the biblical God in all his glory. But what must be noticed is that the usurper does not
come alone, nor even first, through the locked door.

All suddeinly a stormy whirlwind blew
Throughout the house, that clapped euery dore,
With which that yron wicket open flew,
As it with mighty leuers had bene tore:
And forth yssewd, as on the readie flore
Of some Theatre, a graue personage,
That in his hand a braunch of laurell bore,
With comely naueour and count’nance sage,
Yclad in costly garments, fit for tragicke Stage.

Proceeding to the midst, he stil did stand,
As if in minde he somewhat had to say,
And to the vulgare beckning with his hand,
In signe of silence, as to heare a play,
By liuely actions he gan bewray
Some argument of matter passioned;
Which doen, he backe retyred soft away,
And passing by, his name discouered,
Ease, on his robe in golden letters cyphered. (FQ III.xii.3–4)

17. See, for example, Naseeb Shaheen, Biblical References in The Faerie Queene (Memphis, Tenn.: Memphis State University Press, 1976), 127.
The figure, Ease, emerges as a sort of master of ceremonies for what is to follow. For, in his wake follows a “joyous fellowship” of personifications, the significance of which cannot be our business here, nor can the tragic figure of Amoret in its midst, which we will discuss in the following section. For our present purposes, the significance of this “maske of Cupid” lies elsewhere, in its relationship to the theme of the Divine Presence. For, there is an analogy to this sort of ritual and theatrical pomp associated with that theme in early modern England, and it is to be found in the Catholic Mass.

For Catholic theology, the Mass remained the central mode of access to the Divine Presence, specifically to the incarnation of Christ found in the Eucharist. The consecrated host made of the parish church not merely a meeting house, but, in fact, a house containing the Divine Presence in a way not dissimilar to the Israelite Tabernacle and Temple. Thus, we may see yet another building alluded to in the House of Busirane—the Catholic church. Like the enchanter’s abode, these, too, were richly furnished in gold and precious cloth, and their walls, likewise, were adorned with sacred art—in this case, usually scenes from the Gospels. And at the center of this lavish piety stood the celebration of the Mass. As one scholar has described it,

Every Sunday and on the thirty-five or forty important feast days of the Church year, Christians witnessed Mass, the holy drama recreating the bloody sacrifice on Calvary. A dramatic ceremonial, it was enriched through the graphic embroidering of ornament, symbolic movement and the repetition of details which eventually led to the consecration itself.

The theatricality of the Mass was seized upon by the Reformers and savagely attacked. Take, for example, Luther’s cutting remark on the private Mass:

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20. Ibid.
The private mass is the greatest blaspheming of God, and the highest idolatry upon earth, an
abomination the like to which has never been in Christendom since the time of the apostles.\footnote{21}

We have seen already in the figure of Archimago the connection between magic and the Mass,
and, with the reminder of that fact, the picture of the House of Busirane comes at last into focus. What
Britomart has stumbled into in her quest to rescue captive Amoret is none other than a Catholic Cathed-
dral as seen by the Protestant Reformers—a magician’s shrine built in mock imitation of the Temple and
Tabernacle of God, guarded by illusion and laden with blasphemous idolatry. And at the center of it all
is Cupid, the false god of worldly love—perhaps better, “the god of this worlde” (2 Cor 4:4)—the satanic
Antichrist himself. But what of Busirane, the man whose house this is? Where is he? There is yet another
room to explore, and so, the reader assumes he waits within. But he, if not Britomart, approaches the
locked door to the inner sanctum knowing already what sort of place this is, and so, will see all he finds
there in that light.

\textit{Into the Holy of Holies: Approaching the Throne of Love}

As the reader passes beneath those warning words, “Be not too bold,” he is finally prepared to
see what “sence … it figured,” for, he will, no doubt, recall that boldness is a theme found throughout
the Christian canon, and one not incidental to a canonical understanding of the Divine Presence. The
central text in this regard is to be found in the letter to the Hebrews:

\begin{quote}
14Seeing the that we have a great hie Prieft, which is entred into heauen, even Iesu the Sonne of
God, let vs holde faft our profession. 15For we have not an hye Prieft, which can not be touched
with the feling of our infirmities, but was in all things tempted in like sorte, yet without finne.
16Let vs therefore go boldely vnto ý throne of grace, that we may receiue mercie, & finde grace to
helpe in time of nede. (Heb 4:14–16)
\end{quote}

\footnote{21. Martin Luther, \textit{The Table Talk of Martin Luther} (ed. and trans. William Hazlitt; London: Bell & Daldy, 1872), 69. It is, perhaps, fitting that this quote addresses the private mass in particular, for, like Cupid’s maske, it was a ceremony ordinarily carried out without witnesses, purely for the sake of the “magician-priest” and the god/God he served.}
Here, in this discussion of the relationship between the Old Testament institutions and the New Testament’s Christian hope, the author to the Hebrews describes the very act in which Britomart is engaged—entering the Holy of Holies. Because of the sacrifice of Christ, this once-restricted domain—accessible only to the High Priest, and only once a year under the Law—has been thrown wide open to the believer, who now enters “boldly” into the presence of God. The Reformers seized upon this and like passages in their denouncement of the clergy, in favor of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. For them, the Divine Presence was not to be found any longer in the consecrated host, accessible only to the professional clergy, nor even in the church buildings that housed them. It was open and free to all, provided they believed in Christ. By what means, we will see shortly, but for the present, the point is that it was no longer something that needed warning against boldness. On the contrary, because of the priestly and sacrificial office of Christ, boldness was precisely the way the believer ought to approach the Holy of Holies.

But it should be remembered that what Britomart, and the reader, are walking into is not the Holy of Holies, but a demonic parody thereof. And in this light, the warning over the door takes on new meaning. It is a reminder of that boldness which we have seen already condemned, the boldness of the usurper who would set himself up in the place of God. Archimago was such a one, a “bold bad man” whose magic efforts sought, at every turn, to challenge the champion of the bloody cross. A similar, negative side to boldness is to be found in the Bible as well. Take, for example, 1 Samuel 13:7–14:

7 And some of the Ebrewes went ouer Iordén vnto the land of Gad & Gileád: and Saúl was yet in Gilgál, and all the people for feare followed him. 8 And he taried feuē dayes, according vnto the time that Samuël had appointed: but Samuél came not to Gilgál, therefore the people were sectred from him. 9 And Saúl said, Bring a burnt offring to me and peace offrings: and he offred a burnt offring. 10 And asone as he had made an end of offring the burnt offring, beholde, Samuél came: and Saul went forthe to mete him, to salute him. 11 And Samuél said, What haft

thou done? Then Saúl said, Because I fawe that the people was feartred from me, and that thou cameft not within the dayes appointed, and that the Philiftims gathered the felues together to Michmáh, 

Therefore said I, The Philiftims wil come downe now vpon me to Gilgál, and I haue not made supplicacion vnto the Lord. I was bolde therefore and offred a burnt offring. 

And Samué faid to Saúl, Thou haft done foolifhly: thou haft not kept the commandement of the Lord thy God, which he commãded thee: for the Lord had now ſtablished thy kingdome vpon Iſraél for euer. “But now thy kingdome ſhal not continue: the Lord haſte focht him a man after his owne heart, and ſhe Lord hathe cõmãded him to be gouernour ouer his people, because thou haft not kept that which the Lord had commanded thee. (emphasis added)

Here, we see Saul—the tragic first king of Israel—boldly defy the commandment of God. But it should be noted, the boldness is of a particular sort. He was bold in approaching the altar of God, that is, in acting in the capacity of priest and mediator of the Divine Presence, without the support of God’s command. And for this presumption, he is cast out and replaced by David as the Lord’s anointed.23

Another example is to be found in 2 Peter 2:10: “And chiefly them that walke after the fleſh, in the luſt of vnclennes, and deſpite the gouernement, which are presumpteous, and ſtand in their owne conceite, and feare not to ſpeake euil of thẽ that are in dignitie.” Adherence to the flesh, lust, pride and the willingness to speak blasphemy—this is the just the sort of boldness that characterizes not only Archimago, but Busirane, too. And it is, I suggest, this negative, canonical picture of boldness against which the reader has been warned. But it must be remembered that in the House of Busirane it was just such an over-bold, bad man that has written the warning, “Be not too bold.” This is the outworking of the attempt to usurp the divine position. Having perched himself upon his imitation throne, this would-be usurper hangs upon his door a warning. Be not too bold, yes, but more specifically, be not too bold with me. Seek not to unseat me as I have tried to unseat God. In other words, do not do unto me

23. For those still awaiting discussion of the canonical shaping of the ending of Book III and the beginning of Book IV, we find our clue here. I suggest that we are meant to see in Scudamore the beginning of the monarchical period and the figure of Saul. The connection between the two seen here is buttressed by the overt comparison between the two found in IV.i.2.1–5. See, also, the subtler allusion to the first king of Israel in IV.i.52. For these last two points, I am indebted, again, to Lisa Wayland, personal communication.
as I have done unto others, says the enchanter. And in this way, again, he parodies the Christian God he seeks to supplant.

Having understood this and so, ignored the warning, Britomart enters boldly into this unholy inner sanctum: “Bold Britomart, as she had late forecast, / Nether of ydle showes, nor of false charmes aghast” (FQ III.xii.29.8–9). And therein, she finds the dual object of her quest—both Amoret and her captor, Busirane. In our haste to arrive here, we have had to defer the first glimpse of Scudamore’s lady love, which was offered in the train of Cupid’s maske. There, in the eucharistic procession, we first met her, and to that we should glance briefly back before proceeding:

After all these there marcht a most faire Dame,

... 

Her brest all naked, as nett yuory,
Without adorne of gold or siluer bright,
Wherewith the Craftesman wonts it beautify,
Of her dew honour was despoyled quight,
And a wide wound therein (O ruefull sight)
Entrenched deep with knyfe accursed keene,
Yet freshly bleeding forth her fainting spright,
(The worke of cruell hand) was to be seene,
That dyde in sanguine red her skn all snowy cleene.

At that wide orifice her trembling hart
Was drawne forth, and in siluer basin layd,
Quite through transixed with a deadly dart,
And in her blood yet steeming fresh embayd: (FQ III.xii.19.1, 20.1–21.4)

This gruesome image in mind, the reader, like Britomart, is prepared to meet the still-worse scene that awaits them inside the iron door:

So soone as she was entred, rownd about
Shee cast her cries, to see what was become
Of all those persons, which she saw without:
But lo, they streight were vaniished all and some,
Ne liuing wight she saw in all that roome,
Saue that same woefull Lady, both whose hands
Were bounden fast, that did her ill become,
And her small waste girt rownd with yron bands,
Vnto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands.

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
Figuring straunge characters of his art,
With liuing blood he those characters wraete,
Dreadfully droppinge from her dying hart,
Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,
And all perforce to make her him to loue.
Ah who can loue the worker of her smart?
A thousand charmes he formerly did proue;
Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast hart remoue. (FQ III.xii.30–31)

Here, in this sad tableau, we find heaped up parody upon parody of the Christian faith. Amoret, bound in chains and iron bands, cannot help reminding Spenser’s reader of the imprisonment of the Red Crosse Knight in the dungeons of Orgoglio, that figure for the fate of the wicked condemned to Hell. The enchanter’s magical spells written in the blood of Amoret cannot help evoking the memory of Fidelia and her bloody book, and the wound they worked in the Red Crosse Knight’s own heart. The purpose of these bloody charms, to constrain the wounded lady to love “the worker of her smart,” too, finds an echo in the House of Holiness—Charissa, the embodiment of Christian love. But each of these, in the hands of Busirane, becomes a perversion of its counterpart.

Throughout the episode, Cupid has been set up as a would-be Christ figure, and, here, the true significance of that comparison is made clear in the differences between them. Where St. George was rescued from Orgoglio’s prison by Arthur—the most consistent type of Christ in the poem—Busirane plays the role of the imprisoner, rather than the deliverer. This is, of course, what one expects from a wizard who bears this particular name. As has been often noted, Busirane is meant to echo the name of the Egyptian king, Busiris. But this is not merely any Egyptian king—for many in the early modern

24. See The Faerie Queene I.viii.37–40; note that George is found behind “an yron doore, / That fast was lockt” (I.viii.37.3–4) and was, likewise, found in “filthy bonds” (I.viii.40.1).
period, this was the name of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, that paradigmatic oppressor of the people of God whose country became, for them, the “house of bondage.”\(^{25}\) If this is the Busiris that Spenser has in mind, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that he has cast him as a magician—for, the Egyptian magicians, too, famously pitted their magical powers against the miracles of God to become the paradigmatic example of the opposition between demonic magic and divine miracle.\(^{26}\)

So, rather than acting as the savior who sets the captives free, Busirane has become another oppressor of the people of God. This is seen, too, in the bloody writing upon the ground. It must be remembered that the crimson letters in Fidelia’s book were not written in her blood, but in Christ’s. In the blood of his sacrifice were written the mysteries of the faith that brought salvation. But here, it is not so. Busirane has foregone the role of the husband, like Malbecco before him, and placed the burden of self-sacrifice upon the woman he would make his wife. Or—to borrow an image from C.S. Lewis—as the image of Christ, the Christian husband was given a crown not of gold, but of thorns, a crown that Busirane has compelled his wife to wear.\(^{27}\)

The origins of love, for him, are in power and in fear. But the biblical counterpart to this, we have seen already: “There is no feare in loue, but perfect loue calleth out feare: for feare hathe painfulnes: and he that feareth, is not perfect in loue. \(^{19}\)We loue him, because he loued vs firſt” (1 John 4:18–19). Like the issue of magic before it, this theme of love by constraint finds expression in the Protestant critique of Catholic doctrine. We saw this already in the writings of exiles under Mary I, like John Knox and Chris-


\(^{26}\) See, for example, 2 Timothy 3:8.

\(^{27}\) C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), 106. In truth, I have come to wonder if those who would understand the Legend of Chastity would not be better served reading this than *The Allegory of Love*. For, here, a Christian theology of love is explored for its own sake, the very sort of theology—learned, humanist and not quite modern—that underlies Spenser’s poem.
topher Goodman, but it was a theme found commonly in the writings of the Reformers as well. Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*:

> What I contend for is, that necessity ought not to be laid on consciences in matters in which Christ has made them free: and unless freed, cannot, as we have previously shown (Book 3 c. 19), have peace with God. They must acknowledge Christ their deliverer, as their only king, and be ruled by the only law of liberty—namely, the sacred word of the Gospel—if they would retain the grace which they have once received in Christ: they must be subject to no bondage, be bound by no chains. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.X.1)

The theme was so pervasive and so problematic that some Catholics also took it up. For example, Thomas More in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* has his interlocutor express the wish that he could “take away all violence and compulsion upon all sides, Christian and heathen, so that no man were constrained to believe but as he could by grace, wisdom, and good works be induced.”28 But in the end, More rejects this utopian dream, concluding that compulsion is, indeed, necessary and justified by Protestant use of force in suppressing the preaching of Catholic faith.

The effects of the bloody letters parody the Christian canon in another way. For, it, too, is said to have produced wounds in the Red Crosse Knight. We read:

> And bitter Penaunce with an yron whip,  
> Was wont him once to disple euery day:  
> And sharpe Remorse his hart did prick and nip,  
> that drops of blood thence like a well did play (*FQ* I.x.27.1–4)

But the difference should be noticed, too. The reading of those books written in another’s blood worked wounds of revelation; it was their work of revealing unpleasant reality that prompted the repentant to inflict these wounds upon himself. Again, the notion of self-sacrifice is clear, and again, the choice—the liberty to inflict these wounds upon herself or not—has been removed from Amoret and placed in the hands of her oppressor.

The final perversion is to be found in the focus upon Amoret’s heart, for, it was in the heart of the believer, Protestant theologians said, that the latest instantiation of the Jerusalem Temple really stood. As we saw above, the Temple and Tabernacle came early on to be understood as types of the incarnation of Christ. In Catholic tradition, this, in turn, led to the consecration of the parish church as yet another such temple. But Protestant theology progressed in a different direction. Under the influence of such texts as 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “Know ye not, that your bodie is ye tẽple of the holie Gost, which is in you, whome ye haue of God? and ye are not your owne. 20For ye are boght for a price: therefore glorifie God in your bodie, and in your ſpirit: for they are Gods,” and 1 Peter 2:5: “And ye as liuelie ſtones, be made a ſpiritual houſe, and holie Prieſthode to offer vp ſpiritual ſacrifices acceptable to God by Iefus Chriſt,” Protestants came to see the true Temple in the community of the (Protestant) faithful and ultimately in the heart of the individual believer.29 In all ways, the human heart became the property of God.

It was God who wrote his law upon the believer’s heart (Jer 31:33). It was God who circumcised the heart (Deut 30:6). And ultimately, it was God—in the form of the Holy Spirit—who took up his residence there. And so, in his attempts to steal her heart—to force upon it love for himself through his own knife, through his own letters written in blood—Busirane sought to desecrate the ultimate loci of the divine presence and so, in that way, to usurp for himself yet another instantiation of the throne of God.

We may ask in conclusion to our analysis of the House of Busirane, then, who, or rather, what is Busirane? In terms of the ongoing allegory of the passage, what does he signify? Many have suggested

lust. Thomas Roche famously proposed that he is the will to destruction latent in love. But in light of the present analysis, I think we must see him, rather, as the will to usurp the divine prerogative. This signification, like the narrative itself, works on several levels. At the spiritual level, it is the will to the idolatry of the self, to reject the status of creature—the role within the world-text as a sign pointing to a higher reality—and instead to “reed” oneself literally, as the one and only thing worthy to be clung to for its own sake. The paradigmatic example of this in the spiritual realm is, of course, Satan—and his example, as we have seen, is alluded to time and again in the concluding cantos of the book. But his is not the only example. For, this spiritual reality was seen by early modern Protestants also in the figure of Catholic Rome and especially in the papacy. Here, the figure of the Antichrist was frequently seen among Protestant polemicists, and likewise, I suggest, it is to be seen in the figure of Busirane.

In the literal sense of the passage, the sense in which this is the story of a human, marital love, the enchanter is the will to forego the role of Christ as self-sacrificing servant and instead to adopt the role of master, forcing the role of servant upon his bride. He is, in the biblical idiom, the love of this world. And as we have seen, this appears to be the sort of love Scudamore bore for his bride. For, his was not the self-sacrificing Christian love modeled in Britomart—humble dependence upon faith and the Word were not to be found in him, but only pride and anger and, failing that, despair. All this was clear already in his assault upon the enchanter’s gate. But it is made more plain still in Book IV, where we read his own account of how he won his lady-love’s hand. He says:

The pledge of faith, her hand engaged held,  
Like warie Hynd within the weedie soyle,  
For no intreatie would forgoe so glorious spoyle.

...
She often prayd, and often me besought,
   Sometime with tender teares to let her goe,
   Sometime with witching smyles: but yet for nought,
   That euer she to me could say or doe,
   Could she her wished freedome fro me wooe (FQ IV.x.55.7–9, 57.1–5)

The language of mastery and constraint and fear are all present here, and this, as many have
noted before, is the origin of Amoret’s painful ordeal.31 In this, then, Busirane is the love of the world,
not in general, but the love of the world that lay within the heart of Amoret’s own husband. That is why,
like Scudamore at the gate, Busirane depends upon his own words—written now in Amoret’s blood—
rather than upon the canonical Word. Faced with the impassible will of this bleeding virgin, “he bad
[her] stubborn [heart] to yield him way” (FQ III.xi.26.4). And in the end, the words that he has spoken,
he must unspeak, he must read back again, and, in so doing, undo the harm to Amoret’s heart.

And rising vp, gan streight to ouerlooke
   Those cursed leaues, his charmes back to reuerse;
   Full dreadfull thinges out of that balefull booke
   He red, and measur’d many a sad verse,
   That horrour gan the virgins hart to perse,
   And her faire locks vp stared stiffe on end,
   Hearing him those same bloody lynes reherse;
   And all the while he red, she did extend
   Her sword high ouer him, if ought he did offend. (FQ III.xii.36)

This seems to me a picture of repentance—though repentance at the point of a sword. Be that as
it may, though, the tale draws to a close. The bound enchanter is led out of his house and vanishes from
the poem. In the 1590 version of The Faerie Queene, Amoret is then reunited with Sir Scudamore. And
in that meeting, so fittingly discarded in the second installment of 1596, we are given, as Lewis noted
long ago, the mirror image of the House of Busirane—a fitting instantiation of Christian love.32 This im-
age, we will explore in the next and final chapter.

31. See especially A. Kent Hieatt, “Scudamour’s Practice of Maistrye upon Amoret,” in Essential Articles for the Study of

Chapter VII. The End of Spenser’s Biblicism

The analysis offered here has found in Spenser’s interactions with the Bible nothing that is new. And, in fact, I do not suppose that he meant us to. Spenser was not a modern biblical scholar (nor a modern scholar of any sort, for that matter), in that his motive was not to produce new knowledge. His was not the drive to write the latest theory of the Hebrew verbal system nor anything of the sort. Rather, as I have argued repeatedly, his intent seems to have been to reclaim for the present the best of what belonged to the past. And, in this way, to produce a new vision—not only of the past or the present, but of all eternity distilled into a single, microcosmic vision.

We have seen in chapter II that Spenser’s engagement with the Bible as a deeply intertextual, constantly self-referential, unified canon finds analogy in the Book of Common Prayer. The point was not, though, that this mode of reading is distinctive to the liturgy; rather, it was that this mode of reading was so pervasive, had so thoroughly worked its way into the heart of Christian culture through the centuries, that it was found even in the most everyday aspects of Christian engagement with the Scriptures. People married and were buried, prayed and repented and praised, all in terms of a Bible deeply entangled with itself. And so, also, did Spenser write his epic.

His biblicism, we saw also in chapter II, was one in touch with the work of contemporary Christian Hebraists. If my argument is correct, he has fashioned the figure of Britomart in the likeness of Ruth and her counterpart, the woman of Proverbs 31. But this woman underwent a change of identity
in the sixteenth century under the influence of Christian Hebraism. For a thousand years, she had been the *mulier fortis* or, as the Great Bible rendered it, “an honest faithfull woman.” But with the rediscovery of Hebrew among Christian commentators, and perhaps especially with the suggestive lexical entry in Reuchlin’s *De Rudimentis Hebraicis*, the “honest faithfull woman” became a “vertuous woman”—or, as Jean Mercier put it, “une vaillante femme.” Whether Spenser’s characterization of Britomart in just these terms is to be attributed to Reuchlin and his own reading of the Hebrew Bible, to his use of the Geneva Bible, or even to his familiarity with Mercier’s influential commentary is, to me, unclear. But whatever the case, the early modern interest in Hebrew has left an indelible mark on the poem.

Spenser, following a tradition as old as the Hebrew Bible itself, makes of the Christian canon a lens through which to make sense of contemporary history. As we saw, his shaping of Britomart in terms of the Woman of Vertue was not merely a literary typology with significance limited to the relationship between the literary present of the poem and the far distant biblical past. Rather, the two were also tied to Protestant and royal rhetoric in Marian and Elizabethan England, which, likewise, drew upon the Bible in an effort to interpret, affirm, or condemn the contemporary political situation. Mary I was cast by her Protestant opponents in the mold of the Strange Woman and of Jezebel—the paradigmatic instantiation of that biblical archetype—and so, too, was Elizabeth, her Protestant successor, by Catholics both in England and abroad. In this way, Spenser made use of the Bible as an interpretive key to the ongoing narrative of political history, but in this, he was again treating the Bible as others had been doing in royal courts and processions, in chronicles and poetry and art for centuries.

One aspect of Spenser’s engagement with the Bible that is noteworthy is its humanistic effort to intermingle the Christian with the Classical and pagan traditions. By “noteworthy” here, I do not mean that it is in any way unique. We have alluded to several instances of biblical engagement that share
this trait, and we could allude to many more. No, the effort to relate the literature of the Bible to other cultures is as old as the Bible itself and continued in later tradition in myriad ways—but for our purposes, most memorably in the *cento*. In this tradition, the Classical authorities of Virgil and Homer were appropriated—perhaps better, converted into the Christian fold by taking their nearly scriptural works and finding in them the stories and truths of the Christian Bible. This unearthed “Egyptian gold,” in Augustine’s phrase, was claimed for Christian use and carried with them on their journey to the Promised Land. And so, too, we tried to show above, with Spenser.

And yet, Spenser’s humanistic efforts to engage with Scripture remain noteworthy in that they have caused some confusion among readers of his poetry and, in some cases, have led them to overlook in several passages the role of the Bible altogether. The Strange Woman dressed up in the guise of Hellenore, the Tabernacle outfitted in Ovidian dress, the Woman of Vertue in the armor of Bradamante and Athena, both—each has been, so far as I can tell, entirely overlooked by Spenserian scholars, no doubt, because the Classical texts in which these biblical allusions are disguised provide in themselves enormously rich interpretive contexts. There was, then, no felt need to look for biblical allusions because the Classical ones were satisfying enough on their own.

The consequences of this oversight, though, extend further than the Bible’s role in a few, or even several passages here or there. It has led scholars to miss the pervasive, structuring role Spenser has accorded the Christian canon in the poem as a whole. Alternating from the Gospels to Genesis, Spenser begins his poem at the beginning of the two Christian Testaments and progresses, in the Legend of Holiness, from there to the end of the Christian canon in the reimagining of the confrontation with “that olde serpent, called the deuil” in Eden. Much of this, at least, had been noticed already. But Spenser’s continuation with the canon—modeling the opening and closing episodes of each respective book upon
structuring episodes within the ongoing narrative of the Bible—so far as I can tell, has not received scholarly attention. And as a result, the full unity of his project, the genuine continuity of his “darke conceit” has largely gone unnoticed. For, in structuring his epic in imitation of the Christian canon, Spenser has provided a framework within which he can construct a unified vision of Christian Truth. Clothing biblical characters, ideas, and incidents in the dress of Classical and pagan tradition is only the beginning, localized instantiation of this larger, ongoing project to incorporate those traditions into a deeply Christian and deeply humanist, unified vision of reality.

The poem not only provides this reality for us, but offers itself as an instructor in how one is to read within the poem, within the canon, and ultimately within the “real” world. The process of reading—as well as its dangers—we saw, were signalled and explored in the very first canto of the poem. There, we were introduced specifically to the dangers of reading in general. And reading quickly gave way to “reeding,” the notion that to see the world is to read it like a poem and, conversely, to read a poem is to be asked to see the world in a new way.

This discourse of reading-as-seeing was taken up again and applied to the Bible in the encounter with Despayre and in the House of Holiness, where we saw the shape of the canon defined and its transformative function explored. And here, too, Spenser draws on a very long tradition of biblical hermeneutics that extended back at least as far as Augustine of Hippo and his De Doctrina Christiana. The modes of reading, the dangers involved, and the helps to be employed—all of the instruction Spenser had to offer is to be found in even the most basic Protestant writings on the subject. But again, it was not in the innovation of doctrine that Spenser’s energies were spent. Rather, it was in the construction of a poetic world in which to explore those doctrines that his genius is to be found. Or, as Sidney put it, Spenser has not provided a philosopher’s “wordish description,” but “a perfect picture” of those doctrines
to be contemplated and explored.¹ That *The Faerie Queene* is such a world, that it, indeed, does mean to offer us practice in seeing the world through the lens of interpreted Scripture is to be seen in the biblical structure of the poem.

In the attempt to imitate the canon in its universal scope, Spenser is far from unique, being preceded time and again in the Chronicle tradition. And likewise, in the effort to provide a unified, Christian vision of reality, he is preceded more than once (no doubt, most famously in the overawing example of Dante’s *Commedia*). But in letting the canon provide the structure for his epic without allowing it to dictate its content—in this, perhaps we find something unique to Spenser. Unlike Milton and the Mystery Plays before him, Spenser did not seek to produce a retelling of the biblical stories themselves. Rather, he has transformed them into fresh stories that preserve, to some degree, their order and recognizable elements of their content. There are, of course, isolated examples of this within longer works, but, so far as I know, there is nothing that attempts this activity on anything like Spenser’s scale.

Finally, Spenser’s engagement with the Bible is, as we have seen again and again, decidedly Protestant. Or to put it a bit more carefully, from the very first canto of the book, Spenser invites his reader to associate his villains with the ongoing Protestant vilifications of Catholicism. This invitation continues from Archimago and Duessa in Book I to Malecasta and Busirane in Book III, and all the way through to the very end of the poem with Book VI and the Blatant Beast.² Moreover, these polemical visions of Catholicism regularly find their correction in visions of religion and reality that bear a distinctly Protestant air. Opposed to the bold readers and blasphemous books of Busirane and Archimago, we see Fidélia, that great instructor of Protestant biblical hermeneutics; opposed to the coercive love of Busir-

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². “The Cantos of Mutabilitie” we will not have opportunity to discuss here, though we will glance ever so briefly at the final stanzas of that fragment below. It should be noted, though, that in the titaness’ challenge of Jove, we get a glimpse, in Classical garb, of yet another attempt to usurp the throne of heaven.
ane and Malecasta is the Christian love of Britomart, Una, and the Red Crosse Knight. The list could go on. It is in this opposition between Protestant and Catholic—which is to say, for Spenser, between Truth and Falsehood, Wisdom and Folly, Vertue and Strangeness—that the heart of the book lies, and it is especially in those moments of biblical Truth, conceived through the eyes of the Protestant humanist, that we see what Spenser is really after.

For our closing reflections, let us look briefly at one such example—the Protestant response to idolatry that is found in the discarded union of Amoret and Scudamore at the close of Book III. For, here, I will suggest, we catch a glimpse not only of Spenser's Christian Truth, but, to adapt one scholar's phrase, of everything that the poem is trying to achieve and everything it is trying to be.³

The Image and the Book: Sanctifying a Darke Conceit

The specter of idolatry has cast its shadow over nearly every chapter of our discussion thus far. In the religious harlotry of Malecasta and in the displaced relics of ancient Troy, in the figure of Archimago and in every corner of Busirane's false temple, the dangers of idolatry have haunted our steps from the beginning. And this is fitting, for the very same can be said of the poetry of *The Faerie Queene* with which we have been concerned. On one level, of course, this is a statement so obvious it goes without saying. After all, the cited examples are drawn not from my analytical imagination, but from the pages of Spenser’s deeply visual epic poem. But as several scholars have pointed out, these examples are only the beginning of the problem for our poet.⁴ Idolatry, for Spenser and his contemporaries, was not merely

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a pagan and Catholic legacy that could be safely depicted and critiqued by means of poetic imagery. Rather, it was a category that threatened to subsume and, therefore, condemn poetry itself.

From early on, images were a point of contention both for and among the reformers. Some saw in them what Christians had long seen: merely a sign that pointed toward, but did not participate in, divine reality. In the same way that the Scriptures could—for those who could read them—provide a path to wisdom, so, also, could pictures and images do for the illiterate. As Gregory the Great said, “a picture is introduced into a church that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books.”

The use of images, then, was akin to that of poetry. It was, in Horace’s famous formulation, “to inform or delight.” More than that, images were understood from very early on to exert specific force upon the viewer. They were, as signs, meant to point the viewer to the divine reality they depicted, to remind them of the crucified Lord or the blessed Virgin. But the reminding itself was not merely a function of memory and intellection—it was evocative, too, of emotion. The sight of the crucifix was thought to be a more effective way to rouse the conscience than mere words, whether spoken or written down. Feelings of penitence, gratitude, and piety were the fruit of this viewing of images, it was thought, and in this capacity, images played an important role in Christian education for centuries.

So, Martin Luther, in one of his more moderate moments, could say, “There is nobody ... or certainly very few who do not understand that yonder crucifix is not my God, for my God is in Heaven, but that is simply a sign.” But in saying this, of course, Luther is casually dismissing a strand of thinking and theorizing about images that is nearly as old as the one to which he ascribes. For, it did not take long

5. Quoted in Gilman, Iconoclasm and Poetry, 32.
for the notion of images as pointers to divine reality to become the notion of images as bridges to divine reality. Their virtue existed not only in their effect upon the viewer, but, also, in their ability to provide a channel of communication, a means of access to the Divine Presence. But the development did not stop there. By the sixth century CE, some Christians had come to see in these bridges not merely bridges, but types of a sublime archetype—artifacts that, in some way, actually participated in divine realities, irrespective of any effect upon or conduit provided to the believing viewer. And it was this final step, John Phillips suggests, that prompted the outrage that gave rise to the iconoclast controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries.7

Images became associated with idols and, as such, fell under the condemnation of Scripture and so, the masses. This, in turn, led to a wave of image-breaking, the likes of which was not to be seen again until the sixteenth century. In 787, with the Second Council of Nicea, the Church officially adopted the position outlined above, which saw in images an aid to memory and a prod to the emotions. This tradition continued through the centuries, famously finding elaboration under the pen of Thomas Aquinas. But in the interim, some of the old controversial issues had crept in again. For the great doctor of the Church, images were not merely signs, but objects for veneration. Ultimately, the honor paid to the image was passed to the archetype which it represented. As such, the subject of the image was of paramount importance in determining the proper sort of honor to be paid. Saints, worthy of less honor than the savior, warranted in their images only the sort of veneration he calls dulia. Images of the Christ, however, warrant latria—the praise due to the crucified Son of God.8

8. Ibid., 14.
Such theological niceties, though, did not fair well under the watchful, iconoclastic eyes of the Reformers. For Luther, they were dismissed as the opinion of “only a few,” and consequently, images could still be valued as signs and so, retained. For others, though, the problem was of a deeper sort. Tyndale, for example, saw in images not merely false usurpers of divine prerogative, but damnable creations of the human imagination. In fact, as Stephen Greenblatt has argued, Tyndale “asserts that at the heart of the Catholic Church—which at first seems too alien and external to man—there is nothing else than man’s own imagination idolatrously worshiped.” In this way, it is not merely images, but the imagination itself that is vulnerable to the charge of idolatry. And so, for Tyndale, poetry, too, as a product of human imagination, comes under the shadow of this threat. This is why he can say of More, “[the Church] did well to choose a poet to be their defender,” for, the Church was of the sort who “gave themselves only unto poetry, and shut up the Scripture.” And so, in some Protestant polemic, poetry became implicated in the debates over idolatry. It cannot have helped that, at the same time, poetry was being widely theorized under the rubric of the ancient Horatian maxim, *ut pictura poesis*. The tensions, I can express no more clearly than Sidney has done when he said:

Poesie therefore is an arte of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfetting, or figuring foorth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight.

In light of this theorizing, as well as the condemnation of imagination found in the likes of Tyndale, it is unsurprising to find Protestants questioning the connections between the talking pictures of poetry and the idols of Catholic imagination. Some were, undoubtedly, more extreme in this than

others. George Salteren, for example, is among the most extreme when he says, “the word graven Images must be extended to all Images, whether molten, carved, or painted; the word similitude to all kindes of similitude, though but in conceit.” 13 The conceits of painters and, in turn, the conceits of poets fall to the charge of idolatry and so, are condemned. Salteren is not alone in this condemnation. Ainsworth, too, following in the footsteps of Tyndale, condemns not the poets’ conceits, but the very imagination that produced them:

For every man is forbidden to make unto himself, any forme, shape or resemblance, of things in the heavens earth or waters; of any similitude, shew, or likeness, any frame, figure, edifice, or structure, of man or beast, fowl or fish or any creepinge thing, any image, type or shadowed representation; any imagined-picture, fabrick, or shape.... So that it is not possible for the wit or hand of man to make any image or representation whatsoever, which cometh not within compasse of the words and things forewarned of God. 14

It is true that these are extreme examples. But as Gilman and Greenblatt have shown, these extreme voices point to a more widely shared anxiety that existed in Spenser’s day, the anxiety that poetry in general stood condemned as the vain imaginings of humanity that could only stand opposed to the sacred Word of God. 15

We have seen already something of this sort in our analysis above. In chapter V, we briefly discussed that sixteenth-century tradition which conceived of creation as the great poem of a poet-God. In this conception, then, the poet, as the image of that God, could be seen as imitating the creative process of the Creator. Immediately, the dangers we have spoken of above in terms of “boldness” suggest themselves. The poet as creator has a choice. He can style himself as a creator in and of himself, see in himself a thing, rather than a sign pointing to a reality higher than he, or he can adopt the role of a sign and so,

13. Ibid., 43.
14. Ibid.
15. Something like this sentiment can be found, too, in Spenser’s A View of the Present State of Ireland, where he calls “words ... the Image of the mind.” Edmund Spenser, A View of the Present State of Ireland (ed. William Lindsay Renwick; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 68.
undertake the imitation of God-as-creator in humility. It was in light of these two roles, then, and in light of this complex of anxieties and qualifications, that Spenser set about to write his great masterpiece.

This can be seen very early on in the poem in the figure of Archimago, the arch-image, but also the beginning of images. This applies, of course, to his allegorical figuration of the Catholic Church, but also to his role as a reader of books and a master of words.

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 etermore
He strowd an Aue-Mary after and before.

The drouping Night thus creepeth on them fast,
And the sad humor loading their eye liddes,
As messenger of Morpheus on them cast
Sweet slombring deaw, the which to sleep them biddes:
Vnto their lodgings then his guestes he riddles:
Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe he findes,
He to his studie goes, and there amiddes
His magick bookes and artes of sundrie kindes,
He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy minds. (FQ I.i.35.6–36.9)

As discussed at length in chapter V, he is portrayed here as a reader and, as such, finds his Protestant opposition in the figure of Fidelia. But he is also depicted as a wordsmith, even a poet. He is a speaker whose words exert coercive and transformative force upon the hearts of his listeners, and in this capacity, he finds his opposite in Fidelia—whose words can “kill / And rayse againe to life the hart, that she did thrill” (FQ I.x.19.8–9)—but also, and more pressingly, in Spenser himself.16 This analogy is expanded upon directly in the poem, as Archimago uses his magical arts to create false images of Una and the Red

16. It is perhaps worth noting that Archimago and his sleep-inducing stories, which seek to lull and deceive and ultimately destroy their hearer, find another counterpart in the immediate context, and this in the figure of Una, whose encouraging words stir the Red Crosse Knight to action and greater faith (FQ I.i.19.1–4).
Crosse Knight, in turn. He spins out imitations of other characters, of the poet’s own creations and, in this way, sets himself up as his rival.17

By placing this idol-making counterpart to himself within the poem, Spenser implicates his own poem as a possible candidate for iconoclastic outrage. But no sooner has the poem been implicated, than the solution has begun to be explored. The reader and the Red Crosse Knight, both, have already been set the task of sorting the image from the reality. But in contrasting his poetic creations with those of Archimago, Spenser applies the question of discernment to the poem itself. But this is not, I suggest, a task that Spenser had not performed already when he began. The poem is not the product of ongoing anxiety being worked out in the process of writing; rather, it is the answer to that anxiety presented to us in poetic guise.

We find a ready analogy in the way Spenser dealt with the divided legacy of Rome. The relics of a pagan past are foisted off onto Paris and, through him, onto the Catholic present, even as the heroic legacy of Aeneas and Virgil are preserved for Britomart and, through her, for Elizabeth and Elizabethan England. Just so, the idolatrous impulses and dangers that had come to be feared in the poetic conceit are, from the very beginning, associated with Archimago, the deceitful, demonic enchanter, and the hypocritical conceptions of Catholicism and false religion to which he points. And in this way, all that is religiously useful and worthwhile in poetry is preserved intact both in Fidelia as Protestant biblical interpreter and, more pressingly, in Spenser as Protestant poet.

The same concerns are to be found again in the concluding canto of Book III, in the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene. Busirane, that master of an idolatrous house, is, likewise, portrayed as a poet. His letters writ in blood are, as I have argued above, a perverse imitation of the Christian canon.

But at the same time, they are also an echo of love poetry in the Ovidian tradition. They are the literary product of those to whom William Elderton addressed his question, “Tell me is Christ, or Cupide Lord?” The incautious reader might be tempted to see in this another place in which Spenser’s own poetic efforts are implicated in his own critique, for, the Legend of Chastity in which this episode finds its context is, likewise, another installment in that Ovidian tradition. But again, the implication is only apparent, only an “Errour” into whose clutches the reader is perhaps tempted to fall, but which, in light of the book as a whole, is clearly just that—an error.

This error, we have seen already implied by the architecture and tenor of the whole of the House of Busirane. The abuses of love, idolatry, and the attempt to usurp the divine prerogative—all of these signal the poet’s condemnation of the poetry of Busirane and its blasphemous intent. If it remains beautiful poetry—if the images it depicts remain pleasing to the eye, as Britomart’s “greedy eyes with gazing long a space” (FQ III.xi.53.4) suggest they do—this is no reason to undermine Spenser’s condemnation of them. Rather, it is only reason to better understand why Protestants feared their seductive dangers. But like Archimago’s “pleasing words” (FQ I.i.35.6), Busirane’s idolatrous images find their Protestant counterpart not only in Fidelia’s bloody book, as discussed above, but in the discarded image of Amoret and Scudamore at the end of Book III.

There did he see, that most on earth him ioyd,
    His dearest loue, the comfort of his dayes,
    Whoes too long absence him had sore annoyd,
    And wearied his life with dull delayes:
    Straight he vpstarted from the loathed layes,
    And to her ran with hasty egernesse,
    Like as a Deare, that greedily embayes
    In the coole soile, after long thirstinesse,
    Which he in chace endured hath, now nigh breathlesse.

Lightly he clipt her twixt his armes twaine,
    And streightly did embrace her body bright,
Her body, late the prison of sad paine,
Now the sweet lodge of loue and deare delight:
But she faire Lady ouercommen quight
Of huge affection, did in leasure melt,
And in sweeete rauishment pound out her spright:
No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,
But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt.

Had ye them scene, ye would haue 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,
That Britomart halfe enuying their bleese,
Was much empassiond in her gentle sprite,
And to her selfe oft wisht like happinesse,
In vaine she wisht, that fate n'ould let her yet possesse. (FQ III.xii.44–46, 1590)

Let us begin with the end of this quote and Britomart's response. As the witness to this scene, Britomart is, at the same time, cast in the role of the viewer of an image. Her reaction to this poetic imitation of a biblia pauperum, too, is suited to the analogy. Like the illiterate believer confronted with a holy image, the memory of her own state—her ongoing separation from Artegaill—springs to mind. And more than an evocation of memory, her emotions, too, are roused—first, with envy (only half, though, reminding us that she is, yet, only half of her own bliss) and then, with the wish for “like happiness” for herself, for the same union to which she looks forward with her long-sought errant knight. But, of course, these emotions, too, participate in the allegorical polysemy of the story and, in this, they reflect not only the longing of a woman for her lover, but also the longing of the Church for her long-expected Bridegroom who is Christ. Playing on both of these levels already long-established in the narrative, Spenser provides his reader with the counterpoint to the idolatry found in Busirane—the educational role that sacred images can play in the life of a believer.
But there is another function ascribed to images in this tradition, one that asserts that these are bridges between the earthly and heavenly realities and, more than that, are participants in divine reality—types, which, in some way, participate in the reality of their sublime archetype. These aspects of the image tradition, too, find expression in these stanzas. They are reflected in this sublime expression of the doctrine of the *imago dei*. But notice, one final time, that this is an *imago dei* that has been canonically constructed. It is, as Lewis pointed out, one that invokes the “marriage” of Adam and Eve when “they shalbe one flesh.” But it is also built, of course, upon Genesis 1:26, not only the opening, oft quoted, “let vs make man in our image,” but the equally important, “in the image of God created he him: he created them male and female” (Gen 1:27).

And it is, surely, not an accident that this canonically conceived image is expressed not in terms drawn directly from the Bible, but from Classical antiquity. It is the work of “that rich Romane” that comes to mind, he tells us. But we have long since learned that in suggesting the Classical, Spenser is, at the same time, suggesting the biblical and, by means of both, pointing to that Christian Truth which, for him, underlies all reality. And more than that, he offers in this a glimpse of the Protestant doctrine of the true nature of the church and the true mode of access to the Divine Presence.

For, surely, in this scene where “two or thre are gathered together” in invocation of the image of God, we are meant to understand that, there, Christ is also (Matt 18:20). This emphasis upon the community of the saints was adopted by Protestants over against the private, ritual practices of their Catholic opponents—the very practices parodied and condemned in the House of Busirane. And so it is fitting that, like the Temple that this house claimed to be, it has disappeared. For, in the end times, we


are told, there will be a new Jerusalem in which there is “no Temple therein” (Rev 21:22a). Instead, “the Lord God almighty and the Lambe are the Temple” (Rev 21:22b). At the end of all things, all Christians will have the free access to the Divine Presence that is enjoyed only in part, here, by the reunited lovers. (The reader hardly needs reminding to hear, in this, an echo of the union of Christ with his bride.) And for the reader, like Britomart, it is enjoyed only in the form of an envious longing—the hope of union with her husband that is yet to come.

It is in this Protestant view of images, too, that Spenser’s conception of his own image finds expression. Like the vision of Scudamore and Amoret’s embrace, Spenser’s poem is intended to evoke in the reader the emotions of Britomart, to prompt in them a longing for their own long-awaited union with an absent Bridegroom. And in this way, it stands in a long tradition of the Christian use of images. But for that other side of the tradition—that side which sees in its images conduits that provide access to the divine—the reader is directed to look elsewhere. For humans, the Divine Presence is not accessible in images of wood and stone; rather, it is to be sought in their own willingness to take on the role of imago dei, their willingness to read themselves as signs and to find union with others who are willing to do the same.

But this ending did not survive the second installment of The Faerie Queene. It was discarded, Scudamore consigned to despair and Amoret to the quest for her still-absent bridegroom. And this is only one more example of a pattern to which Spenser returns again and again. Time after time, he crafts moments which seek to capture a vision of the Divine Presence, attempts which succeed in moments of aching poetic beauty that is inevitably lost in the ongoing flow of the narrative. They grasp after that vain wish, like Britomart’s, “that fate n’ould let [them] yet possesse.” These are invariably the most memorable, the most glorious moments in the poem. Whether it is in the grand procession of Cupid’s Maske with
its grotesque imitation of a biblical theophany, or the vision of Mount Acidale, the fruits of humanist contemplation of the Parnassian tradition—all reach out for a momentary union with the divine, all offer to the reader a glimpse of the same. But then, the moment ends, the Divine Presence vanishes or is revealed as false, and the reader and the poet continue in their respective quests. Nowhere is this theme more clearly expressed than in what have become the closing lines of the poem.

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,
Of Mutability, and well it way:
Me seemes, that though she all vnworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And loue of things so vaine to cast away:
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd
Vpon the pillours of Eternity,
That is contrayr to Mutabilitie:
For, all that moueth, doth in Change delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight:
O that great Sabaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight. (FQ VII.viii.1–2)

Here, on the heels of Mutabilitie’s attempt to usurp Jove’s throne, we find the poet’s deepest desire most clearly revealed. There is no attempt to express it in terms of the Classical or pagan traditions. No effort to enwrap it in any “darke conceit.” Only the plaintive cry of a Christian man, pleading for that most sacred thing to which the whole of his grand poetic sign has pointed—rest in the unwavering presence of the glory of God.
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