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Carolyn Davis
Andrews University, dcarolyn@andrews.edu

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Honors Thesis

Spenser's Palmer: The Perversion of Right Reason in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II

Carolyn Davis

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Advisor: Dr. L. Monique Pittman

Primary Advisor Signature: ______________

Department: English ______________

Abstract

In Book II of his epic romance *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Edmund Spenser narrates the journey of Guyon, the knight of Temperance, and his faithful Palmer, generally viewed as the external embodiment of Guyon's Reason. In a close reading of the Palmer's behavior, from his appearance at Gloriana's court to his final destruction of the Bower, his flaws may be addressed and properly diagnosed as more than the obvious workings of righteous anger. Additionally, a faceted analysis of the Palmer allows for better distinction between the ideas that Spenser's Humanistic influences and his Protestant leanings bring to his metaphorical table.

Spenser's Palmer: The Perversion of Right Reason in *The Faerie Queene*

In Book II of his epic romance, *The Faerie Queene,* Edmund Spenser narrates the journey of Guyon, the knight of Temperance, and his faithful Palmer. As a sixteenth-century English writer, Spenser's writing is inevitably influenced by Humanism and Protestantism and the allegorical implications that both of these schools of thought contribute. Spenser models *The Faerie Queene* after Aristotle's *Nichomachaen Ethics* in which Aristotle lays out a plan for the ultimate acquisition of human happiness, or *eudaimonia*. This plan requires the development of various virtues, each of which Spenser purports to represent throughout his epic. Aristotle states that "virtue is a kind of mean, since…it aims at what is intermediate," (ii.6.1106b.33-34) though it is only in Book II that Spenser introduces the concept of balance between two extremes—excess and deficiency—which are always moderated by a central governing force of Temperance or Reason.[1] Instances of this need for equilibrium regularly appear throughout the narrative of Book II, and within each is represented a desire, bordering on an obsession, to find a balance between the two temperaments.

As Guyon learns from the various situations that he encounters, the Palmer is necessary to his right understanding of the narrative world around him. Most scholars attribute this to Palmer's representation as Reason, as much of his advice to Guyon and others whom they meet appears to serve as evidence for this distinction. Indeed, Maurice Evans goes so far as to call him "the power which God of his grace restored to Adam after the Fall, enabling him still to retain a glimpse of the divine truth" (89). His supposed direct connection to divinity is iterated by many Spenserian scholars; in regard to the Mammon incident, Rosemary Freeman asserts that "It is significant that the Palmer has been left waiting behind, for man cannot serve God and

[1] It is interesting to note the manner of description that Susanne L. Wofford gives to this situation as it is represented in *The Faerie Queene*. She asserts that "throughout the book we are in a place of dualities—no absolutes, no single one thing that sums everything up, but a constant balancing…to find the proper human place in the middle" (119).

Mammon" (129). Even Helen Cooney, who tries to discover a new realization of the Palmer, ultimately concludes that "the Palmer represents the virtue of Prudence" (Cooney 183). This idealization of the Palmer is so widely accepted that many scholars no longer attempt to address the Palmer's character; any of his specific attributes are conveniently ignored in favor of his generalization as Reason.

The prevailing opinion has long been that every interjection of the Palmer is uttered as a means of good influence. Though this cannot be wholly denied, it does not negate the fact that many actions undertaken for the greater good unintentionally, by their very nature, undermine the work attempted, a cogent example being the crusades of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. As such, this paper will attempt to recognize that if the Palmer is ultimately responsible for Guyon's understanding of his surroundings, then the destruction of Acrasia's Bower in Canto XII must also be attributed to his influence. While this destruction supposedly represents a cleansing experience similar to that of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple in Matthew 21, there is a distinct component of irrational violence and anger to the proceedings as "all those pleasaunt bowres and Pallace braue, / *Guyon* broke downe, with rigour pittilesse" (2.12.83.1-2). Nothing about their behavior is conducive to Temperance or Reason; the very use of the adjective "pittilesse" conveys a heartless and unabating anger, and prompts the reader to question how two characters meant to represent moderation and balance so quickly lose control.

The necessity for and lack of balance appears in almost every situation where Guyon interacts with anyone outside of himself and the Palmer. It is missing in the figures of Cymochles and Pyrrhochles, who err on the side of excess in their dealings. Its absence is the cause of the deaths of Mordant and Amavia in Canto II, and it essentially defines Guyon's

purpose and the reason for the quest that he and the Palmer are on. However, all confidence cannot be put on the logic of rational thought. Judith Anderson asserts that "Guyon's quest confronts the duality of a merely natural world and a world that is primarily rational: between the Palmer and Mordant and Amavia, there stands only Guyon…There is a balancing of alternatives, but no balance between them. Nothing quite unites these alternatives, and no principle quite holds this universe together" (161). With the Palmer acting as an extreme rather than as a binding principle, his influence on Guyon cannot, by nature, be temperate. Anderson is one of the few critics who have thus far attempted to describe a problem with Guyon's ethos; even as he develops Temperance with the Palmer for aid, he is torn between two extremes, and this affects his reading of every situation.

While Guyon ultimately functions as an individual, it would be difficult not to see that much of the blame for his inability to fully engage in temperate behavior can be placed on the Palmer. Throughout the narrative, Guyon requires the interjections of the Palmer to properly read situations, such as the right identification of Redcrosse Knight in Canto I. However, as is later seen in the capture of Acrasia, his status as a figure of right Reason is undermined, which eventually affects the reader's view of his earlier actions. In a close reading of the Palmer's behavior, from his appearance at Gloriana's court to his final destruction of the Bower, his character flaws may be addressed and properly diagnosed as more than what most consider to be the obvious workings of righteous anger. In this way, a fuller understanding of his function in the story may develop, and he will receive not only an allegorical, but a human realization—without which many of his actions on Guyon's behalf appear malicious rather than simply the result of faulty reasoning. Additionally, a faceted analysis of the Palmer allows for better distinction between the ideas that Spenser's Humanistic influences and his Protestant leanings bring to

Spenser's metaphorical table, rendering the tensions between these two schools of thought more visibly traceable.

Elucidating the Palmer's Character

From the introduction of the Palmer's reason for embarking on his journey, it becomes clear that his intentions stem more from anger than justice. His complaint to Gloriana necessitates the voyage that he and Guyon undertake throughout Book II; in Canto II, Guyon tells Medina the story of how the Palmer appeared at the Faerie Queene's court and requested a knight to destroy Acrasia's Bower. Spenser says that the Palmer "did complaine / Of grieuous mischiefs… / …and many whelmd in deadly paine, / Whereof he crau'd redresse" (Spenser, 2.2.43.2-5). Within this passage, the Palmer shows not only a desire to right what he believes are wrongs done to people other than himself, but a propensity to vengeance. If one considers that redresse is "Reparation or compensation for a wrong or consequent loss," (OED) Palmer's craving for it is abnormal in that he has not been wronged, nor has he suffered a loss. He craves redress even though there is no evidence that he has undergone any torment at the hands of Acrasia. Though the automatic interpretation of this behavior would attribute his seeming lack of self-interest to his godly origins, if one considers the significance of his title as Palmer and what that entails, this can hardly be the case. A Palmer is one who travels to the holy lands on a pilgrimage, although the OED gives another, more specific definition of a Palmer as "an itinerant monk travelling from shrine to shrine under a perpetual vow of poverty." This calling is not entered into lightly, and entails much in the way of letting go of personal property, anger being as much a possession as the clothes on one's back. In light of his vow of pilgrimage and poverty, it appears odd that he would not only abandon his quest for the sake of a complaint, but also that he would engage in such extreme behavior to manipulate the circumstances of Acrasia's desired

destruction. His vengeful attitude is entirely outside of the calm reason that the reader has been instructed to expect from him.

In order to critique the Palmer's reason, a proper understanding of reason must be achieved. The OED records that as early as 1225, reason meant "The power of the mind to think and form valid judgements by a process of logic; the mental faculty which is used in adapting thought or action to some end; the guiding principle of the mind in the process of thinking." In this sense then, the Palmer can be seen as Reason for he is a guiding principle, regardless of where he leads Guyon. In the philosophical sense, however, reason also means "A faculty transcending understanding, by which first principles are grasped *a priori*." This reason is not learned over time in the manner of virtue; rather it is an ability that one should have from birth as a guide. Though Guyon has his "reason" for the entire journey, the Palmer's ability to enact desirable behavior through logic is questionable. What is undeniable, though is that the Palmer fails as reason because his actions cannot be "contrasted with will, imagination, passion" (OED); his distaste for Acrasia's concupiscence is far more zealous than reasoned. Instead, the Palmer utilizes his ability to rationalize his passionate reactions and attempts to cast them in a more appropriate light of piety. Rather than relying ultimately on his Reason, the Palmer rationalizes to legitimize his behavior. Though reason does require a certain amount of rationalizing to strengthen an argument, the Palmer engages in such intense sermonizing that some critical attention has come to it. Judith Anderson points out that a comparison can be formed between the speeches of Braggadocchio and the Palmer. Though Braggadocchio hides in fear from Belpheobe he immediately afterwards asserts that he ran because she seemed "either hellish feends, or powres on hye," (2.3.45.5) and that as soon as he realized who she was, he would have come forth. His excuses, Anderson argues, are very much in the same style as the Palmer's

behavior in that the rationalization that the Palmer brings to his various encounters is given an extreme parody in the behavior of Braggadocchio: “That the Palmer's attitude and methods should be subjected to parody… suggests at least a potential weakness and a limitation in them” (165). It seems that Braggadocchio functions more as a foil for the Palmer than for Guyon, for even though he may represent misplaced chivalry, his propensity to “mythmaking”[2] for his own gain and aggrandizement is similar to the moralizing in which the Palmer partakes. Just as Braggadocchio’s rationalizations are not sufficient to convince the reader that he is truly in control of himself and his surroundings, the Palmer’s sermonizing may not be enough to justify his actions as right.

The Palmer appears particularly incompetent in the situation concerning Phaon,[3] Furor, and Occasion and the deceit that the two use on Phaon to convince him of his wife’s infidelity. The Palmer’s dialogue suffers from a descriptive tone as he gives Phaon belated instruction on how to deal with the betrayal of his wife. “Wrath, gealosie, griefe, loue do thus expell: / wrath is a fire, and gealosie a weede / Griefe is a flood, and loue a monster fell” (2.4.35.1-3). While what he tells Phaon is, for the most part, true, it does not serve any real purpose. Phaon’s story is complete and so the Palmer’s admonitions are more akin to posturing than actual counsel, as the counsel hardly holds significance in the face of his imminent death. As one of the earliest instances of Reason gone astray, the Palmer here equates the intemperance of wrath and jealousy with love in its entirety, portraying it as a monster fell: “Fierce, savage; cruel, ruthless; dreadful, terrible” (OED). The argument holds very little substance because it offers no distinctions; the Love of God, which the Palmer must, by definition, hold dear, does not receive separate

[2] A term used by Anderson to describe Braggadocchio’s behavior in the aftermath of his interaction with Belphoebe in Canto III; he attempts to rationalize his fright by saying that he thought it was thunder.
[3] In earlier editions of *The Faerie Queene* and in many journals and articles, this character is more commonly known as Phedon.

treatment. Particularly interesting is the manner in which he names love as the only antidote to Phaon's trials in line 1, yet he immediately withdraws that view in line 3 for his monster metaphor.[4] The Palmer offers no differentiation between the various and faceted types of love that exist, preferring instead to rail against what he sees as the inevitable result of feelings that rarely stem from reasonable emotions. His fear and distaste of concupiscence lead him to react irrationally to the stimulus of dying youth that Phaon embodies. Lauren Silberman, discussing the methods by which Temperance repeatedly fails in the narrative, posits that "The hermeneutical errors characteristic of Guyon and his mentor the Palmer result partly from an indiscriminate adherence to methodology but, more fundamentally, from prudishness that induces the drawing of rigid boundaries around the individual, boundaries that purport to exclude sense experience" (12). Their desire to experience everything through the ethical, though static, lens of Temperance precludes them from sufficiently engaging with each situation; rather than reacting to circumstances, they make futile attempts to force each situation into harmony with their preconceived and ill-applied notions. Consequently, both the Palmer and Guyon consider abstinence from sensory stimulation as the epitome of reasonable behavior although they are in actuality positioning themselves at the opposite pole to sexual extravagance, extreme chastity.

In his interactions with Phaedria, the Palmer shows another facet of his clearly troubled character. Early in Canto VI, she tempts Guyon away from the Palmer and on the journey to Acrasia's Bower, the travelers once again come into contact with her. The Palmer's response to this second meeting is nothing short of vitriolic. When she comes alongside their boat to engage the men onboard with her significant charms, "the Palmer gan full bitterly / Her to rebuke" (2.12.16.5-6). The bitterness of his response opens to the reader another facet of his character, for

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[4] Upon close reading of the first line, the punctuation appears to indicate that the Palmer wants Phaon to exercise love in the face of danger, yet line 3 very clearly iterates an opposite idea.

it is more than stern reproof; it is "cruelly reproachful, stinging, cutting, harsh" (OED). His rebuke is more than an admonishment against her sinful behavior; the anger behind it is severe and cruel, far from the satisfactory example of piety that he is meant to be representing. Again, her obvious sexuality represents a threat to the Palmer's purposeful chastity; as such she and her attendant temptations require immediate expulsion. He lashes out at her because she is an impediment to his studied abstinence. In a chapter discussing Book II, "Sermon Parody and Discourses of the Flesh," Richard Mallete asserts that the two temptresses offend the Palmer's sensibilities concerning the flesh so intensely that he "exercises a curiously public homiletic role" (80). Rather than acting the guide to Guyon, the Palmer engages in sermon parody so as to shield himself from the immediate temptations facing him. By enforcing his will over Acrasia's actions, and in the destruction of the Bower that follows, the Palmer slowly subverts his purpose until his actions locate him so far from his righteous center that the restoration of balance becomes nigh on impossible.

In naming Acrasia, derived from the Greek *Akrasia* meaning incontinence or weakness of will, Spenser attempts to position her as the obvious villain to Guyon's hero. She does not deserve rehabilitation because, as Nigel Warburton reads Aristotle, this incontinence is entirely voluntary. As he states it, those involved in *Akrasia* "are overcome by their appetite and they succumb to the temptation of immediate pleasures rather than acting in a way that is conducive to long-term flourishing" (26). She is inherently against human life, and therefore is rightfully objectionable. However, the Palmer's reaction to her is no more conducive to "flourishing" thank Acrasia's, for rather than being the mean of continence, he moves to the other extreme; "the sort of man who takes *less* delight than he should in bodily things" as it were (vii.9.1151b.27-28). The continent man does not reject bodily pleasure, he merely moderates his enjoyment of them.

The culminating episode of Book II, then, results from the failure to correctly assert righteousness; in allowing himself to succumb to radical chastity rather than attaining the balance that he is said to represent, the Palmer no longer possesses the ability to properly judge and punish Acrasia's offenses. In consequence, the destruction of Acrasia's Bower results from the rage that the Palmer has been slowly fostering in himself and Guyon. Although all previous encounters have appeared to be leading to a final triumph of balance over excess, it is now clear that no earlier scenario truly resulted in a victory of Reason; that the Bower scene should suffer the same fate does not surprise. Immediately, the beauty of the Bower entrances the reader, though certain details appear to emphasize that "the process of exploring [the Bower] (and for the reader, of imagining it), must be similarly separate from the process of assessing it" (Mattison 85).

Spenser devotes three stanzas of Canto XII, 76-78, to describing Acrasia's beauty, but he constantly reminds his readers that what they are seeing must not be desired: "Vpon a bed of Roses she was layd, / As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin" (2.12.77.1-2). The term "pleasant sin" beautifully shows that Spenser recognizes, and desires to emphasize, that sin often disguises itself as beauty. Conversely, the destruction of the Bower supposedly accentuates that proper action may not necessarily be beautiful, especially when it is the only mechanism to achieve the desired outcome. Unfortunately, the "means to an end" rationalization here inadequately satisfies the requirements of Reason. The Palmer's "subtile net" serves to capture Acrasia, but her capture does not equate with overcoming temptation. Those who occupied the Bower with her "Fled all away for feare of fowler shame" (2.12.81.7); though they flee from the Bower, they are not inspired by "The painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances"

(OED) that constitutes shame. Instead of feeling this overwhelming shame as a consequence of their actions, they merely fear the shame that they would doubtless receive from being caught by the Palmer. This shame is not an internal feeling of repentance, its manifestation as public punishment represents a far greater threat to the captives. Little attempt is made to rectify the wrongs of Acrasia; even though "*Verdant*…he soone untyde, / And counsel sage in steed thereof to him applyde" (2.12.82.8-9), Verdant is not penitent. Spenser says "Then led they her away, and eke that knight / They with them led, both sorrowful and sad" (2.12.84.1-2), and though the textual notes would assert that this sorrow is inward shame, it seems unlikely that one such as Acrasia, who is responsible for the deaths and transformations of many, would be chastened by one as apparently impotent as the Palmer.

Having used her wiles to ensnare and transform many men into mindless beasts, their displeasure at her capture is surprising. That those whom she had transformed "fierce at them gan fly / As in their mistress reskew, whom they lad" (2.12.84.6-7) speaks volumes about her entrancing powers, because even when the Palmer transforms them back to their original form, they "stared ghastly, some for inward shame, / And some for wrath, to see their captiue Dame" (2.12.86.4-5). Her captives neither appreciate their change nor desire her capture, a response far removed from the thankful feelings one expects from converts who receive the "gospel truth." Gryll, as the only man who refuses to be restored and who often receives the allegorical interpretation of the unrepentant sinner, becomes a spokesman for the rest of his fellow beasts. Although ultimately restored to his human form, he "Repyned greatly, and did miscall / That had from hoggish form him brought to naturall" (2.12.86.8-9). The Palmer merely glosses over his anger as the pining of an unredeemable sinner, but considering how closely it reflects the reactions of his fellow captives, though with words, the ideal religious transition never receives

suitable attention. The Palmer makes the mistake of assuming that the outward changes observed in the captives mirror some internal repentance. No corrective measures are implemented to see that these enchanted men are converted to a proper way of thinking; they receive baptism without being taught the Bible. The Palmer's objective is the capture of Acrasia, and now that it has reached completion, all that remains is to depart, "whilest wether serues and winde" (2.12. 87.9).

While this overall view of the Palmer places him in a far from favorable light, it is not the desire of this paper to undermine the good that the Palmer does in augmenting Guyon's point of view. It is obvious that Guyon learns greater Temperance from the Palmer's advice—without the Palmer's intercession he would have killed Redcrosse for the "greater good"—and this stems mainly from Guyon's extreme deficiency as a reader. Therefore, it is not necessary that the Palmer be perfect in his teaching because his instructions to Guyon are preferable to Guyon's utterly ignorant readings. Perhaps instead of representing the will of God as many critics suggest, the Palmer inadvertently begins to resemble the Church as an abstract, as well as Spenser's internal clash between his education and his God. Not only does this leave room for error in his ways, but it leaves room for interpretation of his speeches in a more positive light than what has been discussed thus far. While Spenser's God is always just in his dealings with humanity, centuries of evidence have shown that in times of necessity, the Church may turn to brute force to achieve its aim. Righteous anger is God's response to the Israelites' golden calf in Exodus 32; though his anger burned against them, Moses—a mere human—convinced him to extend mercy to the Israelites, a cycle that is repeated many times in Exodus. Wrath as the Palmer engages with it is blind to its own shortcomings; his iconoclastic destruction of the Bower of Bliss does not leave room for mercy, nor does it seek to teach or learn from past failures. This iconoclasm is

characteristic of sixteenth-century Protestantism as it attempted to eradicate the influence of Mary Tudor and the Catholic Church from the social sphere. Spenser was complicit in this and he therefore cannot be objective in his desire to subdue all that is evil and wrong outside of his belief system. To expect him to do so would be to forget his humanity in light of his religiosity and to ignore the complex interplay between Reason and Faith endemic to the Protestant Reformation in England.

Dueling Influences

Spenser came of age in the years immediately following the Elizabethan Protestant settlement and as such it was a pervasive part of his life. The unrest characterizing the Tudor dynasty from Henry VIII's creation of a separate church was finally coming to a close. Elizabeth succeeded in creating a religion that allowed for variety in methods of worship, as such the chance of dissent lessened considerably. By the time in which Spenser was writing *The Faerie Queene*, Calvinist theology had become the most widely accepted belief system. Ciaran Brady asserts that Spenser himself was "strongly Calvinist in his theology" though he was also apparently "with equal firmness, an Anglican in his ecclesiology" (21). This position was not uncommon, in fact it is almost exactly the religion that the Protestant Settlement was meant to create. William A. Clebsch discusses the feat of the settlement, stating that the compromise "achieved a comprehensive church at once loyally national, traditionally catholic, theologically humanistic, and doctrinally Protestant" (114). The settlement succeeded precisely because it was vague enough to make the average citizen happy, although those on either extreme felt the settlement to be a betrayal by the government. Nevertheless, it allowed for a more robust Protestant presence in England, and it created a universal policy of worship for the English populace.

Religion would naturally have been an important facet of Spenser's education in just the same way that it pervaded every part of sixteenth century life. As such, it is not a surprise that his values were so firmly grounded within the biblical context; his grasp of biblical allusion hearkens to a long and thorough education in religion. His academic instruction was based firmly in the study of humanist texts, but it was also accompanied by a sincere discussion of Protestant values. As a child attending the Merchant Taylors' School, he was educated in the classic literature that Humanists admire: Horace, Virgil, and Cicero, of course supplemented with education in Greek and Latin. However, under the auspices of his headmaster, Richard Mulcaster, he would also have frequently come into contact with Protestant writers such as Jan Van der Noodt whose books young Spenser contributed to and which discuss his strongly held beliefs. As John N. King states it, "Richard Mulcaster enjoyed a reputation both as an educational reformer and as a zealous Protestant ideologue" (200-201). According to William Oram, Richard Mulcaster was "a northerner educated at Oxford and Cambridge who later became important in London intellectual circles" (3), and as such "he could hardly have been better chosen as the teacher of England's' future epic poet" (2).[5] Of course, church attendance was compulsory at the time, so Spenser could hardly have helped having a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. Indeed, King says that "in order to enroll as a poor student in Merchant Taylors' School, young Spenser had to recite the catechism," something that any youth in that religious climate should have been able to accomplish (200).

As Mulcaster and Spenser show, the tension characterizing the early relationship between humanism and Protestantism had begun to fade. Erasmus himself, the pinnacle representative of humanist thought, was a proponent of a vernacular Bible for the English speaker. In the

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[5] Most of Oram's claims are suppositions, but it makes sense that a young Spenser would have admired and internalized the lessons he got from this apparent intellectual giant.

aftermath of the Catholic Church's wanton destruction of English translation Bibles in 1526, Protestants and Biblical humanists joined together in rebellion against the Church's policies. The Protestants interacted positively with the humanists in a number of ways; "The intellectual vigor and popular appeal of the learned transferred to the Protestants when, for example, Tyndale translated Erasmus' *Enchiridion of a Christian Knight*, and [William] Roy conjoined Erasmus' plea for the vernacular Bible with Luther's attack on clerical celibacy" (Clebsch 118-119). The importance of correct and accurate translation was a part of both schools of thought; if one cannot learn in another language, learning must be accomplished by whatever method is available to the student. Therefore, the Catholic Church's behavior would have been deeply offensive to those concerned. Protestantism took up the banner of publication to forward its aims and expose popery as false. Though some would object to what they viewed as a return to secular values, the emergence of Protestant poetics combined with painstaking research in the humanist tradition, finally resulted in the emergence of "an authentically Protestant literary culture" (Collinson 98).

In Spenser's time, Protestantism and Humanism were not mutually exclusive; even though this poem contains clear religious allegory, the Spenser Encyclopedia calls *The Faerie Queene* "the major poem of sixteenth-century English humanism." However, this is not to say that tensions between the use of Reason as a way of understanding the world and knowledge of God as the supreme authority did not occur; some misalignment inevitably appears in the interaction of these two because of the belief systems that they encompass. Richard Halpern says that Humanism represented "a means of developing the expressiveness of the individual, or a sure road to cultural anarchy" (43). Essentially, the interpretation of the individual was of the utmost importance; only by interacting with the text on a personal level could knowledge be

acquired. Individual thought free of institutional indoctrination became the standard of true learning. In completely opposite fashion, biblical significance does not depend on the hearer; the gospel message represents absolute truth and its veracity does not depend on belief from any reader, though interpretations may differ. Biblical narrative takes into account human frailty and it assumes that complete understanding is impossible. Regardless, this did not stop those like Erasmus, Tyndale, and, of course, Spenser to work within both spheres simultaneously; it is entirely probable that this tension became a source of creative distinction for them.

Although these authors were able to engage with both Humanism and Protestantism at once, the work of reconciling the two within the context of *The Faerie Queene* poses many difficulties. Though both ideologies are clearly present in the text, few critics of Book II attempt to discuss them because many problems arise upon close examination. If only Protestant influences are examined, they seem to interact in harmony; the same can be said for the classical influences. Yet when these influences are looked at in tandem, the allegory appears to break down because Guyon cannot be an allegorical figure at the same time as he is a rhetorical one. To clarify, the virtues that Spenser adopts from Aristotle are ethical while the Biblical virtues are moral; though Aristotle labels them as moral virtues, his description of their implementation does not stem from the Christian understanding of morality—as knowledge of right and wrong. Aristotle's moral virtues predicate on a constant movement toward *eudaimonia*, or happiness; by contrast, Christian morality is based on metaphysically grounded concept of right and wrong Though Spenser's writing extended from his interaction with Aristotelian virtues, he never separates himself from the Christian tradition of moral virtue. On a certain level, Spenser cannot take a subjective view of his work in the Aristotelian tradition because his religious leanings do not allow for righteousness without morals.

The Nichomachean Ethics say that good works do not make one virtuous, rather "the agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character" (ii.4.1105b.3-4). As the evidence shows, neither Guyon nor the Palmer truly meet any of these criteria. Guyon suffers from an inability to gather knowledge by reading a situation; his actions at every turn result from the Palmer's desires, and his propensity to get into trouble when left alone speaks volumes to his uncertain character. None of these circumstances satisfactorily show whether Guyon's understanding of morality is equally at fault. Likewise, the Palmer suffers from a lack of comprehension, though his is far less noticeable. Yet still, the careful reader sees his failure to recognize the pertinent issues in the situations with Ruddymane and Phaon; his disregard for whether Acrasia's captives experience true conversion shows a superficial view of the importance of righteousness. He chooses the voyage to Acrasia's Bower but not from a disinterested desire for good; his appeal to Gloriana was for "redresse" (2.2.43.5) of the unmentioned wrong she apparently did to him. The situation clearly illustrates the impossibility of combining what supposedly operates as righteous anger in the capture of Acrasia with the reasoned behavior that Aristotle advocates. Forcing a reconciliation between the ideas appears futile in the aftermath of the Bower's destruction.

Rather than trying to make these views fit, examining them as separate entities and understanding why they are both present will be far more satisfying. In many ways, they do complement each other. The influences of Spenser's Protestant background are deeply felt throughout Book II, although many scholars assert that Guyon's story is dedicated more to classical influence than to religion. However, one must not assume that his humanist education

and his Protestant beliefs should be in absolute disagreement. As Patrick Collinson so aptly puts it, "*The Faerie Queene* is unmistakably a Protestent epic…With these poets the total incompatibility of Protestantism and high culture becomes more doubtful" (94). A major tenet that Protestantism and Humanism have in common, it is that one must be well read to succeed. Guyon begins the book as an incompetent reader, so in this respect, both schools work to improve his abilities. Spenser's expert dialogue both with the Bible and classical scholarship allows the book to work ably within both spheres, although at times their inherent contradictions manifest in Guyon's "body." Guyon is both the teacher and the student; as an allegory he is flawed because he cannot act as the embodiment of a single idea, no matter Spenser's intention. As a rhetorical figure, he strays too far from the temperate to be effective. He behaves more as a flawed human, regardless of his faerie origins; both ideals of perfection are outside of his reach. If Guyon must be allowed a modicum of imperfection, then surely the Palmer's failures are even more understandable, for his origins are fallible and human.

Only as a representative of humanity can the Palmer's shortcomings be forgiven. Not only does Spenser's human frailty need to be taken into account, but the Palmer's humanity has also gone unrecognized thus far, and this is truly detrimental to the reading of his character. The Palmer is described as comely, yet he is still "clad in black attyre, / Of ripest yeares," and his physical description gives him "heares all hoarie gray, / That with a staff his feeble steps did stire" (2.1.7.2-4). This man is old and delicate; his weakness is such that he lags far behind Guyon who is upon a horse. His black attire is formidable, yet his steps are feeble and slow; the Palmer has the sobriety to fulfill his purpose, but not the internal resources to do it correctly. The reader's introduction to the Palmer is far different from the one that Spenser outlined in his letter to Raleigh, stating that "The second day ther came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody

hands, whose Parents he complained to haue bene slayn by an Enchaunteresse called Acrasia: and therfore craued of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight, to performe that aduenture" (717). This account is much more satisfactory than the one that eventually became Canto XII because it allows the Palmer some justification in his behavior while creating a more heavy-handed crime for Acrasia than that of too much pleasure. In the final version, not only is the Palmer weak, but he is inconsistent.

Aristotle's Virtuous Man

Spenser's goal in this may have been to undermine his source material, Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, to create a fallible paragon of Reason and thus assert the dominance of spiritual continence over human, and therefore flawed, continence. Aristotle's concern in the *Nichomachean Ethics* is to outline the way in which the happiness of man can be attained. This happiness, or *eudaimonia* represents the most desirable and ultimately satisfying lifestyle for man, "what we state the end of human affairs to be" (x.6.1176a.33) It is only through attaining the virtues that Aristotle discusses that man can reach this state of advanced actualization. These virtues are divided into moral and intellectual virtues, the distinction being that "intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching…while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit" (ii.1.1103a.14-15). Herein then, lies the reason for the underlying tension concerning Reason's role in righteousness. Within the Letter to Raleigh, Spenser describes his work of allegory in the context of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*: "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised" (715). Each of the books is meant to represent one of the twelve virtues mentioned in Aristotle's work, although Spenser was only able to make it through six of those virtues fully. However, the virtues mentioned in the Ethics are "divided

into two main kinds, intellectual and moral," (77) and Ernest Sirluck notes that while Spenser mainly discussed the moral virtues, his vision of the Palmer most closely represents the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (97), which would appear to value the intellect over morality. In the Palmer's failure to properly enact Temperance in Guyon, then, Spenser undermines the intellects ability to be a moral guide. Aristotle's Temperance is not easily swayed; it functions as a corrective mean between two undesirable limits. if the Palmer represents reason, he is unrepresented by the catalog of virtues. However, Ernest Sirluck posits that the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom adequately describes the Palmer's "reasonable" role (97). If we take this assertion to be true, then the Palmer's deficiency becomes perfectly intelligible, though perhaps not in the way which Sirluck intended. Practical wisdom cannot guide Guyon because, according to Aristotle, "it is of no use to those who have *not* virtue" (vi.12.1143b.33-34). Aristotle's words imply that Guyon cannot properly learn his virtue because practical wisdom cannot teach; it is only useful to the one who already know good. The presence of wisdom is dependent on virtue, "for virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means" (vi.12.1144a.2-3). Without the virtue already in hand, the efforts of both are futile.

Temperance, which Guyon should represent, is a moral virtue. According to Aristotle, it is entirely concerned with bodily pleasure, the pleasure of touch. As Guyon and the Palmer finally travel to the Bower of Bliss in Canto XII, they encounter various temptations that Guyon only resists by the help of his Palmer and the Palmer's harsh rebuke of them. When Guyon comes across "wanton Maidens" (2.12.66.1) bathing and he "somewhat gan relent his earnest pace" (2.12.65.8) to join them , the Palmer immediately "much rebukt those wandring eyes of his, / And counseld well, him forward thence did draw" (2.12.69.2-3). Here, Guyon's struggle to

attain Temperance is clear in his inability to resist the maidens on his own merit. Aristotle states that "the temperate man is so called because he is not pained at the absence of what is pleasant and at his abstinence from it" (iii.11.1119a.2-3), and Guyon's wandering eyes show his inability to internalize his temperate education. Though this situation stems from Guyon's lack of true Temperance in the face of sexual temptation[6], it also represents an argument against the Palmer's—or reason's—ability to adequately react to moral situations. Perhaps then, Guyon's character more closely embodies continence than temperance, for Aristotle says that "if continence involves having strong and bad appetites, the temperate man will not be continent nor the continent man temperate" (vii.2.1146a.5-6). If Guyon is striving for continence, his behavior and the Palmer's presence are both justifiable because "the continent man, knowing that his appetites are bad, refuses on account of his *rational principle* to follow them" (vii.1.1145b.7-8, emphasis added). The Palmer as his rational principle, his practical wisdom, turns him from the things that he desires, but cannot have. Only those who feel no temptation can experience temperance, and as shown in the above example, Guyon is not immune to the lure of bodily pleasure.

An argument can be made that Spenser's Reason fails because he is unable to truly reconcile Aristotle's idea of Temperance and, peripherally, Reason with his own beliefs. R. Nevo, in his discussion of the Bower of Bliss, states that "In Spenser's thought…is implicit the puritan suspicion of the works of nature" (39). While Nevo is here discussing simply the beauty of the Bower, this line of reasoning is still applicable to Spenser's imagining of the entire episode of destruction. There is "a close parallel between the evils of the Bower and the evils attributed to the misuse of religious images" (Greenblatt 189) that colors the pure waters of

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[6]This is an idea discussed in Syrithe Pugh's "Ovid and the Limitations of Temperance in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*."

Spenser's reasoning; his suspicion of Catholic otherness and of the surreal beauty that they employ as a means of worship results in retaliatory iconoclasm that is not moderate, yet it is still satisfactory to slake the Palmer's thirst for justice. This suspicion means that the objectivity and neutrality that characterized Aristotle's virtues is missing from Spenser's reasoning and therefore, his Reason.

The inescapably significant issue with the Palmer's inadequacy is his seeming ignorance of any failure. As a paragon of righteous virtue, he becomes more a parody of righteousness than a proper example. Though it is rather unlikely that Spenser's intentions were parodic, the Palmer nonetheless shines as an example of radical religion left unchallenged. In fact, though Spenser created him as a Protestant figure, the Palmer's actions closely mirror the undiscerning violence that Spenser and his colleagues found so abhorrent in the Catholic Church and which the Protestants later reciprocated. For the modern reader, the comparison immediately springs forth, especially in the retroactively informed light of England's contentious, and violent, religious past. The mass killings of Catholics in Ireland—particularly endorsed by Spenser—, as well as the vicious expulsion of Catholics during the Civil War and Interregnum attest to the combative state of religious politics throughout British history.

In his own *View of the Present State of Ireland*, Spenser outlines a plan for the destruction of countless Irish in hopes that the rest of the people will convert out of fear. Spenser creates the characters of Irenius, a man well versed in the "degradations" of the Irish, and Eudoxus, to whom Irenius relays his opinions. The structure of the text works as a rhetorical outlet for Spenser to explain his ideas for reform, and though the reader is treated to two views of the topic, it is clear that Eudoxus' ignorance of the true nature of the Irish make him incapable of properly judging the course of action needed against them. Irenius nonchalantly tells him of the

method of subjugation which he saw dispatched in The Second Desmond Rebellion of 1580 and which he believes should be once again forced on the Irish people:

> Although there should none of them fall by the sworde, nor be slaine by the soldyer, yet thus beinge kepte from manvrance, and there cattle from running abroad by this hard restraint they would quicklie consume them selues and devoure one another.Thee proof whereof I sawe suffycientlie ensampled in those late wars in Mounster, for notwithstandinge that the same was a mot ritch and plentifull Countrye, full of Corne and Cattell that yow would haue thought they would haue been hable to stande longe, yet err one yeare and a half, they were brought to such wretchednes, as that any stonie harte whould haue rewed the same, out of euerie Corner of the woodes & glennes they came crepinge forth vpon theire hands, for theire legges could not beare them, they looked Anotomies of death, they spake like ghostes cryinge out of their graues, they did eate of the dead Carrions, happye were they could fynde them, yea and one another soone after in so much as the verie Carcasses they spared not to scrape out of theire graues, and yf they founde a plot of water cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast…in shorte space there were none almost left and a most populous and plentyfull Contrye suddenlie left voyde of man or beast, yet sure in all that war there perished not manye by the sworde, but all by the extremitye of famine, which they themselues had wrought." (135).

The images contained here describe a people absolutely destroyed by the hunger brought on by invading English, and yet Irenius, and consequently Spenser, sees no reason why the same should not be done to the Irish at large. The parallel between the inhumane desires listed here and the Palmer's actions in the destruction of the Bower of Bliss cannot be ignored, nor are they coincidental. Clearly, Spenser believed that for the sake of civilizing those who wish to remain wild, even the most vicious action is acceptable. Though Ciaran Brady states that *The View* "was even then, as it has been since, a source of embarrassment" (25), the feelings that it evokes were nonetheless prevalent. In his use of force to assert the will of God, we see that Spenser's active zeal is, in itself, not adequately temperate. If, as Sean Kane perceptively states, "a virtue rarely shines forth as a positive but instead is anonymously defined as a middle position between competing opposites" (59), Spenser's Protestant ideology, in direct opposition to the Catholicism he distrusts, undermines his ability to direct the Palmer's actions. Therefore, seeking to reconcile Temperate Reason and religious fervor in the figure of the Palmer represents as difficult a task as

the peaceful coexistence of Catholicism and Protestantism, a reality that Spenser could neither visualize nor desire.

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