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Despaire and Briton Moniments: Moments of Protestant Clarity in *The Faerie Queene*

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Abstract

Two moments of high-pitched emotion in *The Faerie Queene*, the Redcrosse Knight's near suicide in the cave of Despaire and Arthur's rapture at reading the truncated chronicle of the Britons, are strangely similar in resolving the built-up tension by dint of an absolute unity and simplicity of thought and feeling. In the midst of a poem renowned for inviting us to venture into complexity, these two situations swerve from interpretive and affective abundance. Both Despaire's speeches and Briton Moniments are ripe for interrogation on several levels, but each hero eschews such engagement in favor of a principle of radical certitude: Redcrosse is saved by the Practical Syllogism, and Arthur reacts with an outpouring of patriotic fervor. The suggestion is that in some cases, with some matters, proliferation of thought and feeling though ordinarily salutary must be suspended and set aside. Though he did not embrace it as his main mode of operating, Protestantism's simplifying strain did make an impression on Spenser. Returning to known truths is periodically necessary for maintaining an overall openness to ambiguity, intricacy, and dialogue.

Anyone familiar with the scholarly literature on the *Faerie Queene* must appreciate the many and ingenious accounts, from so many different angles, of the ways it works to proliferate meaning and create space(s) open to multiple interpretations and responses.¹ A few of these angles are well illustrated by more recent specimens. From the angle of emotion and affect, Joseph Campana and Andrew Wadowski have explored how *The Faerie Queene* recognizes subjective, affective experience,

¹ All references are from *The Faerie Queene*, 2nd Ed., ed. A. C. Hamilton et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

access to which opposes what Campana calls the “organizing violence of moral clarity”; for Wadowski, Spenser is able, in a way his model Tasso isn’t, to tap the “conceptual force of disorder.”² From the angle of a more intellectual mode of response, meanwhile, Gordon Teskey and Denna Iammarino have described the poem’s generation of hermeneutic possibilities.³ For Teskey, “meaning in *The Faerie Queene* is like meaning in life: it is always entangled in the real”; when the poem makes us alive to layers of such “entanglement,” we encounter what Teskey refers to as “thinking moments.” The briefest consideration of the poem will quickly bring any number of such moments to mind, surely including, as Iammarino points out, Arthur’s vision of Gloriana: in such episodes the hero gains direction even *from* the confusions of emotional agitation and interpretive uncertainty. But as Wadowski proves, the liberating force of disorder may be found in many diverse places—even the starkness of the Bower of Bliss’s destruction.⁴ Moreover, there is a rich strand of commentary, expounded by Darryl Gless, Richard Mallette, and Carol Kaske, and lately developed by James Ross Macdonald and Abraham Stoll, that tracks this disorder from the angle of theology.⁵ For such scholars, the indeterminacy of *The Faerie*

² Campana, “On Not Defending Poetry: Spenser, Suffering, and the Energy of Affect,” *PMLA* 120 (2005): 33-48, quote 39; Wadowski, “Spenser, Tasso, and The Ethics of Allegory,” *Modern Philology* 111 (2014): 365-83, quote 366.

³ Teskey, “Thinking Moments in *The Faerie Queene*,” *Spenser Studies* 22 (2007): 103-12, quote 111; Iammarino, “‘From that day forth I cast in careful mynd, / to seeke her out with labor, and long tyne’: Spenser, Augustine, and the Places of Living Language,” *Renascence* 65 (2012): 39-61. For an extended study of the importance of characters as readers, with willful narrowing of interpretive possibilities being a major obstacle for them, see also Paul Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 51-52, passim.

⁴ The Bower is of course a major node of contention; on its significance for hermeneutics see two recent contrasting studies, Jamey E. Graham, “Character in *The Faerie Queene*: Spenser’s Phenomenology of Morals,” *Modern Philology* 115 (2017): 31-52; and Amy Cooper, “Allegory and the Art of Memory in Book Two of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” *ELH* 84 (2017): 791-816. For Graham the Bower exemplifies *FQ*’s enforcement of pre-known meaning; for Cooper Guyon’s iconoclasm is a departure, and a failure of the interpretive possibilities furnished by memory.

⁵ Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Macdonald, “The Redcrosse Knight and the Limits of Human Holiness,” in *Spenser and the “Human,”* ed. Ayesha Ramachandran and Melissa E. Sanchez, for *Spenser Studies* 30

Queene's allegory is aligned with and even a way of expressing principles of Protestant doctrine and sensibility.

Without implying any sort of objection to such analyses, however, I would like to call attention to moments of *disentanglement*, moments when the poem's open possibilities become temporarily but radically closed—moments which possibly signal Spenser's intermittent suspension of hermeneutic or affective proliferation, and his Protestant inclination, or need, periodically to set limits on it. Such moments by no means outweigh the poem's dominant strain of emotional and intellectual multivalency and disorder, but they do interrupt it. And though such moments do not cast Spenser as anti-humanistic, reductive, or over-simplistic in his religious thinking, they do speak to a sense in which he had imbibed something of Protestantism's fundamental simplifying and clarifying tendencies. His virtue-knights and, implicitly, his readers build up, stretch, and exercise their powers of humanistic and heuristic learning and discerning and wallow in the complexity and the particularity of the inner and the outer worlds. But every so often, reasoning needs to yield to knowledge and emotion needs to crystalize and become focused, with certainty needing to intervene in both dimensions. By this discussion I mean both to contribute to our understanding of *The Faerie Queene's* hermeneutic fluidity by looking closely at exceptions in it, and to suggest how a major current of Protestant thought inflects Spenserian poetics.

I draw on two character-reactions that seem quite different but actually have much in common: the Redcrosse Knight's recovery from Despaire in Book I Canto ix and Prince Arthur's reaching the truncated section of Briton Moniments in Book II Canto x. Each case binds up emotional intensity with logical conclusiveness as a reaction to reflection on the past—a reflection which in each case, insofar as

(2015): 113-31; Stoll *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 47-78. For a seminal though more narrowly conceived account of indeterminacy and Protestantism in *FQ*, see Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1984), 84, 140-41, *passim*.

it *is* a special case, involves what *ought* to be enormous complexity. The personal history of Redcrosse as recounted by Despaire and the national history of the Celtic Britons as told in Briton Moniments are fraught with difficult and questionable premises, in themselves and in their application to their particular hearer and reader; as such, they seem geared to provoke intellectual interrogation and mixed feelings. But ultimately, neither does so. Instead, for Redcrosse and then for Arthur thought and feeling become suddenly and decisively concentrated and simplified; complexity dissipates in favor of the emotional and intellectual certainty of a unified idea. The implication of this parallel is that for the poet, some matters can become dangerous rather than illuminating if subjected to overreading. God's English gentleman or noble person typically can be fashioned by the parceling out, using resources of memory, analysis, and perception, of multifariousness and ambiguity. But a different approach might sometimes be necessary with regard to internalizing truths of special and general providence: applying the Practical Syllogism to the self and appreciating the country's ancient and current purposefulness.

That these two episodes behave differently than the great preponderance of *The Faerie Queene* might be shown by reviewing the one phenomenon Redcrosse and Arthur both encounter: the giant Orgoglio. Encompassing Redcrosse's crushing defeat and one of Arthur's signature victories, the Orgoglio sequence proves the importance of determinedly asking questions, engaging ambiguities, and navigating complexity, including that entailed in one's own experience and emotions. Orgoglio, given the various associations tied to giants, given his strange compounding of the theme of pride, already treated in Lucifera's house, and given the swirl of religious significations he and his partnership with Duessa blow open, epitomizes Spenserian multiplicity; and yet, one of his many meanings is to warn against the constriction of meaning and the paralysis it brings.⁶ Orgoglio figures the thought-trap of

⁶ See the in-depth study by William Oram, "Spenserian Paralysis," *Studies in English Literature* 41 (2001): 49-70.

seeing in only one way. His is the pride of certainty and monovision, and that accounts for its link to despair, as distinct from Lucifera's self-love. Orgoglio inspires feelings much akin to despair: in the face of him Redcrosse is utterly overwhelmed ("haplesse, and eke hopeless" (I.vii.11.4)); and when Arthur meets Una, in her worry over Redcrosse's capture by the giant, she is afflicted by a "griefe" so deep, and so unamenable to help, that expressing it "breeds despaire" (I.vii.41.5-6). He can instill these despairing feelings *and* manifest a projection of prideful feelings because such feelings are of a piece: Redcrosse *should* be made to move from the desperation of Orgoglio's dungeon to that of Despaire's cave, because *one* process of spiritual collapse is being traced.

For, as expositors of Spenser's period pointed out, perceiving oneself as invariably hapless and hopeless amounted to an insidious species of pride, wherein one stubbornly held, to the exclusion of any other possibility, the enormity of one's own sin to be bigger than God's power. Despair deserved condemnation as a rejection of an attitude one was *bound* to, the assumption of God's mercy as a consequent of his infinity; as William Perkins put it, "All such persons as are troubled with doubtings, distrustings, vnbeleefe, despaire of Gods mercie, are to learne & consider that God by his word bindes them in conscience to beleue the pardon of their owne sinnes be they neuer so grieuous or many, and to beleue their owne election to saluation whereof they doubt." Human certitude pertained strictly to God and his goodness; any doubt of that goodness, much less despair of it, was, paradoxically, a kind of certitude in falsity, an insistent elevation of the significance of one's own spiritual resume and thus a kind of "presumptuous disobedience."⁷ Dramatizing a Christian resisting despair, Perkins has Satan compare affections to "mightie gyants" in the mind, and the Christian answers rightly that he "can not

⁷ Perkins "A Treatise of Conscience," in *Golden Chaine* (Cambridge, 1600), 844-45. Perkins's *summa* gives its name to this collection of his works, all references to which are from this edition.

be so infinite in sinning, as God is infinite in mercie and pardoning.”⁸ On this connection John Downname is explicit:

this distrusting of Gods mercies, in respect of our vnworthinesse, proceedeth not from true humilitie, but from our natural pride it is our secret and inbred pride of heart, which makes vs to doubt of Gods mercie, vnlesse we bring him a bribe, and deserue it at his hands; and to desire to make the Lord beholding vnto vs, rather then we would be any whit beholding vnto him.⁹

Some years later John Donne, that lover of paradox, will admonish despair-sufferers that “even in this inordinate dejection thou exaltest thy self above God, and makest thy worst better then his best, thy sins larger then his mercy.”¹⁰

Hence the best answer to the challenge Orgoglio poses is interpretive openness and inquisitiveness, and the setting aside of certitudes. His hugeness seems to overshadow all possibilities and impose certitude in helplessness—but only seems to. Arthur, responding to Una’s sorrow as calling for further investigation as well as sympathy,¹¹ approaches her by overturning precisely this premise, that her near-despair is *necessary*; it only becomes necessary if she rejects dialogue: “Found neuer help, who neuer would his hurts impart” (I.vii.40.9). As he converses with her he maneuvers her into an acceptance of conversation, for her current feeling that disclosure *breeds* despair is self-fulfilling and must be, if gently, decisively refuted. There is inevitability in breeding—like begets like—that does not

⁸ Perkins, “A Dialogue Containing the Conflicts betweene Satan and the Christian,” 658.

⁹ John Downname, *The Christian Warfare* 3rd Ed. (London, 1612), 507-08.

¹⁰ Donne, Sermon #14, in *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10 vols., ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957): 3:303.

¹¹ For their dialogue encapsulating the importance of dialogue in *FQ* see Kaske, *Biblical Poetics*, 142-43.

obtain with talking. And so they converse: “Despaire breeds not (quoth he) where faith is staid / No faith so fast (quoth she) but flesh does paire. / Flesh may empaire (quoth he) but reason can repaire” (I.vii.41.7-9). What exactly he means by this and what its doctrinal ramifications are is unclear.¹² But he does prove the possibility-opening powers of the human intellectual and spiritual faculties he references, even in the referencing of them here. How does reason shore up a faith shaken by worldly infirmity and vicissitude? Many possible ideas arise: but then, Arthur has induced us, and Una, to generate ideas about idea-generation, and has thereby demonstrated that *not* all thought-avenues lead to despair. There are other possible things to believe in and other possible ways to make inferences. In fact, this may be one of his meanings: with faith weakened, reason can aid it by inventing propositions arguing adherence to it—discursive reasoning, dialogue, *abundance* of thought, all corroborate faith. Coordinately, her position that everything--disclosure, nondisclosure, our mortal coil itself--points only to despair becomes untenable, because it is exposed as merely *her* position, merely a self-authenticated and rote non-answer. Despair cannot abide an interlocutor; it requires a pridefully self-enforced echo-chamber.

Arthur’s “goodly reason, and well guided speach” accomplishes only persuading Una to “disclose the breach” that her predicament has wrought in her heart (I.vii.42.1-4), but this, since it marks the beginning of Orgoglio’s fall and Redcrosse’s rescue, merely testifies to the possibilities brought to life by the dynamics of conversation, with question-asking and processing new, complex information on his side, and coping with and sharing difficult memory and emotion on hers.¹³ For him to “inquire into the secrets of [her] griefe” and for her to answer by telling “the story sad” (I.vii.42.6, 9) is in itself to initiate

¹² See Mallette, *Discourses*, 17-23.

¹³ For a related discussion and an opposing view that the Despaire episode also shows this, see Christopher Bond, *Spenser, Milton, and the Redemption of the Epic Hero* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 119-21.

an escape of sorts, for here hopelessness is aligned with contentlessness; that Orgoglio is “empty wynd” (I.vii.9.9) clinches this sense of intimidatingly absolute non-meaning.¹⁴ Tellingly, perhaps, the heart-pain Una discloses and opens up to conversation is called a “breach,” a stabbing, rupturing intrusion into thought and feeling. It is as if the psyche were a wall, and her grief over Redcrosse’s capture a sudden and violent incursion into it, a gouging aperture threatening to swallow up thought and feeling. Such a breach in itself cannot be closed or undone, but it need not necessarily become a vacuum—reason can repair.

The breach acknowledged, exercise of reason, as begun by Una’s dialogue with Arthur, can displace bleak contentlessness with variegated content: Arthur first addresses Orgoglio’s monolithic menace with a trial-and-error, multiphasic attack, of which the brilliant burst of clarity from the diamond shield¹⁵ plays a major but not unassisted role, and then locates Redcrosse using a searching, exploratory activeness. What he finds, fittingly, is a depleted Redcrosse languishing in solitary confinement, with his jail-keeper the blind old man Ignaro, who “could not tell: ne euer other answere made” (I.viii.32.9). As we’ve seen, prideful despair/despairing pride knows only one note and abhors all alternative ideas, and so it is held in place by willful incuriosity. Moreover, as Redcrosse also represents the religious experience of the English people, imprisoned in the high Middle Ages by blind, rote acceptance of tradition, Ignaro’s aversion to conversing, learning, and questioning serves the historical

¹⁴ On Orgoglio’s windy identity-lessness, see James Nohnberg, *The Analogy of the Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 265-68.

¹⁵ For the shield’s irresistible power to dissipate falsity and confusion see I.vii.33-36; it being used against Orgoglio, in it “he has red his ende,” for its force is comparable to “th’Almighties lightning brond” (I.viii.21). Such would seem to stress the irresistible force of divine grace in inspiring understanding deleterious to pride; see Nohnberg, *Analogy*, 273-77. And yet, not only is the shield not the only factor in Orgoglio’s downfall, but irresistible grace is far from the shield’s only meaning; it also symbolizes the meaning-making magic of the poem itself, as implied in the remarks on Merlin’s fashioning of it and its enduring in “Faerie Lond, where it yet may ben seene, if sought” (I.vii.36).

and historiographical allegory, in a way anticipating the issues raised by Briton Moniments: part of what the Reformation rescued England from is a blind, uncritical view of the past, as framed and delimited by the Church.¹⁶ As pre-Reformation English Christianity and as the yet unregenerate individual believing soul, Redcrosse is stuck in a tightly circumscribed paradigm allowing for no fresh or new ways of evaluating or interpreting self and world. Arthur, contrariwise, interrogates Ignaro repeatedly (I.viii.32-33), then interprets his stolidity (I.viii.34.2-4), then confiscates his keys nonviolently (I.viii.34.5-7), proceeding to investigate the dungeon's recesses one room at a time (I.viii.37.1-3), never resorting to force until obstructed by the iron door of Redcrosse's cell; he tries the keys on all the other doors "without any breach" (I.viii.34.8). Arthur is open to emotion,¹⁷ but he also maintains his "goodly temperance" (I.viii.34.5) and *engages* with complexity in an experimental and inquiring vein, finding the solution after "long pains and labors manifold" (I.viii.40.5). Depth and variety of mental activity never become subsumed in a breach. Breaches into the psyche are not inevitable; and when they do occur they can be ministered to with a lively generation of thought and feeling.

And yet, this message applies, finally, neither to the breach sustained by Redcrosse because of Despaire nor to the breach in Briton Moniments that so moves Arthur, even though in each case it conspicuously ought to be applicable. Despaire's speeches in Redcrosse's "conscience made a secrete breach" (I.ix.48.3); the breaking off of the chronicle at Uther's reign is an "vntimely breach" that astounds and offends Arthur, though he still feels "secret pleasure" at his reading (II.x.68.6-9). Both Despaire and Briton Moniments make for complicated and provocative texts, and each makes a deep impact on its hearer/reader's innermost self. Each in itself calling for careful, subtle reading, each is

¹⁶ See for example John N. King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 97-100.

¹⁷ See his revulsion at Redcrosse's condition I.viii.39

shaped to have much in common with “thinking moments” throughout the poem. And yet, in each case the interpretive openness that seems to be developing is halted and closed in favor of a unified, simplified certitude. Syllogistic clarity of thought and unmixed, intense feeling come to the fore, in situations where *The Faerie Queene* would lead us to expect far otherwise. We find that sometimes, a breach into the secrets of the heart and mind cannot be handled by intellectual inventiveness or by self-governance of many-sided feelings.

Superficially, Despaire and Briton Moniments do not seem to parallel each other at all. In my reading I have not seen the episodes examined in tandem, and their evident unlikeness might seem to foster a sense of interpretive openness, as each seems its own discrete situation with its own problems, puzzles, and paradoxes. Despaire, whose discourse is obviously wrong, seems much more akin to a scene like Mammon’s cave; and Briton Moniments, preserve of sacrosanct truth--“Argument worthy of *Maeonian* quill” (II.x.3.1)--seems much closer to the education Redcrosse receives in the House of Holiness.¹⁸ Moreover, Arthur’s elation is his own response, whereas Redcrosse swerves from despair because of Una’s interceding—what we may take to be his thought and feeling is expressed not by him but by her.

When we do see the climax of Despaire and that of Briton Moniments as situations of the same kind, moreover, they seem at first blush even more redolent with multivalency and primed for readerly exertion. In terms of emotional stimulus, both involve the processing of mnemonically powerful storytelling: Redcrosse hears Despaire “Well knowing trew all, that he did rehearse,” and is struck with “fresh remembraunce” of his *personal* experience (I.ix.48.4-5); Arthur finds Briton Moniments in the chamber of Eumnestes, the man “of infinite remembraunce” (II.ix.56.1), and after reading is struck with

¹⁸ See Nohrnberg, *Analogy*, 267, 289-90.

“How brutish” it is to remain ignorant of the *national* experience (II.x.69.7). In both, this confrontation with memory amazes and arrests: Redcrosse reacts as though all his manly powers it did disperse, as though charmed with enchanted rhymes, and he oftentimes quaked and fainted (I.ix.48.7-9); Arthur feels “quite raiisht with delight,” as wonder at antiquity long stopped his speech (II.x.69.1, 68.9). In both, this amazement involves “secret” operation in the mind: within Redcrosse’s conscience, Despaire’s words “made a secret breach”; Arthur at the “vntimely breach” in the chronicle became offended, “yet secret pleasure did offence empeach.” The secret and vehement motions revolve around a sudden, incisive breach--the piercing sinking-in of Despaire’s anti-sermon and the abrupt cutting-off of Briton Moniments. The breach caps a deeply affecting and difficult-to-absorb discourse, one stirring memory and awakening feelings bound to be both profound and conflicted in each hero, insofar as he alive to a range of emotion.

We would also anticipate mixed feelings to be accompanied with a complex intellectual reaction, for both Despaire’s rhetoric and Briton Moniments are logically problematic and invite interrogation. That there are gaps in Despaire’s logic has been well observed,¹⁹ as his case for suicide depends on the hearer’s inability to detect the logically unsound and invalid. Arguing that the unfolding of life can mean one and only one thing, the piling up of reasons to incur God’s hatred—“The lenger life,

¹⁹ See for example Hume, *Protestant Poet*, 97-98; King, *Reformation Tradition*, 213-16. For my account, including these gaps as reflecting equivocation, see Curran, “That Suggestion: Catholic Casuistry, Complexity, and Macbeth,” in *Religions in Shakespeare’s Writings*, ed. David Urban, for *Religions* 9 no. 10: 315 (2018): 5-6;

<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100315>. Some readers find Despaire’s potency despite these gaps indicative of problems

in the determinism of Reformed theology; see Harold Skulsky, “Spenser’s Despair Episode and the Theology of Doubt,” *Modern Philology* 78 (1981): 227-42; Daniel Moss, “Spenser’s Despair and God’s Grace,” *Spenser Studies* 23 (2008): 73-102; Andrew Escobedo, *Volition’s Face: Personification and the Will in Renaissance Literature* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 143-57.

I wote the greater sin, / The greater sin, the greater punishment" (I.ix.43.1-2)--Despaire relies on an Ignaro-like imperviousness to knowledge and thought: his major premise would be revealed as unsound if his victim's mind could muster any consideration for the Protestant disapproval of Catholic merit-theology, or even for the New Testament itself. And to this lack of soundness is added a lack of validity, as his conclusion is self-contradictory: he pushes suicide as relief, rest from the troubles of life, but also as absolute non-relief, an eternal indulgence in self-flagellation; he frames suicide as satisfying in being easy escape *and* excruciating non-escape, all at once.

Moreover, even if Redcrosse assumes the significance of his own merits and demerits, Despaire's minor premise is extremely vulnerable. His argument builds its persuasiveness on past history, sins to which Redcrosse's "fresh remembraunce" forces him to admit guilt; but therefore Despaire's attack foregrounds *Redcrosse's* particular actions and their particularity—"For neuer knight that dared warlike deed / More luckless disadventures did amate" (I.ix.45.3-4)--which in turn calls attention to the many-sidedness of what he's done and been through. It is true that he cannot merely boast of his run of "great battels," and that even in his victories he has much to repent (I.ix.43.3-5)—but there *were* victories, along with semi-victories and shameful defeats, and defeats with mitigating circumstances. Even with what Despaire rightly identifies as his worst misstep, his betrayal of Una, his "Lady mild" (I.ix.46.6-9), Redcrosse's story, with its galaxy of details and the narrator's shifting perspective on it, defies reductively harsh judgment. Despaire proposes to Redcrosse that his sins are peculiarly heinous, but that very peculiarity, the uniqueness of Redcrosse's case, undercuts the proposition.

The argument of Briton Moniments, too, is troubled in general and insofar as it specifically regards its audience, in its case Arthur. Most obviously, the chronicle, derived principally from the medieval legendary British History originally propagated by the imaginative Welsh monk Geoffrey of

Monmouth (Galfridus), is, like Despaire, overtly one-sided: Despaire's thesis is that no one's ever been worse than Redcrosse, and the thesis of Briton Moniments is that the Troy-descended, super-civilized, world-beating Britons are uniquely excellent: "Ne vnder sunne" lives "ought" that to Queen Elizabeth's "linage may compaire" (II.x.2.1-3). As I have discussed at length elsewhere,²⁰ Spenser was almost certainly aware of the historiographical advancements which had exposed the fancifulness of Galfridian legend, and in his epitome of it signals this awareness. Briton Moniments periodically alludes to the absurdly self-glorifying quality of its material, freely throwing in Spenser's own invented eponymous heroes (Debon and Canutus) as well as elements, like Bunduca, *not* from the British History but from much more authoritative sources like Tacitus. Embellishing Geoffrey's embellishment of Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain, Spenser mentions that the sword Prince Nennius won in personal combat with Caesar is still extant, "yet to be seene this day" (II.x.49.5)—the non-historical, chivalric-romance tenor of the Galfridian duel is highlighted by the notion of there existing an artifact from it. As emblemized by this fight between Nennius and Caesar, the Galfridian chronology reconceived Britain as a parallel and rival civilization to Rome, an idea of world-historical conflict that with the Reformation gained a revitalized exigency; but, as set off by Briton Moniments' highly idealized counterpart, the Faerie Chronicle, with its untroubled line of hero-kings and their sparkling accomplishments, the heightened significance of the British History as national encomium seems to come at the expense of a believable historical record. To the extent Briton Moniments resembles the Faerie Chronicle, it speaks both to the imperative to fall back on a glorious and ancient national narrative, and to the unavailability of one that substantively reconstructs the past. And yet, the contrast between Briton Moniments and the Faerie

²⁰ Curran, "Spenser and the Historical Revolution: Briton Moniments and the Problem of Roman Britain," *Clio* 25 (1996): 273-92; *Roman Invasions: The British History, Protestant Anti-Romanism, and the Historical Imagination in England, 1530-1660* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 110-16, 168-71, 211-15.

Chronicle is as problematic as the comparison,²¹ for the Galfridian stories packed into Arthur's book are collectively laden with complication. Briton Moniments is filled with painful political turmoil, infighting, betrayal, succession and transition discontinuities, and tragedy and loss. Such features aid and abet encomium because they are necessary for the history's truth-to-life, but they compromise encomiastic functioning by making this unique people seem not so unique at all. *Are* the Britons a people of destiny, God's chosen, with a divinely purposed story-arc? The individual stories do not unambiguously show any such thing. It might be just as Ignaro-like to dismiss Briton Moniments as to embrace its content unquestioningly.

Any reader, that is, might do well to wonder about Briton Moniments' soundness—are the stories true?—and its validity—does the nation's glory follow from them?—and *this* reader, Arthur, should be especially inclined to read with curiosity. Arthur's interpretive position here is something like the inversion of Redcrosse's with Despaire: whereas Arthur cannot know how intimately Briton Moniments pertains to him, the relevance of Despaire to Redcrosse is all too plain. But just as Redcrosse's knowledge of his own experience might prompt him to object to Despaire's glossed-over, oversimplified account, so might Arthur's incomprehension of who he is, the future King Arthur, prompt closer reading of the chaos in Briton Moniments. *He* is the Galfridian chronology's linchpin, the component necessary for seeing an orderly pattern in it, a trajectory toward glory; he is the personage who far more than any other endows the British History with its teleology and its capacity for meaning and magnification. The epic voice opens Briton Moniments reminding Elizabeth and us of this—that her "realm and race, / From this renowned Prince deriued are" (II.x.4.1-2)—and it is reaffirmed with

²¹ For the ambiguities between Briton Moniments and the Faerie Chronicle in terms of idealization see the seminal study of Joan Warchol Rossi, "Briton Moniments: Spenser's Definition of Temperance in History," *English Literary Renaissance* 15 (1985): 42-58.

mention of King Arthur's future defrayal of Caesar's conquest of Britain by taking revenge on "ambitious Rome" (II.x.49.7-8),²² and then with the chronicle's breach at Uther, precisely the point of *The Faerie Queene's* historical present (III.iii.52), a clear sign of what King Arthur's victories will bring to the epic story of Britain. He cannot know as we do that he is the crescendo toward which the narrative he reads is building. But it must occur to us that this grants him rare opportunities as a reader. As he alone can read a version of the British History with the idea of King Arthur extracted from it, he alone might read it objectively and evaluate specific points of historical accuracy and exemplarity in it; he might even be able to ask how and how clearly the Britons' saga illustrates God's providence. On the other hand, if his view must remain mysteriously subjective, in that case he somehow senses the story's intimate connection to himself; this, too, would give him much to probe into. Do the Britons seem to have a national character, and how might it inform and reflect his own? If his singular relation to the chronicle somehow comes across to him, wouldn't this move his curiosity as well as his affections? Indeed, just such a response to his vision of Gloriana, *for* him and him alone and motivating him to pursue understanding *and* love, has itself brought him to Faerie Land in the first place.

Thus both Despaire and Briton Moniments seem geared, in *The Faerie Queene's* accustomed mode, to stimulate complexity of feeling and thought, and both Redcrosse and Arthur seem on the verge of engaging them as such, each agitated by burgeoning emotions and each wrestling with perplexing ideas.²³ Gravitating to and horrified by suicide, Redcrosse undergoes an arduous struggle before yielding to Despaire's insistence of immediate death as the only option for him, vacillating wildly

²² On this allusion to the Galfridian tale of Arthur's victorious Roman wars, see A. Kent Hieatt, "The Projected Continuation of *The Faerie Queene*: Rome Delivered," *Spenser Studies* 8 (1987): 335-42; Curran, *Roman Invasions*, 241-45.

²³ For somewhat related accounts of the strangely missed opportunities for interpretation, with Despaire, see Gless, *Interpretation*, 143-46; with Briton Moniments, see Suttie, *Self-Interpretation*, 159-60.

and avoiding a choice on the means of his demise, as if resisting intellectually as well as viscerally.

Arthur, meanwhile, reading the chronicle intently up to Uther's reign, is startled by how "There abruptly it did end" (II.x.68.2), and he comes away half offended and half pleased, captivated by the narrative but also frustrated at its discontinuance. This frustration has its intellectual component, as, thus left in suspense, he muses over the possible causes of the breach, including the unaccountable paralysis of the author and even the rending out of pages by "some wicked hand" (II.x.68.4).

But howsoever Redcrosse and Arthur seem poised to entertain and grapple with the uncertainty and mixed feelings to which each interpretive situation so seems to lend itself, certain and unified thought and feeling are soon and definitively brought to bear.

In the case of Despaire, while we may well wonder if Despaire's cave is actually another compartment of Orgoglio's dungeon, and if therefore his spell can be broken by asserting a mind open to multivalency, Redcrosse escapes Despaire by the most concise and straightforward logic possible: knocking away the knife Despaire places in his hand, and reminding him of his mission as dragon-slayer, Una demands of him,

Come, come away, fraile, feeble, fleshly wight,

Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart,

Ne diuelish thoughts dismay thy constant spright.

In heauenly mercies hast thou not a part?

Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen art?

Where iustice growes, there grows eke greter grace,

The which doth quench the brond of hellish smart,

And that accurst hand-writing doth efface.

Arise, Sir Knight arise, and leaue this cursed place. (I.ix.53)

Like everyone else interacting with Redcrosse, Una here is in part an aspect of his inner life, but this case of the allegorical blurring of inward and outward merely emphasizes the totality of the spiritual regeneration visited upon him. Dramatically contrasting his exchange with Despaire—as well as his interview with Heavenly Contemplation later (I.x.48-67)—Redcrosse registers no response to Una whatever, instead simply rising and departing with her; despite the presence of two characters, there appears no prospect of dialogue, and there is no hint of the allegory allowing an alternative line of thought to what she says. With this elision of any gap between her words and Redcrosse's internalization of them, Una here represents a univocal state of mind. She is always the One Truth; now she is the One Truth in an absolutely compressed, distilled, and self-evident form. Strikingly, she formulates interrogatively what is not in question at all: "In heauenly mercies hast thou not a part? / Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen art?" The answer is so clear that the questions only express its utterly unquestionable truth, and the answer is not one admitting any qualification; and yet, too, the answer is not asserted, its obviousness to be wholly understood. This understanding has effectively forestalled all possible further discussion. Redcrosse does not even think or feel any assent to it. He simply *knows* the Truth, that he is elect.

What Spenser portrays for us here is the working of the Practical Syllogism.²⁴ Since R. T. Kendall's seminal study, scholars have been aware of how the Practical Syllogism, the mental process by which the believer applied faith and repentance to the self and achieved assurance of salvation, became

²⁴ For an opposing reading, arguing his escape from Despaire as representing not assurance but a step toward it, see Peter Iver Kaufman, *Prayer, Despair, and Drama* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 71-79. For the House of Holiness as in tension with Una's predestinarianism, see Kaske, *Biblical Poetics*, 101-02.

a key concept for English “experimental predestinarianism.”²⁵ For Kendall, this brand of Protestantism, as exemplified best by the prolific Perkins, distorted established Calvinistic fideism and promoted an anxiety-inducing inwardness, prescribing an interiorly certain assurance of salvation even while removing any exterior markers thereof; and Kendall’s assessment has proven extremely durable and influential.²⁶ However, that English Calvinistic practical piety such as Perkins’s would inculcate a bleak or despairing conscience has been challenged, in my view successfully, by Leif Dixon. Conceiving predestinarian theology as “a doctrine of comfort and contextualization” well suited to troubled times, Dixon shows how it was “designed to be reassuring on a level beyond the soteriological,” in that “it was intended to demonstrate an orderly universe which was governed according to clear and robust categories”; predestination answered the need for a more stable framework in unstable circumstances, addressing both “the concern for individuals to be sure of their own salvation, and for them to be certain that they were interacting meaningfully with the outside world.” Dixon proceeds to center on Perkins, painting the Cambridge divine as advancing his potentially disorienting, iconoclastic schema from an attitude not of anxiety but of confidence “that he possessed solutions.” Dixon’s Perkins, seeking ground immunized from epistemological crisis, positioned God’s grace as “the only available source for true certainty,” and the “concept of certainty as the central message of Christ.” For Dixon, Perkins equated faith and knowledge, and sought to expunge theological paradox and nuance about human agency: “There is no space for navel-gazing in Perkins’ depiction of ‘unwilling’ wills made ‘most willing’”;

²⁵ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 42-66. For experimental predestinarianism see also Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (London: Arnold, 2003), 126-35. For the Practical Syllogism from Calvin and Beza to their successors see also Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 244-76. For Muller, the concept, whether or not the term was used or logic employed formally, was a common thread through reformed theology to treat the issue of assurance.

²⁶ On Perkins see Kendall, *Calvin*, 67-76. For a recent corroboration see Stoll, *Conscience*, 39-46. For an important representative argument linking Calvinism to despair see John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 27-61, on Perkins, 11-12.

in fact, “A doctrine of ferocious divine power . . . seemed to be the only means of freeing man to act meaningfully. This was not a ‘paradox’—it was a solution.”²⁷

When Perkins draws on the Practical Syllogism, it is to model the assurance he ascribed to the elect mind, by means of a starkly conclusive logical structure susceptible to no doubts or qualifications; it is this aspect of it, its sense of ambiguity and complexity as deleterious to regenerated psychology, that I would stress here. One prominent rendition²⁸ appears in his “Treatise of Conscience”; the regenerated believer feels an “vnfallible certentie” articulable as pure deduction, as the conscience, with thought repelling any potential contrary evidence, is enabled by the Holy Spirit to identify the self as the minor premise in the Practical Syllogism: “*Euery one that beleuees is the child of God; But I doe beleuee; Therefore I am the child of God.*” As Redcrosse will need the House of Holiness, so Perkins notes here the edifying force of the church (“The proposition is made by the minister of the word in the publike congregation”), but the “inlightning” conferred with the Holy Spirt, with certain inference from certain, incontrovertible knowledge, is the crucial turn of mind, making possible fuller training and ingrafting. The streamlined reasoning seems tautological—he knows he is chosen because he is chosen and knows it—and it works, explains Perkins in “A Case of Conscience,” only because the minor premise, including the self in the middle term “faithful,” is verified not by the particularities of the individual’s inner and outer life but by God:

Therefore who is it that maketh this conclusion for thee, that thou art predestinate to euerlasting life? euen God himselfe: the proposition beeing taken forth of the gossell, and the assumption proceedeth of the gift of faith. But that indeede by which we properly attaine to the

²⁷ Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590-1640* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 7, 53, on Perkins 61-122, quotes 91, 96-97, 116, 120.

²⁸ See Muller, *Calvin*, 268-69.

knowledge of the matter contained in the conclusion, is the *middle tearme* Wherefore it is manifest, that God by the word of his gospell, where hee saith, *that all the faithfull are elect*: doth reueale to euery faithfull man his owne predestination. Onely this one thing is to be required, that the faithfull man hearing the vniversal propositions, in his mind should make an assumption: But I am faithfull by the gift and grace of God. . . . for God . . . euen by his worde, in generall propositions doth reueale to euery man his predestination: for what can be more certaine then this demonstration? Whosoeuer doe truly beleeeue in Christ, they are elect to eternall life in Christ: but I truly beleeeue in Christ; therefore I am elected.

Small wonder, then, that Despaire attacks Redcrosse with “fresh remembraunce” of his sins; for Perkins, recollection of the particularities of unique experience often clutters and can even prevent identification of the self as the minor premise. In the *Golden Chaine*, one of the devil’s principal attack strategies is to *deduce* despair, with loss of faith following from the self’s personal record of sins, and damnation following loss of faith: “Thou art not of the number of the elect: thou art not iustified: thou hast no faith: thou must certenly be condemned for thy sinnes”; as in Spenser’s allegory, despairing logic fuels and is fueled by “The remembrance of sins past” and “A feeling of death euen alreadie at hand.” For Perkins the best answer to this crisis of faith is “true faith, applying Christ with all his merits particularly, after this manner. I assuredly beleeeue that I shall not be condemned, but that I am elected, and iustified in Christ.” The monovision Despaire presses upon Redcrosse is that his personal history makes him singularly irredeemable--“neuer knight that dared warlike deed” has accrued such sin--but for Redcrosse, as for Perkins’s spiritual warrior, questioning and finding alternatives to the monovision avails little. Rather, Redcrosse’s relative culpability and how harshly he should be judged must be banished from his mind; one monovision must be replaced with another, even more airtight and hermetically sealed. In his dialogue between Satan and the Christian, Perkins’s devil similarly harps on

the uniqueness of his victim's sin, arguing inductively that, if we consider the known children of God, "neuer any of them haue beene in this case, in which thou art at this present"—the general promises "concerne not thee." The Christian gives the lie to Satan's induction, recalling having felt faith and citing biblical examples of elect sinners, but by far his strongest counter is simply trusting in God: "although, according to mine owne sense and feeling, I want faith: yet I will beleeeue in Iesus Christ, and trust to be saued by him."²⁹

While it's possible to dispute using memory or logic, then, that Redcrosse does not, and that instead the Practical Syllogism comes to him and dominates his thinking and feeling and closes off all alternative avenues, taps into a strain of Protestant thinking not limited to Perkins. For Downname, "though we can haue no assurance by our owne speculations, yet we may attaine vnto it by the testimonie of Gods Spirit"; Satan's subtlety in deconstructing the logic by which this testimony persuaded the believer was offset simply by the testimony's reapplication:

though Christ hath only redeemed some, yet we may after a more sound manner conclude that we are in this number . . . inferring our conclusion out the generall propositions grounded vpon Gods word after this manner; Whoseuer beleeeue in Christ, those hee hath redeemed and will saue; . . . but I (may euery faithfull man say) doe truly beleeeue in Christ; and therefore I am redeemed and shall therefore eternally be saued.

Downname ratified the Practical Syllogism by hard-fast "lawes of reason," whereby "out of a generall and indefinit proposition" we can "gather and inferre a particular conclusion"; but the certainty of the demonstration hinges on the certain knowledge of a self-understood, self-aware faith, for "faith certainly and evidently perswadeth, and like a candle doth not onely manifest other things, but also it

²⁹ Perkins, "Treatise of Conscience," 883, "Case of Conscience," 698, *Golden Chaine*, 131-33, "Dialogue," 662-63.

self appeareth by his own light.”³⁰ Even Donne, who tended to be wary of predestinarian terms, and discussed the Practical Syllogism’s minor premise as supported by the believer’s efforts at goodness,³¹ was still able to treat the “true knowledge” of the conscience—“*Conscientia est Syllogismus practicus*, Conscience is a Syllogisme that comes to a conclusion”—as a function of our union with Christ.³²

If we can read Redcrosse as being impressed with the instant, full assurance of the Practical Syllogism, such intellectual and emotional certainty and unity resonates in Arthur’s outburst of patriotic fervor:

At last quite ravisht with delight, to heare
 The royall Ofspring of his natiue land,
 Cryde out, Deare countrey, O how dearely deare
 Ought thy remembrance, and perpetual band
 Be to thy foster Childe, that from thy hand
 Did commun breath and nouriture receave?
 How brutish is it not to vnderstand,
 How much to her we owe, that all vs gaue,
 That gaue vnto vs all, what euer good we haue. (II.x.69)

³⁰ Downname, *Christian Warfare*, 322-23, 356, 240-42.

³¹ Donne, *Sermons*, Sermon #3 4:121-22, Sermon #12 6:256.

³² Donne, *Sermons*, Sermon #10, 9:248-49.

Arthur calls failure to “understand” as he does “brutish,” but he does not appeal to any refined, rational comprehension; rather, certain knowledge of our debt to our motherland—“How much to her we owe, that all us gave”—results in an outpouring of love. As with the Practical Syllogism, with this patriotic syllogism reasoning is tautological and impersonal; what would underwrite a “because,” the inductive soundness of the proposition, is displaced, and the minor premise inserted securely without induction: history elicits a love of *this* particular country that is clearly *owed*, because . . . it simply is. Arthur does not seem to be admonishing any hypothetical person of obligation to country, any more than Redcrosse is made to feel that any given believer might be elected. Arthur expresses how the British History ought to make *us* feel, the chosen people, the people of the Trojan founder Brutus, King Arthur, and Queen Elizabeth, the people standing against all forms of Roman oppression. As Una applies the Gospel promise particularly to Redcrosse, so does Arthur apply love of country to Britain. And yet he expresses this untethered from the British History’s content; like Una’s, his words express what we *must* “understand,” what is *understood*--and they are couched, as Una’s are, not as assertion but rhetorical question. The Britons’ particular tribulations are as irrelevant to Arthur’s *understanding* as Redcrosse’s turn out to be to his.

Spenser was keen to explore vagaries of nationhood and historiography, as has been shown by a number of fascinating studies,³³ but he also felt the pull of the patriotic--and anti-Roman--meaningfulness of the Galfridian tradition, and his skepticism could not extend to relinquishing it

³³ For a comprehensive treatment of Spenser’s reflections on historiography see Bart Van Es, *Spenser’s Forms of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For Spenser’s struggles squaring patriotism with historical skepticism see Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 45-46, 69-80, 163-85. For *FQ*’s problematizing of how British identity was evolved from Welsh tradition, see Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37-45; Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 114-21.

altogether. This ambivalence cannot be summed up, in my view,³⁴ in a dichotomy between history and poetry; of this Spenser's concept of Arthur is in itself proof enough. Everything about Prince Arthur is fictive, referencing nothing about him but the storied name; and yet, Spenser is careful to situate him in historical time, most emphatically at this very moment, Briton Moniments' halting its narrative at Uther's reign. His marveling at what to him seems fragmentation confirms our sense that the breach is no mystery at all—Briton Moniments, we know, *cannot* continue, for its next chapter is the future reign of the man who reads it. The Galfridian continuum is hereby subtly but powerfully reinscribed, proposed to us as *historically*, not merely poetically, true, a parcel of our own, human time-stream in a way the Faerie Chronicle, which originates Faerie time in the Gardens of Adonis and traces it all the way through Gloriana, is not—and yet this distinction is proposed by sheer implication alone. Though not explained or evidenced, it is established that a grain of historical truth subsists in the British History, a grain by which the nation's claims to a uniquely glorious and providentially ordered descent can be validated. Toward this bare idea, that Briton Moniments though only vaguely quite substantively captures something about what makes the ancient past a conductor of glory for the elect nation, Arthur's response is appropriate and commensurate. As he says, diluting it with inquiry or mixed feelings were brutish misunderstanding, willful failure to attain vital knowledge.

Such a response, in fact, can be found in some of the British History's most rational and measured Elizabethan Protestant defenders; one revealing example is Lodowick Lloyd,³⁵ author of the

³⁴ Curran, *Roman Invasions*, 241-45, 257-58; "Poetical History," in *Spenser in Context*, ed. Andrew Escobedo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 185-93. For an important discussion of the history vs. poetry dichotomy see Hume, *Protestant Poet*, 145-61. For a development of this dichotomy, arguing that history is too brutal to be coherently read and the threat of this is defused by the Faerie Chronicle, see Campana, "Not Defending," 46.

³⁵ On Lloyd's interweaving of Welshness through his assertions of Protestant patriotism, see Stephen Hamrick, "The Bardi Brytannorum: Lodowick Lloyd and Welsh Identities in the Atlantic Archipelago," in *Region, Religion, and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Coleman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 45-65.

vast and vastly learned *Consent of Time*, which purported to gather all the prominent histories of the prominent peoples of the earth and revise their chronologies, checked against the superior authority of the Scriptures. Given his Welsh heritage, the objectivity of Lloyd's design is impressive. Not only does he lay out the salient highlights from the expected world-empires, but he does the same for the Spanish and the French; meanwhile, a brief "Brief for Britain" comes at the end, as a sort of appendix. The Brief does argue for the basis in truth of the British History, especially the eponymous founding by the Trojan Brutus, but its emphasis is on the reliability of the ancient sources for Aeneas' arrival in Italy—*not* on that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, whom Lloyd cares not to mention at all. Thus the Brief's brevity, its marginalization in the work as a whole, and its emphasis on the truth of *Roman* antiquity convey Lloyd's resignation to the much lesser importance of British traditions. Moreover, Lloyd's apparent commitment to rationality enables him to forge an accommodation between patriotism and logical historical critique. Elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser uses the hero Britomart to portray a similar attitude: steady and self-possessed, she corrects Paridell's review of the Trojan War's aftermath, for he has hailed the rise of Rome and omitted how a third Trojan civilization, Britain, "Both first and second *Troy* shall dare to equalise" (III.ix.44.9).³⁶ Like Britomart, Lloyd effectively protests the privileging of some national fables over others. It is not logical to "reprooue without authoritie" and yet refuse proof *with* authority, dismissing what does have *some* documentation. Anyone can simply deny something from those primordial times, but selective belief is unfair, and throws all historiography into doubt: Lloyd declares that his "reason" for Brutus "shallbe as probable" as any national origin myth. And yet, at times Lloyd lapses into a feeling that the British History *and* the distinctive glory it provides simply must be accepted because it must:

³⁶ See Curran, *Roman Invasions*, 113-16.

But let controuersies passe, all countries haue their fables mingled with trueth: and so I will returne to the histories of the *Britaines*, whose certeintie and trueth is as sound, and as true to bee proued, as either *Fraunce*, *Spaine*, or any other countrie: whose continuance was without change of name for longer time, then many bragging kingdoms, whose lawes, whose kings, whose countrie vnconquered longer than any of them both.

The massive *Consent of Time* closes with an outburst of defiance against envy toward renowned Briton heroes, with a Latin *sententia* about the endurance of honor—*suus ex merito quemque tuetur honor*--and with a validation of Geoffrey's great theme of the indomitable British fighting spirit: "the *Britaines* were not to be overthrown but by *Britaines*."³⁷

If Arthur's reaction to Briton Moniments is like Lloyd's closing salvo, with patriotic enthusiasm displacing reasoned inquiry and maybe even in a certain way countermanding its work, is it a moment of "organizing violence"? Does Redcrosse's Protestant epiphany come at the price of similar violence, the coercive imposition of fixed meaning? And by extension, do we ultimately need recourse to such violent hermeneutic clarity to make sense of *The Faerie Queene*? I do not think so. Our biases against Spenser's Protestant religiosity must not keep us from seeing that in each case, the principle of certainty latched onto is fairly basic and baseline: Redcrosse feels himself loved by God, and Arthur feels attached to a people whose sufferings have purpose—the two points, salvation and meaningful action in the world, about which Dixon says English Protestants needed comfort and contextualization. Redcrosse does not excuse himself from sin or presume to judge others, and Arthur does not assert anything disputatious about historicity, or an imperialistic, xenophobic, or apocalyptic vision—in neither case does certainty

³⁷ Lodowick Lloyd, *Consent of Time* (London, 1590), 710-22.

underwrite much that is violent. More importantly, we have ample opportunity throughout the poem to trouble such issues as are excluded here. Spenser in my opinion is maintaining an overall sense of interpretive freedom *by* sometimes lending us a break from it. To handle such daunting complexity, we are granted moments of Protestant clarity, when we are returned to foundations, and feel and know, and *understand*, without the burden of *comprehending*.

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