



This Rough Magic

A Peer-Reviewed, Academic, Online Journal

Dedicated to the Teaching of Medieval and Renaissance Literature



"The Protestant Refashioning of Saint George in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*"

Author(s): Mickey Casper

Reviewed Work(s):

Source: *This Rough Magic*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (January, 2010), pp. 54-75.

Published by: www.thisroughmagic.org

Stable URL: <http://www.thisroughmagic.org/casper%20article.html>

"The Protestant Refashioning of Saint George in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*"

By Mickey Casper

Since its inception, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* has been discussed in many ways. An allegory which mirrors the politics of Elizabethan England, *The Faerie Queene*'s various books introduce readers to diverse characters who are meant to push ideological agendas. In Book I of the text, Spenser depicts Saint George (i.e., Redcrosse) as a symbol of Protestant holiness due to his dealings with Prince "soon to be King of Camelot" Arthur. Arthur serves as both savior and magnanimous role model for Redcrosse, ultimately making it possible for the knight to become Saint George. While Redcrosse's transformation is central to Book I's plot, his alteration at Arthur's hands carries great significance – particularly when one views both characters from an Elizabethan viewpoint. As a symbol of Tudor authority, Prince Arthur is an obvious link to a dynastic family responsible for severing England's Catholic ties. Aiding Redcrosse in the process of refusing Duessa, an allegorical villain associated with Roman Catholicism, Arthur's efforts mirror the real life transformation of Saint George from a Catholic icon to a symbol of Protestant Unity. Looking upon Arthur as a

representation of dynastic authority, one can make the argument that the reigning English monarchy was responsible for George's assimilation into a Protestant culture.

The Arthurian aura surrounding the Tudors was contrived shortly after the family took power in 1485. A political ploy meant to unify a country torn by civil war, the Tudor family's claim to King Arthur went back hundreds of years to when the Romans abandoned their foothold in the British Isles. With the departure of the Romans, Saxon invaders entered the country from Germany and "possibly [...] from the south of Sweden" (Derry and Blakeway, p. 30). Though little is known about the military exploits of this period, historians acknowledge that British inhabitants initially beat back the Saxon invaders under a military leader later "transformed by [...] legend into 'King Arthur'" (Derry and Blakeway, p. 32). By the middle of the sixth century, however, Saxon military power pushed England's native inhabitants to the northern and western parts of the country. These natives, known as the Britons, "mingled with remnants of earlier peoples" before forming "a series of British or Welsh tribes known, respectively, as [...] the North, and the West Welsh" and inhabiting what would later be Wales (Cross, 30). Though forced to retreat, the "notion had become more and more fixed in the minds of the Britons" that Arthur would "one day restore them to their lawful sovereignty [...] if not in person, then in a Welsh claimant to the throne" (Millican, pgs. 8-9). It was the nostalgia surrounding this legend that Henry VII and the Tudor family latched upon after winning the English throne in 1485. A descendant of

Welsh bloodlines, Henry took power by defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field and claiming that “the very blood of Arthur” had been returned to power (Millican, p. 9). Henry’s claim of Arthurian blood ties was not only acknowledged by the Welsh, who considered him to be “the first British king’ of England,” but also by an English population eagerly awaiting the return of prosperity (Millican, p. 15).

A popular monarch throughout his reign, Henry VII quickly gained the support of the people who saw in their King both a “friend and protector” due to his so-called mythic ancestry (Cross, p. 279). Upon his own ascension to power, Henry VIII continued to link the Tudor dynasty with the legendary Arthur. Charles Millican states:

Henry clearly realized the power of Arthurian association in the minds of the people, for on December 4, 1531, he had [the young noble] Rhys ap Griffith [...] beheaded for ‘calling himself FitzUrien in commemoration of his ancestor Urien, the companion of Arthur and Lancelot.’ Henry imagined that by adopting the word ‘Fitz,’ the boy was laying a claim to the sovereignty of Britain (p. 22).

The message associated with this beheading was clear to all – there was room for only one claimant to the Arthurian mystique and that individual sat upon the English throne.

Henry VIII’s link to Arthur became even more pronounced when England cut ties with Rome. Lacking a male heir, Henry divorced his queen, Catherine, on the basis that she was too old for more children. Asking the Pope to nullify his marriage to Catherine so that he could marry Anne Boleyn, Henry’s request was rebuked and the

break with Rome began. With the passage of the Act of Supremacy in 1534, an action that appointed England's monarch as head of the nation's church, "Henry alleged as a ground for separation that Britain had once been an empire" (Millican, p. 25). This claim stemmed from adherence to the Tudor family's Arthurian origins. During Arthur's "reign," Henry VIII asserted that Britain "had once been independent of Rome" and could therefore return to that status (Millican, p. 4).

Under Elizabeth's rule, the issue of Arthurian ancestry continued and enthusiasm for the topic reached its peak with the study of the Queen's genealogy. During this period it was generally believed that Elizabeth was the last of her family to contain Arthur's blood. It was also "considered by her subjects" that Elizabeth owned "the right inheritance of the principallitie of Wales" and that she was "a continuator of the Welsh faery blood" (Millican, pgs. 37 and 38).

With a history so entrenched in legend, it was only natural that Edmund Spenser would incorporate Arthur into a poem written with Queen Elizabeth in mind. Dedicating his poem to the "most high, mightie and magnificent Empresse renouvmed for pietie, vertve, and all gracious government [of] Elizabeth" (Spenser, p. 38), Spenser explained the topic of his allegory to Sir Walter Raleigh. In his letter to Raleigh, Spenser maintained that the subject of the poem would be to form a "portrait [of] Arthure, before he was King, [by depicting him as] the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private moral virtues, as Aristotle had devised" (p. 15). Opening his first poetic

book with the subject of "Holinesse" (I.i.Argument), Spenser begins his allegory by using Arthur not only as a counselor for Una, but also as a template that the future Patron Saint of England may both study and learn from.

Arriving to Book I during Canto VII, Arthur can be characterized as saving Una from the despair of knowing that Redcrosse has been imprisoned. Understanding that Una is unhappy due to the "loth" answers she gives to his questions, Arthur immediately wishes to "allay, and calme her storming paine" through an abundance of "[f]aire feeling" words (I.vii.38). Telling Una not only that "counsel mitigates the greatest smart" (I.vii.40), but also that "reason can repaire" (I.vii.41) a troubled mind, Arthur is exposed to the maiden's dilemma. Acknowledging that Redcrosse found defeat through his trust in the "false Duessa," Una characterizes the villainess as an individual who is her "onely deadly dread" (I.vii.50). Hearing her problem, Arthur aids the distraught princesses' frame of mind with the following words: "[Be] of cheare, and comfort to you take: / For till I have acquit your captive knight, / Assure your self, I will not you forsake" (I.vii.52).

While such words successfully cheer Una, and provide her with mental relief, one must note the allegorical significance in the help that she receives from Arthur. Initially described as traveling on a "lowly Asse more white than snow," and differentiated by Spenser as being "much whiter" than the animal she rides (I.i.4), scholars maintain that Una's worth as an allegorical character becomes evident through

her initial depiction. According to Elizabeth Heale, Spencer's portrayal of Una in Canto I helps to define the princess as a woman of "humility," as distinguished by the presence of "the Ass," and as a lady that exhibits "innocence," a feature attributed to "her whiteness" (p. 27). These assertions are further defined by the fact that Una also enters Book I carrying a "milke white lamb" (I.i.4), an image that points to Una's religious identity. Heale states:

Una's association with the lamb [...] suggests both her identity as Christ's True Church, to be restored by the defeat of Roman Catholicism, and the promise by which our sinful inheritance from Adam and Eve will be purged and we shall be restored to our first communion with God.... [She] is [also] fixed by a name, Una (i.45), meaning One, the indivisibility of Truth (p. 27).

Una's resistance to Roman Catholicism, and adherence to a Protestant outlook, is very unique as she is later counseled by Arthur – the representative of a family that is responsible for breaking with the Church of Rome. Based on the significance of both characters, and Arthur's statement that he will "counsell" (I.vii.40) Una's greatest smart with "faith" (I.vii.41) and "comfort" (I.vii.52), one can make the statement that Spenser is depicting the Tudor direction of English religious ideology within this canto.

Also vowing to help Una rescue Redcrosse, Arthur continues to place himself in the role of savior throughout Book I. Falling victim to Duessa's charms at the beginning of Canto VII, Spenser's audience views Redcrosse as a protagonist who is far from espousing a traditional view of holiness. Though successfully fleeing from Lucifera's House of Pride by the end of Canto V, Redcrosse jeopardizes himself by lustfully

making love to Duessa at the beginning of Canto VII. Positioning himself by a fountain,

Redcrosse is described in the following terms:

Yet goodly court he made still to [Duessa]
Pour'd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd
Both carelesse in his health, and of his fame:
Till at last he heard a dreadful sownd, [...]
[Of an] hideous Geant horrible and hye
(I.vii.7-8)

Surprised by the giant Orgoglio in this fashion, Redcrosse is taken captive and imprisoned "in a Dongeon deepe" (I.vii.15).

D. Douglas Waters characterizes Redcrosse's defeat as a combination of many factors. Focusing on the figure of Duessa, Waters acknowledges that past critics have identified the villainess as standing for "the city, the church, [...] the pope of Rome," or even "as a symbol of the Roman mass personified as a witch and whore" ("Duessa," p. 211). The belief of the mass as "witch or whore" fits with the Protestant idea that this Roman Catholic service ultimately divided Christ from His flock. Early Modern Protestants believed that the Catholic "mass hearer's foolish confidence in meriting grace through hearing the mass outwardly inflated his pride but inwardly increased his spiritual weakness. Trusting in merit brought him to his proudest moment which was also his weakest" ("Duessa," p. 216).

If Duessa can be viewed as the personification of the Roman Catholic mass, and Redcrosse acts as her adherent throughout this scene, then he could easily be defeated – especially if one takes into account the other factors which play into Saint George's

downfall. Viewing the fountain that he is captured by as a representation for spiritual sloth, critics also charge Redcrosse with falling victim to pride through his capture by Orgoglio (Waters, "Duessa," p. 214). Elizabeth Heale maintains the popular belief that Orgoglio "represents [...] that prideful self-righteousness of fallen man 'rashly puft up with his fleshy minde' [...] against which Saint Paul warns" (p. 39). Assertions of this nature not only stem from Spenser's description of Orgoglio's birth, in which the monster is "puft up with emptie wind" (I.vii.9), but also from the portrayal of the giant's death in which Orgoglio deflates like "an emptie bladder" (I.viii.24).

Allegorically ensnared by his lust and his pride, Redcrosse is physically imprisoned by Duessa and Orgoglio by losing the strength that was once his. "Drunke [from] the stream" of spiritual sloth that rests nearby, Saint George's "manly forces faile" because of his actions with Duessa and he becomes both "feeble" and "fraile" as a result (I.vii.6). Mirroring the lack of spiritual/moral strength of the knight, Redcrosse's lack of physical strength makes him an easy target for Orgoglio and he is unable to fend off the giant as a result. Through Duessa's efforts Redcrosse becomes captive in Orgoglio's dungeon, an action that allegorically depicts Saint George's fall through his association with the Roman Catholic Church. In this way, Spenser continues to model the plot of his poem after the historical account of his country.

Returning to England's history, the character of Saint George initially found prominence during the beginnings of the First Crusade. A matter of military and

religious importance, in 1095 Pope Urban II asked the “knights of Western Christendom to go and aid their fellow Christians in the East and liberate the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem” from Muslim rule (Tyerman, p. 8). Honoring the call to arms, the Catholic armies traveling to Jerusalem differentiated themselves from regular knights by donning the sign of the cross upon their armor – an emblem associated with Saint George. Known as the patron of victory and often linked with the killing of the dragon, Saint George’s image found increasing popularity throughout the military campaign. According to legend, the figure of Saint George “appeared at the head of a large army, carrying the red cross banner, to help Godfrey de Bouillon against the Saracens at the siege of Antioch” (Bond, p. 151). Further popularity for the Saint occurred when King Richard I “had a vision, bidding him to take for his battle cry [...] ‘S[aint] George for England.’ This he did, and won the day; and S[aint] George became the patron saint of Richard and his family and his soldiers” (Bond p. 152).

Becoming linked to the Catholic crusades in this manner, George’s fame spread throughout England. Originally becoming an icon for the pilgrim soldier bent on liberating the Holy Land, George’s presence was solidified within the boundaries of England when he was declared a national saint in 1222. In the years following the First Crusade, “the red cross worn by Royalists [...] became the emblem for English troops in the later Middle Ages [and...] presaged its adoption by Edward III and its association by him with the national cult of Saint George” (Tyerman, p. 149).

Prominently associated with the Roman Catholic doctrines that made the Crusades famous, the figure of Saint George ultimately lost ground once the English nation turned Protestant in 1534; the worship of saints became prohibited and George's holy day of observance actually "vanished from the [English] calendar in 1549" before being reinstated by 1552 (Weatherby, p. 121). Losing the luster he had once had, George continued to find disfavor from Protestant adherents who attacked the idea of the Catholic crusades. Arguing that the crusades to liberate Jerusalem failed due to the "Papal corruption of religion," Protestant critics lambasted Saint George and the politics that made the conflict so popular (Tyerman, p. 348). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the writings of martyrologist and preacher John Foxe, who stated: "We war against the Turk with our works, masses, traditions, and ceremonies, but we fight not with Christ.... He that bringeth St. George or St. Denis, as patrons, to the field against the Turk leaveth Christ, no doubt, at home" (Vol. 5, p. 2). Thus as the Turks were viewed as the arm of God's chastisement against the Roman Catholic crusaders, the idea of the Holy War and the figure of Saint George continued to lose ground in England until the late 1500s. Losing prestige due to his relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, the figure of Saint George models Spenser's depiction of Redcrosse within the middle stages of Book I.

It is not until Arthur's arrival during Canto VII that Redcrosse's rebirth becomes plausible. Often viewed as an agent of heavenly grace throughout the entirety of Book I,

critics such as D. Douglas Waters also characterize Arthur as exhibiting “magnanimity in the sense of greatness of soul” (Waters, “Arthur,” p. 55). In his article, “Arthur as Christian Magnanimity,” Waters provides his reader with a compelling argument that paints the Prince in these terms. Basing his essay on Aristotle’s writings, which state that the “magnanimous man has great qualities of soul and body, knows he is great, demands honor to the degree of his greatness, and does great deeds in regard for his greatness,” Waters plots how such scholarship was available to writers throughout the Early Modern Period (“Arthur,” p. 55). Later Christianized by the doctrines of the Church, Aristotle’s idea came to be adhered to in the following terms:

There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God; something defective which accrues to him through weakness of nature. Accordingly magnanimity makes man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God.... On the other hand, humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency (Jones, p. 202).

While the magnanimous man may find “deficiency” because of his nature, he is allowed to do great things through the “gifts” relayed to him by God. Specifying that Spenser could easily “have been acquainted with this Christianized concept,” Waters demonstrates how such notions are incorporated into Book I (“Arthur,” pgs. 56-57).

In order to expose his audience to the larger part God’s grace will play in the allegory, Spenser introduces divine intervention to the poem before Arthur enters Book I. Seen at the beginning of Canto VII, God’s grace proves useful to an unprepared Redcrosse trying to fend off Orgoglio. Spenser states:

The Geant stroke so maynly merciless,
That could haue ouerthrowne a stowny towre,
And [had] not heauenly grace [...] blesse[d] [Redcrosse],
He had been poulderred all, as thin as flower
(I.vii.12)

Spared in this way, Redcrosse is to be prepared for rebirth through Arthur's help. In Canto VIII, heavenly intervention is again mentioned in terms of Redcrosse and Prince Arthur. Specifying that the "righteous man" would find "perils" if not for "heavenly grace," Spenser parallels such a statement with the remark "Else should this Redcrosse knight in bands haue dyed, / For whose deliuerance [Una...] doth [Arthur] guide" (I.viii.1). Conducted to Redcrosse's aid through the help of true religion (I.e., Una), and heavenly intervention, Arthur ultimately defeats Orgoglio with God's help. Striking at Arthur with "his hideous club" (I.viii.18), Orgoglio unintentionally uncovers the Prince's shield and blinds himself. Spenser states:

And in his fall his shield, that couered was,
Did loose his vele by chaunce, and open flew:
The light whereof, that heauens light did pas,
Such blazing brightnesse through the aier threw,
That eye mote not the same endure to vew.
Which when the Gyaunt spyde with staring eye,
He downe let fall his arme, and soft withdrew
His weapon huge, that heaved was on hye
For to haue slaine [Arthur], that on the ground did lye.
(I.viii.19, italics mine)

Dimming the "dazed eyen" and "senses" of Orgoglio, "th' Almightyes" power saves Arthur from death and makes it possible for the knight to kill his foe (I.viii.21). Holding

his “sparkling blade about his head,” Arthur finishes off the giant through God’s help (I.viii.22). In this manner, Arthur is able to destroy the allegorical figure of Pride (i.e., Orgoglio) due to the magnanimous spirit he possess.

Lacking such a spirit himself at the time of his encounter with Orgoglio, Redcrosse is unable to defeat the giant and must rely on Arthur for assistance. Set free from his prison, Redcrosse is able to learn from the experiences he has suffered from because of his lust and pride. By transforming England’s Patron Saint into a sinner within the confines of the allegory, Spenser successfully makes it possible for George to reject the doctrines he has been deceived by. Emerging from Orgoglio’s dungeon as a shell of his former self (I.viii.41), Redcrosse is further exposed to the truth of his prevailing companion when Arthur strips Duessa of her outer garments upon Una’s request. Relieving Duessa of “her scarlet robe” (I.viii.45), Arthur and his companions are exposed to the witch’s true appearance. Spenser states:

Her craftie head was altogether bald,
And as in hate of honorable eld,
Was overgrown with scurfe and filthy scald;
Her teeth out of her rotten gummies were feld,
And her sowre breath abominably smeld;
Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld,
Her wrizled skin was rough, [...]
[And] at her rompe she growing had behind
A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;
And eke her feete most monstrous were in sight;
For one of them was like an Eagles claw, [...]
The other like a Beares vneuen paw....

(I.viii.47-48)

Staring at “the face of falsehood” (I.viii.49) in this way, Redcrosse is able to move on from this point in the poem to a greater understanding of how he should behave. A full-fledged Christian at the beginning of the poem, through Spenser’s avowal that Redcrosse bore a “bloudie Crosse” in “rememberance of his dying Lord” (I.i.2), Una’s champion grows into a better man through Arthur’s involvement. Understanding Duessa for what she truly is, Redcrosse is confronted not only by Una’s value, but also shown how Arthur’s behavior was successful in combating “the spiritual pride (Orgoglio) that is the mortal enemy to holiness” (Horton, p. 161). In D. Douglas Waters’ study of the Orgoglio episode, the critic specifies that “Prince Arthur’s rescue [of Redcrosse] shows allegorically that God’s grace restores magnanimity to the Christian man’s soul [so] he can rise from actual sin and work out his own salvation” through grace and repentance (Waters “Arthur,” p. 58). Exposed to the error of his own behavior through Arthur’s example, Redcrosse will become a better man and move closer to holiness.

With the threats of Orgoglio and Duessa defeated, Arthur, Una, and Redcrosse converse with one another for the first half of Canto IX. Used as a means of broadening Arthur’s identity, Spenser paints the future king as a virtuous man that had earlier led a morally ambiguous lifestyle. Through training, and his love for the Fairy Queen, Arthur

is depicted by Spenser as a changed man and continues to provide Redcrosse with a valuable role model.

Asking Arthur to reveal his “name and nation” (I.ix.2), Una and Redcrosse learn of the Prince’s upbringing under the tutelage of Sir Timon and of his time with Merlin. Describing his foray into Fairy Land as a quest for love, Arthur admits to having the same problem that plagued Redcrosse earlier in the Book – excessive passion. Warned by Sir Timon of passion’s “creeping flames,” lest “their rage [grow] to [...] great unrest” (I.ix.9), Arthur discloses the power his lust held over him before being exposed to the Fairy Queen. Acknowledging that he was a prisoner to the “looser life, and heat of hardiment” associated with it, Arthur ranged the “forest wide” in order to quell such a lifestyle (I.ix.12). However, these activities ended after viewing the Fairy Queen in a dream. Arthur states: “From that day forth I lou’d that face divine; / From that day forth I cast in careful mind, / To seek her out with labor and long tyne, / And never vow to rest, till her I find” (I.ix.15).

Ronald Arthur Horton maintains that Arthur’s dream of the Fairy Queen “is meant to contrast with the ‘fit false dreame’ that caused Red Cross to swerve from his proper quest” (p. 18). Abandoning Una at Archimago’s cottage, Redcrosse soon begins traveling with Duessa, a character initially viewed by the young knight as riding a “wanton palfry” and engaging in “courting dalliance” (I.ii.13-14). Noting that the dream used to dissuade Redcrosse from Una left the world of dreams and entered Fairy Land

via the “Yvorie dore” (I.i.44), a portal depicted in Virgil’s Aeneid as being the “gate of false dreams” (Horton, p. 18), Horton goes on to distinguish Arthur’s vision as something that is both tangible and real. Having the characteristics of substantiality, the Prince’s dream is given weighted authority through the evidence of the “pressed grass, where she had lyen” (I.ix.15) after Arthur awakes. The physical proof of the Queen’s existence differs markedly from the false image used by Archimago to send Redcrosse away.

Hearing of Arthur’s concrete love for the Fairy Queen, the fair Una becomes jealous of the fact that her own knight has proven to be less than steadfast. In her own remarks regarding Arthur’s quest, Una states, “O happy Queene of Faeries, that hast found / Mongst many, one that with his prowess may / Defend thine honor, and thy foes confound: / True loves are often sown, but seldom grow on ground” (I.ix.16). Bemoaning her own past experience with Redcrosse’s loyalty in this manner, Una makes it clear to all that Arthur is the type of man her protector should be.

Based on Arthur’s actions towards the Fairy Queen, Una’s steadfast behavior and commentary on how a lover should behave, as well as Duessa’s falsehood firmly established in his own mind, Redcrosse repents his former actions and faithfully pledges himself to his lady once more. Redcrosse states: “Thine, O then [...], / Next to that Ladies loue, shalbe the place, / O fairest virgin, full of heavenly light, / Whose wondrous faith, exceeding earthly race, / Was firmest fixt in mine extreemest case”

(I.ix.17). Reading the word "Thine" as equating to "thy love" or "my love for you," Richard Levin maintains that Redcrosse's aforementioned statement "declares that his love for Una shall henceforth match Arthur's love for the Faerie Queene" (p. 16). Taking an episode from Book III of the Faerie Queene into account, one can believe Redcrosse at his word. Accosted by six knights who try to "enforce [Redcrosse] by oddes of might, / To chaunge [his] lief, and love another Dame (III.i.24), Redcrosse refuses to do so and decides to fight the men instead.

Described by Spenser as "redeem[ing] the Redcrosse knight" from the troubles that plagued him (I.ix.17), and addressed by Saint George as being "the Patrone of my life" (I.ix.17), Prince Arthur is extremely influential to the Hero of Book I. Labeling Arthur as a figure of "magnificence" who "containeth [...] perfection" and whose actions are "applyable to that vertue" which becomes highlighted in each individual book (Spenser, p. 16), Spenser defines his creation as a model for the different heroes he encounters. Once a particular virtue has been mastered, it is time for Arthur to continue his quest for the Fairy Queen. Arthur's departure from each section of the poem "signifies his having demonstrated his proficiency in the particular virtue of the book and the assimilation of that virtue" into his larger being (Horton, p. 22-23). Leaving Redcrosse with a "boxe of Diamond" that contains "virtue excellent" (I.ix.19), Arthur has indeed left his mark on the future Saint George. Freeing Redcrosse from the

shackles created through his pride and lust, Arthur sets the young knight back onto the path of Holiness by uniting him once more to Una, or “divine truth” (Horton, p. 68).

With his lady by his side, Redcrosse’s conformity to Una, or the “One True Church” (Heale, p. 27) make it possible for the Knight to fully encompass the virtue of Holiness. A quality that “requires the denial of the desires that deviate from the commandment of God” (Horton, p. 68), the virtue is imbued within Redcrosse during his stay at the House of Holiness – a convalescence made possible through Una’s intervention. Learning the dictates of Holiness from this establishment, Redcrosse demonstrates his own magnanimous nature by defeating that dragon at the end of Book I through God’s help. Profiting from his exposure to the “well of life” (I.xi.29), and from the “Balme” of the Tree of Life that “Great God [...] planted” (I.xi.46), Redcrosse invigorates himself both physically and spiritually during his ordeal with the dragon. Refreshed in such a manner, and carrying “Those glistering armes, that heaven with light did fill” (I.xi.4), Redcrosse kills the dragon and transforms himself into Saint George.

Viewing the process of George’s transformation allegorically, one can make the case that the Tudor monarchy was responsible for linking the Saint to Protestant doctrines. Finding disfavor with his public after the advent of Protestantism within the nation, Saint George would ultimately be resurrected towards the latter part of the 1500s after England became embroiled in two distinct military excursions that pitted

Protestant against Roman Catholic. Looking for a symbol to rally behind, the figure of Saint George once again grew to importance.

With Protestant doctrine fueling the hearts and minds of many citizens, the English nation aided a revolt within the Netherlands towards the end of the 1500s. A conflict that had been building since the mid 1560s, the inhabitants of the Netherlands started their rebellions on August 25, 1566 by “abolishing [the Catholic] Inquisition” within their country and “allowing Protestant doctrine to be preached in places where it was already established” (Cross, p. 381). Erupting into warfare between the two religions, the conflict for spiritual freedom was “doomed” without the “hope [of] foreign aid” (Cross, p. 390).

Intervening in the struggle in 1584, English military aid to Protestant forces “was interpreted by participants and observers as a religious war and was justified accordingly” (Tyerman, p. 367). Characterized as fighting against men of false religion, the English forces considered themselves to be combatants for God as well as for Queen Elizabeth. “Although the rhetoric had strong doses of chivalric imagery and overtones of crusader ideology, most accounts reveal that patriotism featured as prominently, if not more so, than traditional, formal religious justifications” (Tyerman, p. 368).

Rehabilitated for the conflict due to his status as Patron Saint of the country, the figure of Saint George again found prominence. Whereas before George had held sway as a Catholic icon, he now became “a protector of Protestant soldiers [who fought]

against the impious and the Anti-Christ, commonly identified as the pope (and his followers) or the Turk” (Tyerman, p. 368). With the attack of the Spanish Armada in 1588, George continued to be a rally point for the troops of his country in the same manner. Angered by English involvement in the Protestant revolt taking place in the Netherlands at that time, and by the aggressiveness of English sea power, King Philip II of Spain ordered his invasion fleet to cross the English Channel in the Spring of 1588. However, rather than acquiring victory, the Spanish Armada was accosted by both the elements and the English Navy before making the decision to return home. Flocking to the defense of their sovereign and their kingdom, the victory was a “cause of national unity” that coalesced behind the Monarch as well as Saint George (Cross, p. 396).

With a belief that God had aided in their defeat of the Spanish, the figure of Saint George was picked up by Spenser as the subject matter for Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. Labeled as the “Patron of true Holinesse” within Canto I’s argument (I.i), Saint George continued to find the luster that had made him famous. In his article on the subject, Harold Weatherby remarks that Spenser intended to use the Patron Saint of England within his allegory in order “to make him shine more brilliantly than before” (Weatherby, p. 121).

In this way, the figure of Saint George was resurrected through the sovereignty of Elizabeth I and assimilated into a culture that no longer adhered to the belief in saints or the authority of popes. With a new identity as the “protector of Protestant soldiers,”

Saint George successfully bridged the gap between his Anglo-Saxon past of Roman Catholicism and a future where the Protestant faith had successfully taken hold due to Tudor influence. Shaping Book I as a learning process for George, in which the knight is successfully molded by a Tudor-esque version of Prince Arthur, Spenser depicts the influence that the reigning family of the period had upon England's Patron Saint.

Works Cited

- Bond, Francis. *Dedications & Patron Saints of English Churches; Ecclesiastical Symbolism; Saints and Their Emblems*. London: Oxford University Press, 1914.
- Cross, Arthur Lyon. *A History of England and Greater Britain*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917.
- Derry, T.K. and M.G. Blakeway. *The Making of Britain: Life and Work to the Close of the Middle Ages*. London: Murray, 1968.
- Foxe, John. *Book of Martyrs*. Vol. 5. 1-337. www.watpad.com. Ex-classics Project, 2009 / www.exclassics.com. Web. 8 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.wattpad.com/229162-foxes-book-of-martyrs-v5-the-reformation-in-europe?p=2>>.
- Heale, Elizabeth. *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Horton, Ronald Arthur. *The Unity of the Fairie Queen*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1978.
- Jones, H.S.V. "Magnanimity in Spenser's Legend of Holiness" *SP*, XXIX (1932):202.
- Levin, Richard A. "The Legende of the Redcrosse Knight and Una, or of the Love of a

- Good Woman." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31:1 (Winter, 1991): 1-24
- Millican, Charles. *Spenser and the Table Round*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. London: Penguin Classics, 1987.
- Tyerman, Christopher. *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Waters, D. Douglas. "Duessa and Orgoglio: Red Crosse's Spiritual Fornication." *Renaissance Quarterly* 20.2 (Summer 1967): 211-220.
- Waters, D. Douglas. "Prince Arthur as Christian Magnanimity in Book One of the Faerie Queene." *Studies in English Language and Literature* 9:1 (Winter 1969): 53-62
- Weatherby, Harold. "The True Saint George." *English Literary Renaissance* 17.2 (1987): 119-41.