AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Monsters in the Mirror: Literary Reflections of Mentally and Physically Deformed Humanity in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

Abstract approved:

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Rebecca R. Olson

Monstrous beings, or distortions of nature, were a tangible object of fear in the medieval

and early modern eras. Aristotle, as a precursor to the scientists and magical practitioners

of the twelfth century or the barber-surgeons of the sixteenth century, understood

monsters to be human or animal beings deformed by a mother's corrupt imagination. The

possibility that one's corrupt thoughts might either cause the individual to produce

congenitally deformed progeny or to transform into something monstrously deformed

would have been believable to medieval and early modern audiences. Monstrous figures

in literature, then, might act as vessels for catharsis—inspiring self-reflection and

confession from terrified readers. This study explores the ways that Edmund Spenser uses

monstrosity to engage and instruct his sixteenth century readers. In his seminal epic work

The Faerie Queene, Spenser generously fills his pages with anthropomorphic monsters

representative of some particular human flaw. This study suggests that Spenser uses these

allegorical, visceral, and significant monsters intentionally as literary instruments of

pedagogy, warning against the human capacity for bestial behavior. In order to establish

the importance of such hypothetical intentionality, this study draws heavily from the

etymological and cultural history of monstrosity and from the contemporary conversation regarding the allegorical significance of both the human and monstrous figures in Spenser's text. The first chapter of this study focuses on the ways in which medieval and early modern readers would have understood monstrosity as a concept and a reality. The second chapter focuses on three types of monstrous figures that appear in Spenser's text—specifically Errour, Orgoglio, and Malbecco—in order to establish Spenser's purposeful use of monsters throughout the text. The third chapter utilizes close readings and an analysis of the critical history of the monster Duessa to establish her as the token piece of Spenser's pedagogically monstrous figures.

Monsters in the Mirror: Literary Reflections of Mentally and Physically Deformed
Humanity in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

by
Michele Joy Bromley

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing English

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Director of the School of Writing, Literature, and Film

_____

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Michele Joy Bromley, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dedicated to Dr. Daniel Sweeney, who is simultaneously the grumpy, old professor I want to be and the father who's always believed I could do it.

Introduction

Regardless of plotline, brush stroke, or rhyme scheme, a veritable constant in literary and visual art over the centuries has been the presence of good and evil—of heroes and monsters. A question this study addresses—within the context of Edmund Spenser's seminal Early Modern English work *The Faerie Queene*—is why monsters in particular have become so intrinsic to literary fiction. In many ways, readers seem to crave the unnatural and the grotesque; monsters, in other words, become a necessary evil. A thorough engagement of Spenser's work would suggest that monsters are necessary because in reality, even heroes have a little darkness in their souls. Even heroes struggle with their inner tendency toward selfishness and malcontent. Monsters exist on paper to remind audiences that monsters exist within. My argument is that the presence of monsters and their use in this pedagogical capacity were significantly more impactful in the Early Modern era due to the scientific and cultural understanding of monstrosity at the time. Monsters were then understood to be a real and tangible product of a corrupt imagination. Readers were thus steeped in an understanding of monstrosity that would allow them to take Spenser's monstrous figures and the danger they present seriously and, indeed, instructively.

Though Spenserian critics have undeniably spent a great deal of time evaluating and interpreting individual allegorical figures in the text, rarely have these figures been classified and interpreted as groups. The categorization of good and evil characters seems intuitive, but the fact that several of the more prominent allegorical figures in the text fall

under the category of monster seems worthy of investigation. Their monstrosity is confirmed not only by the grotesqueness of their deformity but also by the fact that many of these allegorical figures were explicitly referred to by Spenser as monsters. Again, while critics do discuss the allegorical portent of several of these monstrous figures, no one seems to focus solely on their monstrosity or the significance of the fact that their presence thoroughly permeates the text. In many portions of the text, Spenser's monsters seem to carry the weight of the narrative trajectory by either forcing or inspiring action on the part of human or elven protagonists. The more positive figures in the text are thus redefined and redirected by their interactions with these monstrous figures. The cultural understanding of monsters in the medieval and Early Modern periods as realistic beings would suggest that their presence on paper might also redefine and redirect susceptible and introspective readers.

My focus in this study is not only the significance of individual figures' monstrosity but on the monstrous themes established by each prominent monster in the group. Why does Spenser include monsters of such variety? Is there any plausible intentionality or purpose for including this number and variety of monsters? Why do monsters rather than heroes dominate the most explosive episodes in the text? In my first chapter, I seek to answer these questions by exploring the scientific, etymological, and literary notions regarding monstrosity at the time. Readers in the Early Modern era would have seen monstrosity differently than readers might see it today. Knowing this, it seems impossible to assume that Spenser did not have some latent pedagogical purpose in

including such blatantly anthropomorphic monsters in his text. In my second chapter, I investigate some of the more prominent figures in this monstrous group—Errour, Orgoglio, and Malbecco. I focus particularly on the physicality of each of these monsters in order to establish the effect of such variety on readers wary of monstrous transformation. My third chapter focuses on one particular monster, Duessa, with which Spenser capitalizes on early understandings of monstrosity to expose the manifest dangers of monstrous behavior.

This study contributes something new to the critical conversation on *The Faerie Queene* in that it focuses on a heretofore unexplored theme in the text. Though critics today have done significant work regarding monstrosity in a historical context, monstrosity as a literary device has been virtually undefined. Monstrosity as a meaningful and potentially intended theme in *The Faerie Queene* is correlatively a topic that has been largely overlooked. This seems a gross void in the critical conversation when one considers Spenser's obvious and focused attention to monsters in *The Faerie Queene*. In this study, I establish that Spenser's use of monsters in *The Faerie Queene* must have been based on an understanding of the prevalence and impact of monstrosity in an Early Modern culture. I argue that this text may have served not simply as an allegorical vessel by which to inspire self-improvement, but as a text whose language itself invites self-reflection. Within the context of this argument, monstrosity becomes a powerful literary tool in the Early Modern era—a device that both inspires fear and encourages self-reflection.

Chapter 1

"[T]hus cloudily enwrapped in allegorical deuices": Pedagogical Monstrosity in Medieval and Early Modern Literature

Monsters have held the attention of audiences for thousands of years. Their presence on the page, stage, and screen are often signifiers of myth and magic. Indeed, monsters in their most fantastic and grossly anthropomorphic forms are today recognized as elements of fiction. If popular film and literature are any indication, the contemporary understanding of monsters is one in which monsters and monstrous human beings are two distinctly separate entities; the former is accepted as fiction while the latter is portrayed as a frightening reality. Monstrosities like zombies and aliens are either no longer human or were never human at all. Conversely, vampires and werewolves have been humanized to the point that they are no longer portrayed as monsters so much as super-humans. In either case, contemporary monstrosity is presented as a fiction separated distinctly from humanity. The reality is that today's anthropomorphic portrayals of monsters such as werewolves and vampires are simply an extension of the more complicated understanding of monsters prevalent in the medieval and Early Modern eras. Monsters in these eras were believed to be deformed human beings corrupted by some dark influence. Scientific hypotheses in the Common Era periods leading up to the sixteenth century defined monstrosity as a physical deformation or vile extension of humanity from its

natural form[1]. Monsters were human beings that were deformed physically and were therefore assumed to be corrupted mentally. While the current understanding of monsters is that they are fictional and a figurative product of the imagination, the medieval and Early Modern understanding of monsters was that they were, in fact, a real and physical product of a corrupt human imagination; a pregnant woman's sinful thoughts during either conception or gestation were considered a probable cause for congenital deformity (Huet 13, 19). Monsters were thus tangible rather than illusory objects of fear and marvel in societies in which anything physically unexplainable must be seen as spiritually and mentally unnatural.

This early understanding of monstrosity within the context of deformity was popular and influential with audiences long before contemporary horror films and television shows capitalized on the anthropological fascination with unnatural distortions of the human form; in short, monsters were "real" long before they were fictionalized. The term "monster", while associated today with creatures that are by definition *not* human, was ascribed in the medieval and Early Modern era to creatures that were either partially or had once been human. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "monster" originally as "a mythical creature which is part animal and *part human*, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and

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[1] In this case, naturalness is defined as "[t]he condition or fact of being innate, or in accordance with nature"; accordance with nature in the medieval and Early Modern eras would entail an understood or definable state of being uncomplicated by physical or mental deformity ("naturalness").

ferocious appearance [emphasis added]" ("monster"). The entry notes that the word is

understood only later "more generally, [as] any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and

frightening" ("monster"). Monsters were thus originally associated directly with

monstrous humans; they were, in fact, partially human. Monsters—hereafter understood

in the context of this study to mean something that is both bestial and human, a

misshapen and deformed human being—were once seen as the result or physical

manifestation of monstrous behavior. This relationship of monstrosity to reality in the

medieval and Early Modern eras would have allowed audiences to perceive monstrosity

in literature differently than it is perceived today—it would have been considered more

threat than thrill. Rather than terrors *of* the imagination, monsters were seen as manifest

terrors *from* the imagination. In other words, the horror or threat of monsters in the

medieval and Early Modern periods lay in their proximity to reality rather than their

distance from it. A familiarity with this cultural attitude seems to have made authors of

medieval and Early Modern literature no less likely to capitalize on the shock value of

bestial deformities. This study focuses particularly on the way in which Edmund

Spenser's sixteenth century text *The Faerie Queene* utilizes monstrosity most effectively

as a pedagogical literary tool. However, before investigating the impact of literary

monsters on medieval and Early Modern readers leading up to the publication of *The*

Faerie Queene, it is important to contextualize monstrosity in these periods.

  Monsters were believed, as early as before the Common Era, to be actual products

of human or animal procreation deformed either by God, demonic influences, or a corrupt

natural environment (Huet 3). Monsters might most commonly be recognized in those periods in the guise of a deformed baby or deformed animal believed to have been corrupted by any manner of influences—most popularly a mother's corrupt imagination during conception or gestation (Huet 13). The fact that these early audiences perceived monsters to be among them indicated that there was little limit to their collectively timorous imagination. Visual artists of the time would consequently paint both physical and rhetorical pictures of the unseen monsters that could be. If a baby could be born with three limbs or an inordinate amount of hair, could it not also be born with a beak or claws? Medieval and Early Modern authors of both fiction and non-fiction[2] would present these more fantastic monsters as a feasible reality to a susceptible audience. One might imagine that an audience already steeped in the reality of human deformation and the imagined exoticism of the new world would be wholly susceptible to the suggestion of more unbridled deformations. These exaggerated monsters would be especially alarming to medieval and Early Modern readers considering the supposed origin of monstrosity from a corrupt or deformed imagination. This potential susceptibility of readers in fear of their own imaginative tendencies would lend to the amenability of monsters as literary devices of warning and instruction. The horror of extensive deformation combined with the idea that deformation must be triggered by human corruption in the first place would have captivated early audiences much in the same way

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[2] Non-fiction in these eras was a genre to which travel journalists were particularly inclined as exploration and new world discovery were of paramount concern to the civilized world.

that films about monstrously-behaved humans captivate audiences today. The etymological and scientific history of monstrosity leading up to the sixteenth century lends itself particularly to this interpretation of literary monstrosity as a device or tool of pedagogical instruction.

French scholar Marie-Hélène Huet explores the origins of monstrosity, explaining that even before the onset of the Common Era, philosophers and scientists understood monsters to be any living body distorted from its natural form (Paré, Huet, and Davies). Huet quotes Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* to describe his theory that women themselves may be categorized as deformities because of their departure from the natural male form: "Anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though this indeed is a necessity required by Nature" (Huet 4). Aristotle was one of the first to propagate the theory that monstrosity was the result of a mother's corrupt imagination. Teratologically and scientifically speaking, this theory remained prevalent for some time. Surekha Davies cites Aristotle's theories as one of "three interpretive traditions of Renaissance teratology," followed by theories in Cicero's *On Divination* and Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (Davies 49). According to Davies, "Cicero perceived monstrous births as signs of impending calamity," while Pliny the Elder introduced the theory that "entire races of monsters [are] dwelling in the far corners of the earth" (Davies 50). Monsters were a deviation from what was culturally normal or acceptable; a deformation

of God's "natural" design for humanity. Babies subject to any congenital deformation, persons suffering from dwarfism, hypertrichosis, hermaphroditism, or gigantism—all of these would have been considered "monstrous" rather than human. Thus, the term "monster" was a designation for those representative of a physical "other" in the medieval and Early Modern periods—outcasts in a society in which the physically unexplained and grotesque must be internally base. In short, physical monstrosity *must* be a reflection of a corrupt mind and spirit.

Ambroise Paré was a sixteenth century barber-surgeon and expert on the topic of birth defects and deformities. His 1573 pseudo-scientific text, *Des Monstres et Prodigies* (translated as *On Monsters and Marvels*), would have been seen as a thoroughly authoritative technical dissertation at the time of its publication. Beyond his investigation of known birth defects and physical deformities, Paré hypothesizes regarding the spiritual and mental causes of these afflictions. Indeed, Janis Pallister describes Paré as a "philosopher, as a historian and storyteller, as a critic, as a philologist, as a moralist," and "as a demonologist" (Paré xv). Paré concerned himself not only with documented physical irregularities but also with speculative or invented monstrosities of unproven existence; Paré first of all recognized "deformities" as monstrosities. Indeed, within the hypotheses and theories proposed in *Des Monstres et Prodigies*, deformity and birth defect seem synonymous with "monstrosity." His thirty-nine chapters detail thirty-nine different kinds and causes of monstrosity, ranging from acts of God and possessions of the devil to the mother's imagination or physical strain during pregnancy. Perhaps one of

the most important details or circumstances related to Paré's theories is that *any*

deformation of the natural human physical form in the Early Modern period was

considered scientifically to be a monstrosity. It is also clear that these monstrosities were

believed to be the result of both physical or biological circumstances *and* psychological

or imaginative influences. In other words, monstrosity might result from a flawed or

corrupt imagination.

Amongst the many causes Ambroise Paré lists for the development of monstrous

bodies, imagination is listed fifth of thirteen. Other causes are almost wholly involved

with either human semen or demonic and divine influence. He concludes his

comprehensive list with that caveat that

> …[t]here are other causes that [he left] aside for the present because
> among all human reasons, one cannot give any that are sufficient or
> probable, such as why persons are made with only one eye in the middle
> of their forehead or the navel, or the horn on the head, or the liver upside
> down. Others are born having griffin's feet, like birds, and certain
> monsters which are engendered in the seas; in short countless others which
> it would take too long to describe. (Paré 4)

Paré, regardless of proven or accepted cause, attributes these monstrosities almost wholly

to God, explaining that God "*permits* fathers and mothers to produce such abominations

from the disorder that they make in copulation, like brutish beasts, in which their appetite

guides them, without respecting the time, or other laws ordained by God and Nature"

(Paré 5). Monsters that proceed from one's imagination are those that, at least in Paré's

consideration, might appear the most realistic to a contemporary audience. His chapter

regarding examples of monsters created through the imagination cites a specific example

of a child born with what is now understood to be hypertrichosis, or an "excessive growth

of hair, locally or over the body generally" ("hypertrichosis"). Paré attributes this

abnormality to the mother's having "looked too intensely at the image of Saint John [the

Baptist] dressed in skins, along with his [own]

body hair and beard" (Paré 38). The birth of

children whose skin color was different from that

of their parents was also attributed to the mother

having seen an image during either conception or

gestation (see Figure 1). Davies notes that "[f]or

Paré, most monsters merely demonstrated nature's

curious mechanisms, and were neither portent,

sign, nor errors. Monsters evoked curiosity and

wonder rather than fear or horror" (Davies 58).

Early authors of both fiction and non-fiction would

take it on themselves to extend this scientific

understanding of monstrosity to one that would

imply "portent, sign, [and] error" (Davies 58).
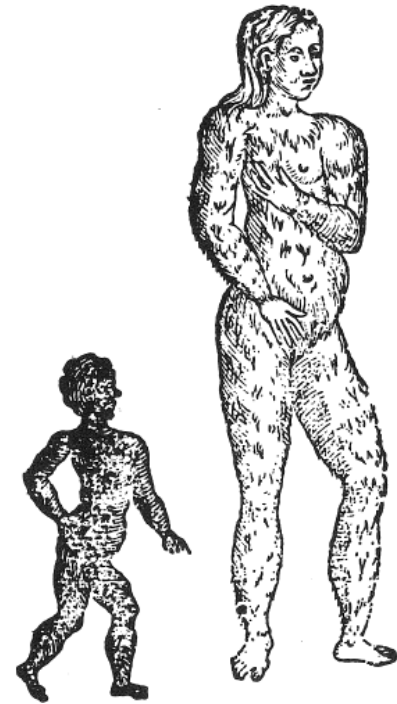
Figure 1. "Two figures, one of a furry girl, and the other of a child that was black because of the imagination of their parents" (Paré 39).

Many medieval and Early Modern texts capitalized

on the anxiety-ridden understanding of monstrosity as a fantastic conflation of man and

beast in order to warn their readers against bestial or corrupt tendencies inherent to the

human psyche. Out of the examples addressed in this chapter, Marie de France's

"Bisclavret" demonstrates the most obvious use of this kind of pedagogical monstrosity in a way that prefigures Edmund Spenser's more explicit use.

Marie-Hélène Huet and Caroline Walker Bynum address the idea that even the etymology of the word "monstrosity" may be an indicator of its amenability as a tool of instruction or demonstration. Bynum writes that "[a]s every medieval schoolboy knew, monsters are named from the verb *monstrare* (to show)—that is, not from their ontology but from their utility" (Bynum 23). Huet correspondingly notes that "following Augustine's *City of God ...* the word *monster* derive[s] from the Latin word *monstrare*: to show, to display (*montrer* in French)" (Huet 6). The very root of the word confirms its utility as a vessel for revelation. According to the *OED*, the etymological Latin derivative of the word "monster" is "mōnstrum" or "moneō." The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines "moneō" in multiple ways: "To bring to the notice of, remind, tell (of)," "[t]o suggest a course of action to, advise, recommend, warn, tell," or "[t]o serve as a reminder or warning to" ("moneō"). Thus, monstrosity is rooted in action—it is a word that denotes telling, advising, and warning. The etymological origins of the word indicate that it could have been no accident that medieval and Early Modern authors were using monsters as literary vessels for moral instruction; monsters were, by definition, vessels of notice and warning. Authors in these eras used this kind of discursive monstrosity to play with the margins or limits of their readers' imaginations. If corrupt behavior or thinking could affect the physical composition of one's progeny, it was not a stretch to consider that a debased imagination might affect one's own physical composition. In other words,

monsters might be used in literature to forewarn readers of their own capacity for transformative monstrosity—a deformity that might first exist in one's imagination before manifesting as discernible physical deformity.

If physical deformation was indeed a result of a corrupt imagination, anyone might fall victim to their own moral frailty and susceptibility to corruption; anyone might capably produce or become a monster. Literary monsters, then, might be seen not only as instruments of instruction but as a means of catharsis[3]. Readers might be inspired to recognize and confront their own spiritual and mental monstrosities when faced with literary manifestations of their bestial tendencies. Many medieval and Early Modern authors built on the reality of deformity as an early signifier of monstrosity; they created wildly fictitious monsters whose existence and physical composition might have been accepted within the realm of realistic probability. The remainder of this chapter deals predominantly with specific examples of these texts. The medieval and Early Modern authors discussed in the following pages clearly capitalize on the contemporary scientific understanding of monstrosity to thereby create fictional monsters that might present themselves as potentially tangible threats to early readers. The first two examples of such exaggerated literary monstrosity emerge in the fourteenth century: the anonymously written *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Sir John Mandeville's *The Travels of Sir*

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[3] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "catharsis" as "[t]he purification of the emotions by vicarious experience, esp[ecially] through the drama (in reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*…)" ("catharsis").

John Mandeville, which represents the deluge of exaggerative fourteenth and fifteenth

century travel literature that elaborated on reality through the allure of the fantastic.

      Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a poetic romance that describes the Arthurian

knight Sir Gawain's multiple and fantastic encounters with an ethereal green knight.

Though the green knight's glowing green hue is one of his more prevalent characteristics,

the knight is also ostensibly a deformed human being:

> In his stature the very tallest on earth.
> From the waist to the neck so thick-set and square,
> And his loins and his limbs so massive and long,
> In truth half a giant I believe he was… (*Sir Gawain* 263.137-140)

Giants were already seen as a deformation of the natural human body; alongside those

with dwarfism[4], they were perhaps the most real and prevalent manifestation of

monstrosity available to medieval and Early Modern audiences. Giants, having already

been accepted as monsters in the medieval period, would have been excellent literary

vessels through which to project further possibilities of monstrosity and deformity. It

would not have been an impossible stretch of the medieval imagination to consider the

possibility of a giant being green or possessing the magical ability to be beheaded and

live (*Sir Gawain*). In the narrative, the giant challenges Sir Gawain to a game; he asks

that a member of Arthur's court strike him defenseless, promising that he will accept the

blow if they agree that he may reciprocate in one year's time (*Sir Gawain* 267). In this

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[4] An Old English metrical charm "Against a Dwarf" personifies severe illness as an evil dwarf—a veritable "personified agent of illness" (Black 41). In this situation, a known human deformation is explicitly associated with evil.

scene, the awe of the giant's generally fantastic appearance and the nobility of his speech

allow his monstrosity to appear almost human; consequently, the author augments the

giant's monstrosity by allowing him to survive violent decapitation:

> The handsome head flew from the neck to the ground…
> Blood spurted from the trunk, gleamed on the green dress,
> Yet the man neither staggered nor fell a whit for all that,
> But sprang forward vigorously on powerful legs,
> And fiercely reached out where knights were standing,
> Grabbed at his fine head and snatched it up quickly… (*Sir Gawain*
> 270.427-433)

The anonymous author of this text patently capitalized on one of the most familiar

medieval monstrosities by introducing his readers to a giant who exceeds all physical and

metaphysical bounds of possible reality; the giant actually speaks to Arthur's court with

his head in his hand:

> For he holds up the head in his hand, truly,
> Turns its face towards the noblest on the dais,
> And it lifted its eyelids and glared with wide eyes,
> And the mouth uttered these words… (*Sir Gawain* 271.444-447)

The grotesqueness of this image firmly establishes the giant's extensive deformity; he is

partially human but more significantly monstrous. Tellingly, the text refers to the giant at

this point in the poem as an "it" rather than a "he" (*Sir Gawain* 271). The author

describes a monster that would have been initially familiar and believable to his audience

before jarring the semi-realistic atmosphere of the poem with the addition of fantastic and

truly grotesque elements. The realistic nature of the giant is complicated by his magical

properties and monstrous physical characteristics.

The Travels of John Mandeville is yet another example of a fourteenth century

text whose author exploits and elaborates on medieval understandings of deformity in

order to present a more extraordinary and bizarre monstrosity. In *The Travels of Sir John*

Mandeville, circa 1360, the author describes an Egyptian holy hermit's encounter with a

monster thus:

> …there met with him a monster (that is to say, a monster is a thing
> deformed against both of man or of beast or of anything else, and that is
> clept a monster). And this monster that met with this holy hermit was *as it*
> *had been a man*, that had two horns trenchant on its forehead; and he had a
> body like a man until the navel, and beneath he had the body like a goat
> [emphasis added]. (Mandeville 570)

Mandeville thus further perpetuates the cultural belief in monstrosity and the human

capacity for bestial transformation. The monster is described as having "*been* a man;" it

can thus be assumed that he at some point transformed *from* a man *into* the creature

described in the remainder of the passage (Mandeville 570). Monstrosity as a definition

was not restricted to the malformations that might occur within the context of a human

body; it became commonplace to assume that deformation might occur in such a way as

to combine the physical characteristics of man and beast in *one* body. Later in the text,

the author describes another centaur-like creature he refers to as a "hippotayne"; he

designates these creatures "half man" and "half horse," describing them later as man-

eaters (Mandeville 585). Like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Travels of Sir John*

Mandeville sets the stage for the grotesque deformities and theorized monstrosities

imagined by Early Modern scholars and brought allegorically to life in Edmund

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Early texts like *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, being

a supposed record of exploration and discovery, allowed hybridist monstrosities to appear

possible and, indeed, probable to medieval audiences.

Marie de France's twelfth century lay, or short romance, "Bisclavret"

demonstrates a more overt use of monstrosity as a pedagogical tool of instruction. Marie

de France appropriates the already popular idea of extended or exaggerated monstrosity

and appeals directly to her audience's likely fears of monstrous reproduction and

transformation. "Bisclavret" tells the story of a Baron who is betrayed by his wife and

forced to fully assume his previously partial identity as a tortured werewolf. The Baron's

wife betrays his confidence by manipulating a lover into helping her steal the discarded

clothes that allow the Baron to become human again (de France 184.125-126). At the

conclusion of the poem, the Baron's wife is tortured into confessing her treachery. In

revenge, the Baron attacks his wife while he is still a werewolf, physically mangling and

deforming her face: "[Bisclavret] tore the nose from her face! / What worse could he

have done to her" (de France 186.235-236). The Baron is subsequently returned to his

natural human state, while his wife is left to produce a long line of daughters whose

congenital facial deformations mirror her own. In other words, the Baron's noble interior

is ultimately matched by a human exterior while his wife's cruel interior is ultimately

matched by a monstrous facial exterior. Her internal monstrosity is evidenced by her

heartless betrayal of an otherwise gentle beast; Bisclavret is a seemingly innocent and

noble creature—a "marvelously praised," "handsome, good knight"—who unwillingly

transforms into something monstrous (de France 181.16-17). The wife's parallel

transformation in the conclusion of the poem acts as a literal warning against bestial

behavior; it is indicative of the disturbing revelation that one's inner or mental

deformation may translate not only to the physical deformation of one's progeny but to

the one's own monstrous transformation.

The reader's fears regarding this kind of self-transformation would be enhanced

by any initial identification with the wife before she becomes monstrous. While the

Baron is almost immediately established as a beast—"Lady, I become a werewolf"—the

wife masquerades as a helpless and empathic human. Despite any monstrous behavior

tendencies, Bisclavret's wife *appears* human, while the overtly sympathetic Baron

appears monstrous. Huet notes the fact that monstrosities often bear a "false

resemblance" to another species, allowing them to be "doubly deceptive": "[t]heir strange

appearance—a misleading likeness to another species, for example—belies the otherwise

rigorous law that offspring should resemble their parents" (Huet 4). Essentially,

monstrous figures might demonstrate to those around them that the human mind, and

subsequently the body, may be wholly deceptive. Bisclavret's wife's monstrosity

originates within and is only reflected on her body when she faces the victim of her

bestial behavior. Her children further manifest the consequences of her monstrosity for

generations to come; essentially, the wife's monstrosity is perpetuated as a sort of

punishment for her wrongdoing:

        She had a number of children,

who were quite recognizable
in face and appearance:
most of the women of that line,
in truth, were born without noses
and lived noseless. (de France 188.309-314)

Considering the apparent reality of transformative monstrosity in the twelfth century and
the accepted physical and mental corruptibility of humanity, a twelfth century reader
might keenly feel the threat of bestial transformation within his or her own mind and
body. de France's readers' perceived proximity to monstrosity—in the form of
realistically deformed human bodies—and their beliefs regarding its origins would
suggest that they had reason to fear transformative corruption in their own imaginations.
The wife's shocking transformation is clearly the most effective instrument of catharsis in
the text as far as the reader's own self-examination, as the reader might ask "What is my
own capacity for deception and monstrosity?"

This question is invoked perhaps most poignantly, and I would argue, most
effectively, in Edmund Spenser's sixteenth century poem, *The Faerie Queene*. While
scholars have offered multiple theories regarding the origins or manifestations of
monstrosity as understood in the medieval and Early Modern eras, few have discussed the
ways in which authors might use or capitalize that understanding as a literary or poetic
device. Monsters held more significant and relevant meaning for early audiences, and
while medieval authors like Marie de France were consequently able to use monstrosity
as a vessel for pedagogical truth, Spenser "ran the gamut," so to speak, in his incomplete
epic, *The Faerie Queene*. He allowed monstrous imagination to take precedence in his

poetic narrative, even so far as to allow his monsters to carry the weight of allegorical pathos; it is *their* monstrosity that allows each righteous protagonist to stand out as a representation of admirable virtue. Like Marie de France, but to a significantly more overt degree, Edmund Spenser builds his poetic narrative on a foundation of monstrous etymological and scientific history. Spenser's express purpose, revealed in his 1590 letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" is manifested in his use of monstrosity as a powerful pedagogical tool (Spenser 714). His apparent hope was to educate and reform his audience—presumably before his readers were *deformed* by their own inherent corruption. Spenser's use of exaggerated monsters that were not only variable conflations of human and beast but also allegorical representations of some particular evil seems to confirm that his monsters represent a realistically physical manifestation of human corruption.

Spenser introduces a litany of monsters that would serve to evoke every possible sensation or cathartic reaction from his audience. He utilizes monsters in the same imaginatively evocative ways seen in the aforementioned texts from the medieval era while simultaneously extending Marie de France's pedagogical methods in such a way as to fully engage his audience with a more complicated and oblique monstrosity. Spenser unveils monsters that are partially human and partially monster; monsters that are simply deformed humans, realistically recognizable to an Early Modern audience; humans that metamorphose into monsters over the course of the narrative; and most significantly for this study, monsters that are at once fully human and fully monster. Spenser imagines

every capacity in which his readers might find themselves identifying with a monstrous character in his text, and indeed, considering his range of monstrous and empathic characters, he invariably forces his readers to do so. Monsters that are first human and then transform into a monstrous creature pose a threat to the reader in that they act as warnings of what might realistically occur. Monsters that are disguised as humans represent something much more sinister; they pose a threat to the reader of what might already be in existence. C. S. Lewis describes a reader's reaction to literary monstrosity that exists outside of themselves as follows: "When we ourselves are looking at the evils from outside their world, they appear as filth, defect, disease, or as life-in-death, a silent, empty imprisonment, 'dust and old decay'" (Lewis 73). If the threat of this filth or disease were represented as something potentially hidden or covert it would be all the more potent to a susceptible Early Modern reader. The allegorical representation of evil, then, that exists in Spenser's text in the form of the hybrid, realistic, transformative, and oblique monstrosity would provoke a reaction of abhorrence and fear from the reader. The complex and multiple layers of monstrosity in *The Faerie Queene* allow it to become a distinctly effective tool of instruction.

The overall allegorical and pedagogical impact of the text on any of its Early Modern readers would have been strongly influenced by its political and cultural underlinings. It would be a gross understatement to say that *The Faerie Queene* is simply a multilayered text. On the first and most obvious level, the fact that the text is titled *The Faerie Queene* suggests that the faerie queene character herself, while not the focus of

the text or its protagonist, is the most important *concept* of the text. Edmund Spenser's

own admission to Sir Walter Raleigh to having fashioned the faerie queene in character

and grace after the English Queen Elizabeth I is a veritable admission of his pandering

and desire that, on a surface level, the faerie queene herself remain the ultimate focus of

the text: "In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my general intention, but in my

particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine Queene, and

her kingdome in Faery land" (Spenser 716). On a deeper level, however, the text is just as

obviously an epic allegory, designed by Spenser explicitly "to fashion a gentleman or

noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" (Spenser 714). In other words, or rather in

Spenser's own words, the focus of the reader should remain on the allegorically

representative protagonists and their efforts to maintain the sanctity of virtue in the face

of incarnate vice. I would argue that, on an overt but unequivocally more impactful level,

the physicality of Spenser's monsters could become the most important focus for an

Early Modern audience. The cultural meaning and unavoidable psychological impact of

these anthropomorphic monsters would have gripped the minds of Spenser's sixteenth

century readers. Literary monsters that are both human and monster—both natural and

unnatural—would have horrified and captivated readers who lived in terror of their own

capacity for, or proximity, to physical and mental monstrosity. I propose that Edmund

Spenser intentionally uses monsters, or more specifically, monstrous distortions of

humanity, to force his readers to examine their own spiritual and emotional weaknesses.

The fact that Edmund Spenser's text is most often read as a moral allegory contributes to the expectation that a reader might engage the text through self-reflective reading. Spenser not only allows his readers to interpret *The Faerie Queene* as moral allegory but also encourages them to do so. Whether or not it is beneficial to accept an expressed authorial intent, it is worth noting that many Renaissance publications such as *The Faerie Queene* included "epistolary commentaries" written by the author for that specific purpose (Maclean 1). In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser further defines the work as an allegory designed to educate and motivate his readers with regard to their own morality (Spenser 714). Spenser acknowledges that some readers may doubt his methods, but that his allegorical approach and use of historical fiction may prove to be a truly effective pedagogical tool:

> To some I know this Methode will seeme displeasaunt, which has rather haue good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large as they vse, then thus cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises. But such, me seeme should be satisfied with the vse of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their shows, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence. (Spenser 716)

With this suggested textual interpretation in mind, critics have long studied the allegorical meaning behind Spenser's human, elven, faerie, and monstrous figures. The emphasis, however, is often placed on the human characters of the text; they are, after all, most commonly Spenser's protagonists. His monsters, then, are often understood as entities off which righteous figures in the text can be reflected and magnified. This dichotomy is clearly visible, for example, in the undeniable comparison between Una,

Spenser's human representation of truth, and Duessa, his disgustingly monstrous representation of falsehood and deception (Hamilton 32, 51). Though *The Faerie Queene*'s human, elven, and fairy protagonists draw much critical analysis, the monsters that surface within their narratives demand equal attention. These anthropomorphic antagonists demand attention specifically for what their physicality signifies, for their allegorical purpose is most potent and more fully understood when viewed through the lens of their physicality.

In the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser creates an environment in which he is able to imprint on his text misshapen anthropomorphic monsters that resemble not only those that might appear in his readers' imaginations but also those that were already hypothesized by contemporary scientists. Many of Spenser's figures alternate resemblance to the physical composition of a human and to the skewed physical compositions of a monster; once again, these conflations and transformations allow the reader to consider his or her own internally monstrous constructs. The characters I will investigate in the second and third chapters of this text—Errour, Orgoglio, Malbecco, and Duessa specifically—are also blatant allegorical representations of realistic and socially abhorrent internal human flaws. It is fitting, then, that these flaws should appear in the form of a being that is clearly a disturbing distortion of the physical human body. In concordance with Aristotle's theory regarding the influence of maternal imagination, Huet describes monsters as the "offspring of an imagination that literally imprinted on progeny a deformed, misshapen resemblance to an object that had not participated in their

creation" (Huet 5). Huet continues to describe the way in which this theory of imagination's power, particularly the "maternal imagination," became the most prevalent and debated theory regarding the formation of a deformed being (Huet 5). Just as Early Modern scientists asserted that human beings have the imaginative capacity to imprint their own internal flaws on the outward appearance of their and their progeny's physical bodies, Spenser's imagination comparatively imprints these monstrous reflections of human frailty on the pages of his text.

As this study begins to focus on monstrosity within the context of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, it is important to note the relevance of Spenser's monsters as a lens through which to examine humanity. Though protagonists like Redcrosse, Una, Britomart, and Artegall are often studied for their primary roles as allegorical representations of various human virtues, they are also unmistakably human. Spenser establishes human characters to represent truth, holiness, temperance, and chastity, and monstrous characters to represent all that is sensuous and evil in the human heart—pride, lust, deception, and jealousy, for example. These monsters are more than simply the antitheses of human virtue; they are one of Spenser's greatest and most potent pedagogical tools: Spenser uses monsters to command notice, to instruct, and to caution his audience. He makes a distinction between good as that which is natural—humanity— and evil as that which is unnatural—distorted humanity. He uses clearly anthropomorphic monsters to reflect mankind's physical, spiritual, and mental deformities in a way that his audience cannot ignore; Spenser shocks his readers into self-reflection even further

through the use of monsters disguised as empathic humans. This use of monsters as a pedagogical literary device suggests that Spenser had a clear understanding of the etymological and scientific history of monstrosity and the ways in which authors had capitalized on this history in the past.

Chapter 2

"[T]h'other halfe did womans shape retain": Fantastic and Didactic Examples of Anthropomorphic Monstrosity in Books I and III of *The Faerie Queene*

Like many of his literary predecessors, Edmund Spenser capitalizes on the contemporary scientific and spiritual understanding of monsters to supplement his own allegorical agenda—the pedagogical enforcement of moral imperatives through anthropomorphic representations of human frailty. He does this by presenting known examples of Early Modern monstrosities such as giants and dwarves, extensions of these monstrosities such as conflations of human and monster, and transformative monsters such as those that were once fully human and become fully monstrous on the page. This chapter focuses on these literary categories of monstrosity and the ways in which they both reinforce and intensify the contemporary perception of visceral monstrosity. To strengthen the realistic probability of their existence, Edmund Spenser allows his first monster, or anthropomorphic deformation, to appear as a dwarf—again, individuals with dwarfism or gigantism in the Early Modern era would have been considered proof of deformative monstrosity. The introduction of a dwarf as a less threatening deformation is followed by the introduction of a hybrid human-reptilian monster, reestablishments of realistic deformation in the form of giants, and finally, a human figure that transforms into a monster. These latter examples are all used by Spenser as monstrous vessels for his allegorical representation of evil and vice. These fantastic extensions of visible

monstrosity and supposed transformative monstrosity[5] act as a warning to Spenser's

readers of their own inherently repressed monstrosity and bestial tendencies. They force

the audience into a perhaps unwilling but inevitable identification with these

anthropomorphic manifestations of human flaw. These literary manifestations of mental

or spiritual corruption would have presented themselves as realistic possibilities to a

susceptible Early Modern conscious. The conflation of human and beast or the

transformation of human into beast—an evocation of Marie de France's "Bisclavret"—

accomplish this goal with varying levels of unsettledness.

Though the dwarf is the first deformed human introduced in Book I of *The Faerie*

Queene, he is minimally examined throughout the text and presented in a supportive role

rather than the role of a foregrounded protagonist or antagonist: "Behind her farre away a

Dwarfe did lag, / That lasie seemd in being euer last, / Or wearied with bearing of her bag

/ Of needments at his backe…" (Spenser 1.i.6.1-4). Indeed, when dwarves do appear at

any time in Book I, they are inevitably carrying something for someone else or

supporting someone in some capacity. The fact that this dwarf—Una's companion—and

a similar dwarf that acts as a companion to Duessa later in the poem appear repeatedly

throughout Book I is an indication that despite their relative unimportance to the forward

trajectory of the narrative, dwarves are meant to play some larger symbolic role in the

text. Again, the dwarf is not explicitly described as something "horrible" like later

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[5] By "transformative monstrosity," I am here referring to the category of literary
monstrosity in which a figure is first fully human and then transforms into something
monstrous on the page.

monstrous figures in the text; indeed, the dwarf may not even represent some specific

allegorical vice or virtue. While few critics seem to touch on the dwarf's impact in the

poem, I would suggest that the dwarf acts as a way of anchoring the audience to the

concept of realistic human deformation. Before further deformations—particularly those

that might appear fantastic to the reader—are introduced in the text, the dwarf is

established as a constant, realistic reminder of the ways in which humanity is tied to these

deformations. Aside from being representative of a familiar and entirely realistic

deformation, the dwarves in Book I additionally become empathic characters with which

the audience may easily, if not subconsciously, identify. Though seemingly

inconsequential to the narrative, the dwarves intermittently carry the emotional weight of

a given scene just as they physically carry bags, spears, and other items as instructed by

the leading figures in the poem. These dwarves express human emotions like fear,

weariness, sympathy, and woe[6]. Though they may at first seem dismissible, Una's and

Duessa's dwarves seem to represent a sort of literary foundation for Spenser's

introduction of more fantastic deformations. The dwarf becomes a trope through which

readers may become accustomed to the idea that monstrous deformations may crop up

anywhere in the text. The dwarves also become a proverbial anchor by which the reader

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[6] "Fly fly (quote then / The fearefull Dwarfe:) this is no place for liuing men" (Spenser I.i.13.8-9). "For on a day his wary Dwarfe had spyde, / Where in dungeon deepe huge nombers lay / Of caytiue wretched thralls, that wayled night and day" (Spenser I.v.45.7-9). "Whose case whenas the carefull Dwarfe had tould, / And made ensample of their mournfull sight…" (Spenser I.vi.52.1). "The wofull Dwarfe, which saw his maisters fall…" (Spenser I.vii.19.1).

may tie future monstrous deformations to reality. While readers might recoil from identification with Spenser's more fantastically deformed monsters, the dwarves' proximity to humanity and existence in reality would have drawn readers back into such an identification with all of Spenser's monsters. That identification would appear particularly disturbing when the reader first encounters monsters that are clearly amalgamations of human and beast.

Errour is the first explicitly allegorical and monstrous figure to appear in the text. She is, in fact, the first figure to be actually described as a monster: "This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*, / A monster vile, whome God and man does hate" (Spenser I.i.13.8-9). Errour is described again as a monster when her ugliness is first revealed to both the protagonists and the reader. The text describes Errour as "the vgly monster plaine, / Halfe like a serpant horribly displaide, / But th' other halfe did womans shape retaine, / Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine" (Spenser I.i.14.6-9). In contrast to the dwarf, which can be seen as a relatively mild deformation of the human body, Errour is a blatant and grotesque conflation of humanity and bestial monstrosity. As an unnatural and visually jarring conflation of two naturally separate entities, Errour becomes sensually overwhelming. She is the imaginative pinnacle of manifest monstrosity as speculated in Ambroise Paré's hypothetical *Des Monstres et Prodigies* (see Figure 2). Considering the correlation so often made by medieval and Early Modern philosophers between women's imaginations and the deformation of the human body, it is interesting to note that the first fantastic creature that Redcrosse encounters in the text

is a female

representation of error

and, more importantly, a

mother. At first glance,

Errour is simply that—a

feminized

anthropomorphic

Figure 2. "Picture of a Marine monster having a human torso" (Paré 112).

monstrosity that serves

as an allegorical representation of some specific behavioral distortion. By nature of the

fact that the dragon's name is Errour, one cannot help but associate the creature with the

concept of error; moreover, the reader may accept Errour as a physical manifestation of

error. Considering Spenser's express desire in his letter to Raleigh that his readers read

the text as an allegory, readers might overlook the juxtaposition that exists between

Errour's allegory and her physicality. That is to say, Errour's partially human physicality

might be overlooked in favor of her obvious allegorical meaning, but it is her humanity

that most importantly affects the readers' ability to relate to her. In order to ultimately

examine the impact of Errour's hybrid physicality and the way in which it allows her to

become a pedagogically effective literary monster, it is important to first unpack her

allegorical meaning as it is perceived within the context of this study and within the

context of her critical history.

Book I focuses of the journey of Redcrosse, a lone knight in pursuit of both a lady

and his destiny. This knight is the human protagonist in Book I and an allegorical

representation of holiness, referred to by Spenser in the first canto's introduction as "the

[p]atrone of true Holinesse" (Spenser I.i). Redcrosse's identification with holiness is

confirmed by Spenserian critics' historical comparison of him to Saint George and to

Christ himself (Hamilton 31). Redcrosse is introduced as riding in the company of the

lady Una: "A Louely Ladie rode him faire beside, / Vpon a lowly Asse more white than

snow." Una remains unnamed until later in the canto, but she is nevertheless accepted by

Spenserian critics as an allegorical representation of truth[7]. Una is accompanied by the

aforementioned dwarf. As noted previously in this study, while the dwarf is a sort of

anthropomorphic buffer to subsequent monsters, Errour is the first monster of note that

Redcrosse encounters during his quest. After a storm causes Redcrosse and Una to be

lost, they find themselves on the threshold of a cave. Una subsequently realizes that they

are on the brink of an encounter with Errour. In an overtly symbolic moment, Una, or

truth, recognizes that Errour is near and advises Redcrosse that it is better to avoid "error"

than to encounter it: "Yet wisedome warnes, whilest foot is in the gate, / to stay the

steppe, ere forced to retrate..." (Spenser I.i.13.4-7). It is telling, of course, that truth and

wisdom can detect error while Spenser's representation of holiness is blind to it.

Accordingly, holiness must overcome, or conquer error, in order to eventually unite itself

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[7] In the footnotes to his 2007 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, A.C. Hamilton explains that
"Una is associated by the lowly Asse with Christ's humility…; by more white then snow
with truth…and with faith" (Hamilton 32).

with truth. Allegorically speaking, this interaction—in which truth senses error, holiness disregards truth, and holiness subsequently falls under error's influence—is presented to the reader as the focal point of the episode.

The fact that the monstrous figure's name unequivocally ties her to her allegorical meaning allows the reader to continue interpreting the episode allegorically. Redcrosse approaches Errour despite Una's warnings partly because he is "full of fire and greedy hardiment" and partly because he is young and subsequently naïve (Spenser I.i.14.1). Further interpretation would suggest that Redcrosse may be greedy for knowledge and experience and therefore leaps at the opportunity to encounter and defeat a physical manifestation of Errour. This stanza is significant in that it reveals truths about both Redcrosse and Errour. It is at this point that Errour first reveals herself in the light. This revelation exposes another dichotomy like that which exists between truth and deception: that which is dark is revealed by the light, and the light reflecting off of Redcrosse's armor exposes Errour to the sight of both Redcrosse and the reader: "A little glooming light, much like a shade, / By which he saw the ugly monster plaine…" (Spenser I.i.14.5-6). To even the most sensitive reader, an interpretation that focuses on light as an instrument of revelation and truth may be lost beneath the weight of the graphic violence and enthralling action about to ensue. Nevertheless, it is in the light that the fullness of Errour's hybridity is revealed. Errour's gender is established by the fact that half of her body is that of a human woman (Spenser I.i.14.8). Her "loathsomeness" stems from her conflated identity as both human and beast; her bestiality takes precedence in the ensuing

battle, but her humanity takes precedence in the episode as a whole when one considers the implication of her hybridity. This study suggests that Errour should be examined not only as a dragon that is half human, but also as a human that is half dragon. She is a *deformed human being* and therefore a demonstration of humanity's capacity to become deformed by way of spiritual or mental corruption. Again, her more fantastic deformity is made all the more threatening and rhetorically effective by the continued present of the realistically deformed dwarf.

Because Errour is described in the text explicitly as a monster, she can be seen etymologically as a demonstration or revelation of some truth for Spenser's audience. The first chapter of this study demonstrates that a literal monster would have held significant etymological and historical weight for an Early Modern audience. Errour's specific truth may be encompassed simply in the fact that she is a monstrous representation of *error* and that humanity must conquer error in order to be holy. I would suggest that Errour herself is the lesson, even withstanding her interactions with Una and Redcrosse. In such a brief and violent episode, it might become easy for the reader to dwell on Errour's monstrosity; this tendency would be supported by Spenser's use of grotesque and truly visceral language to describe the horror of her physical deformity. Thus, Spenser's readers might be able to fully remove themselves from any identification with such a monstrous reptilian creature, only to be jarred *into* that identification by her revelation as a deformed *human* being. Errour's partial humanity invites a myriad of possible interpretations. Based on theories and speculations in the Early Modern period

regarding the manifestation of human vice as physical monstrosity, it might be postulated that Errour was once fully human and may have transformed to her current state under the influence of error. Like Marie de France's final portrayal of the wife in "Bisclavret," Errour can be interpreted as a being that may have already transformed from human to monster.

Spenser's audience might further dwell upon her human side when the episode continues to reveal her "thousand young ones"—Errour's ability to produce offspring, while both a bestial and human trait, allows her a certain measure of empathy—despite her offspring's obvious grossness (Spenser 1.i.15.5). However, these progeny are described "each one / Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill fauored: / Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone, / Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone" (Spenser I.1.15.6-9). Errour's capacity to produce progeny almost *more* monstrous than herself would allow Spenser's audiences to reflect back on what they know of monsters as products of the mother's diseased imagination. Errour is able to produce these progenous monsters presumably because error itself has already consumed her identity; her offspring's subsequent retention of any physical semblance of humanity might then be impossible. Her production of monstrous offspring—an echo of the monstrous reproduction from Marie de France's text—may also serve to draw attention to the location of Errour's monstrosity. It is her lower half, the half that in a human being contains all reproductive organs, that appears reptilian.

Recognizing Errour's both allegorical *and* physical significance as a deformed human being allows Spenser's readers to interpret the text's subsequent monsters in a similarly multifaceted manner. In other words, Spenser's monsters can no longer be interpreted solely as allegorical figures alone, but must also be recognized as physical reminders of humanity's own realistic capacity for monstrous transformation and reproduction. Furthermore, the way that Spenser creates an experience that is both allegorical and physical—mental and visceral—prepares the reader to recognize the multiplicity in meaning apparent in later hybrid and transformative monsters. Errour's physical significance would be thus complicated and strengthened by her historically allegorical interpretations. Though critics tend to focus on Errour's multiple allegorical meanings rather than her physical portent, the question of *how* she should be read becomes a matter of study and debate. This debate allows for the possibility of a more material reading.

Rufus Wood discusses the dilemma of multiplicitous interpretation within the context of Errour's episode in his book, *Metaphor as an Act of Faith*. He too recognizes that it is the reader's initial inclination to "identify with the plight of Redcrosse and Una, but they are also expected to distance themselves to some extent from the characters' moral indiscretions" (Wood 30). Those "moral indiscretions" are often externalized and formed into an actual monstrous entity—as is the case with Errour. It might be easy therefore for readers to distance themselves from these unnatural figures due to the obvious lack of emotional and physical empathy they inspire; it would be difficult, for

example, for a human reader to empathize with a grunting, base, and violent giant or a creature that is partially serpentine. Wood argues that the language Spenser uses in the scenes preceding the Errour episode "privilege[s] the reader's interpretation of the text over the protagonists' experience of their world," consequently allowing the "self-sufficiency of an autonomous reader" to come into question (Wood 31). Wood's ultimate question regarding the problem of literary interpretation in this episode is how Errour should read in light of her multiple possible interpretations. Should Errour be read within the context of her rather overt analogy for human error or her grotesque physical descriptions and the way in which she represents a tangible connection between humanity and the consequences of error? My submission is that she should be read—and indeed would have been read by an Early Modern audience—through both of these lenses. It is the strength of Errour's physical *and* allegorical meaning that allow Spenser so effectively to use monstrosity as a pedagogical tool; Errour acts as an instructive warning against the unbridling of one's bestial or monstrous inclinations.

To fully contextualize this dichotomous interpretation of Errour, it would be helpful to briefly review scholarship on her role in *The Faerie Queene.* Like the character Duessa, examined more fully in the next chapter, Errour has been ascribed with multiple meanings by Spenserians. According to George F. Butler, Spenser "link[s] Error with the Fall, since the Fall was caused by the initial error of Adam and Eve" (Butler 27). Butler further establishes this connection by comparing Errour's serpentine characteristics to the figure of Satan in the Judeo-Christian literary tradition. This relationship is established

even further by the way in which Redcrosse's encounter with Errour in Book I strongly

foreshadows his "apocalyptic battle with the Great Dragon near the end of Book One"

(Butler 27). Though Butler's interpretation strongly supports the more common

allegorical reading of Error as warning against religious hypocrisy and error, it also

reiterates her power as a reflection of the human capacity for error. At least in the

religious tradition, an extension of Butler's argument would seem to be that Errour is a

reminder of the way in which humans were naturally designed to be blameless like their

Judeo-Christian God. Yet through humanity's own weakness and capacity for error,

humans underwent a fall and became more like beasts. If anything, Butler's interpretation

therefore buoys the idea that Errour's physicality acts as the proverbial exclamation mark

on a statement about humanity's existence as partially bestial beings.

A religious interpretation of Errour as a reminder of the fall of man and as a

warning against religious hypocrisy becomes especially important when one considers

Errour's allegorically charged behavior in the twentieth stanza:

> Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
> With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
> And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
> Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has
> (Spenser I.i.20.6-9).

This allegorically charged description of Errour's vomit further perpetuates the widely

accepted interpretation of Errour as a reflection of the Catholic Church and its propensity

to mass produce heretic and error-ridden literary propaganda during the Early Modern

period. A.C. Hamilton notes that this passage can easily be read as a translation of a

Biblical passage from Revelation 16:13: "And I sawe thre vncleane spirits like frogges come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (Spenser 36). Again, Errour becomes, on an allegorical level, a warning against false religion as an external threat, and on a physical level, a warning against the consumptive and transformative consequences of embracing false religion. The grotesqueness of the imagery in this passage—an image of her vomit defiling the ground—allows ensure that the allegory will not overshadow the import of her monstrous physicality. Error becomes both an internal and external threat.

The dangers of being consumed by one's own inner beast are further highlighted by the events that occur at the conclusion of the Errour episode in the text. Wood writes that "[t]he deformed monsters and inky poison that issue forth from Errour's mouth constitute the deformation and defilement of the spoken and written word," just as Errour's physical form is a demonstration of the deformation of the human body into something monstrous and unnatural (Rufus 32). Errour is not only representative of a vessel in which something is defiled—both her progeny and these presumably holy books and papers—but also of a defiled object herself. She is corrupt and therefore produces corruptly. Again, Early Modern readers would find this reflective of Early Modern scientific theories that hypothesized women's ability to produce monstrous children through a corrupt imagination. When Redcrosse has finally struck down the beast by removing her head with his sword, she is subsequently devoured, or at least drained of blood, by her children. All that is left of her humanity is destroyed and only her

monstrous offspring remain to feed off her ruin. Spenser describes the scene in horrific and visually graphic detail: "They flocked all about her bleeding wound, / And sucked vp their dying mothers bloud, Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good" (Spenser 1.i.25.7-9). Errour's children defile her by voraciously and violently sucking the blood from her hemorrhaging wound. This brings to mind the way in which—as discussed in chapter one of this study—Aristotle theorizes the manifestation of psychological misbehavior in the mother as a precursor to unnatural and deformed progeny. Ultimately, the physicality of the scene becomes paramount to Errour's more overt allegorical significance. Her partial humanity allows Spenser's reader to identify with her, and the grotesqueness of both her hybridity and her progeny encourage them to examine their own capacity for error.

Through her allegorical multiplicity and visceral monstrosity, Errour is indeed a figure of both fear and wonder to her audiences within the fiction and without. The attention paid to her jarring hybridity in the text would perhaps be the most impactful to an Early Modern audience because of their ability to identify with her apparent humanity. Nevertheless, this study cannot assume that Spenser's Elizabethan readers *would* empathize with this partially human creature as she is by nature fictitious. Errour is a fantastic creature, the likes of which contemporary readers would have seen only in speculative texts like Paré's *Des Monstres et Prodigies*. My first chapter established that Early Modern theories and corroborative literary texts would have allowed Errour to appear as a conceivable possibility, but she would nevertheless remain a creature that

Early Modern readers would never have encountered in person. Spenser, accordingly,

does not allow his audience any lasting comfort from the relief that this skepticism might

bring. Like the dwarf, who appears regularly in Book I as a reminder that Spenser is

describing true-to-life monsters, a more imposing representative of realistic deformity

appears following the Errour episode; it is at this point in the text that Spenser's readers

are first introduced to a giant. Realistic deformations once again brilliantly serve as

proverbial anchors that more firmly establish the realistic probability of Spenser's more

fantastic monsters. Gigantism[8], for example, would have been a real and tangible

"deformation" of the human body that Early Modern audiences would have seen not as a

medical condition but as a symptom of monstrous transformation—an unnatural

symptom manifesting itself in an otherwise natural being. Gigantism would have been

understood in the sixteenth century as a form of monstrosity and therefore as something

wrought by unnatural and evil forces. Giants as monsters represent a less forceful, yet no

less effective, distortion to the human body than monsters like Duessa and Errour.

Spenser uses dozens of these "monsters," all infused with some disdainful allegorical

meaning, to drive home the point that all human beings and their offspring are susceptible

to the physical and mental influences of vice.

   Giants, as symbols of either power or destruction, play an incredibly central role

in *The Faerie Queene*. Susanne Lindgren Wofford lists the most prominent giants in the

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[8] Gigantism is defined, in humans, as "excessive size due to an increase in the supply of growth hormone caused by overactivity of the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland" ("gigantism").

text: Orgoglio, Disdaine, Argante, Ollyphant, Corflambo, Geryoneo, and Mutabilitie[9]

(Wofford 200). Wofford draws attention to the fact that King Arthur, another central

human figure in the poem, defeats a giant, or a being like a giant, in Books I, II, IV, V,

and VI of the text. Considering the scattered and frequent presence of giants in the text, it

may be safe to assume that Spenser had some purpose in emphasizing the presence of

giants throughout *The Faerie Queene*. Again, I would suggest that the presence of giants

throughout the text—similarly to the presence of dwarves—serves as a method by which

to tie Spenser's more fantastic and transformative monsters to the reality of probable

human deformation. While there are definitely a few examples of "good" giants in the

text—Wofford discusses the case of the "two giants who help defend the house of Alma"

in Book II, "Awe, the potters at the gate of Mercilla's court…and Valgo, one of

Britomart's descendants"—the emphasis in the text is on the terror inspired by some of

the more violent giants, the ones to whom Spenser ascribes some specific allegorical

meaning (Wofford). Once again, Spenser ties together allegory and physicality in order to

drive home a more impactful pedagogical lesson. One might argue that the "good" giants

merely exist in the poem as a means of cementing the audience's begrudging and

conflicted inclination to identify with these realistic deformations of the human body. It is

easier to empathize with a "good" giant or a morally indeterminate dwarf than a

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[9] Wofford lists these giants as follows: "Orgoglio in Book I; Disdaine, the gatekeeper of Philoteme's court in the Cave of Mammon in Book II…Argante and Ollyphant in Book III; Corflambo in Book IV…the Egalitarian Giant in Book V, canto ii; Geryoneo in Book V…Disdaine in VI, vii, 41; and Mutabilitie" (Wofford 200).

serpentine monster or some other gross deformation. Spenser's inclusion of "good" giants further lends to the suggestion that dwarves and giants act as "anchors" in the poem—connecting the audience to a more acceptable, monstrous reality.

While several giants—both good and bad—do appear in the poem, for the purposes of this study, I will focus specifically on the disconcerting appearance of Orgoglio in Book I and the appearances of Argante and Ollyphant in Book III. Orgoglio is introduced in the seventh canto of Book I as "[a]n hideous Geaunt horrible and hye" (Spenser I.vii.8.4). In summary, he attacks Redcrosse and renders him unconscious, only keeping him alive for the sake of Duessa's pleas. He then takes Duessa as his lover and imprisons Redcrosse in a dungeon: "And ere he could out of his swowne awake, / Him to his castle brought with hastie forse, / And in a Dongeon deep him threw without remorse" (Spenser I.vii.15.7-9). Again, in order to understand the effectiveness the giant's physicality as a vessel for allegorical instructiveness, one must first fully grasp the scope of more blatant analogy. Before the giant's name is revealed to be Orgoglio—a word that A.C. Hamilton notes is the Italian word "pride, disdaine," and "haughtines", he is referred to simply as the "Geaunt" (Hamilton 94; Spenser I.vii.8.4, I.vii.12.1, and I.vii.14.1). Hugh Mclean notes that this spelling recalls the word for mother earth, "Gea" (Mclean 83). Wofford asserts that, similarly to many other unusually or atypically spelled words in the text, this spelling was intentional: "because giants in the mythographic tradition can also be seen to represent the body, as opposed to the soul, of a human being—as Spenser consistently reminds [his readers] with his spelling of *Geants*, from *Gea*, the

earth, echoing the creation in Genesis of the body from earth—their story can always evoke either human greatness or the greatest of human failings" (Wofford 205). This identification of giants with earth, or dirt rather, is another way in which Spenser reinforces the correlation between giant and man, or rather monster and human for the purposes of this argument. Another reason for this correlation might be that Spenser wished to fully distinguish between "pride" as a base instinct and the more inaccessibly divine; he anamorphizes pride as a being having been birthed from the ground of the Earth herself. He thus uses Orgoglio to draw a clear line between ethereal holiness as it should be and pride as a deeply human emotion.

Spenser makes a bold choice in *The Faerie Queene*, having established "ethereal holiness" as a truly fallible character susceptible to human pride. Throughout Book I, Redcrosse is intermittently described as having both been blind to deception—a reference to his prolonged encounter with Duessa—and susceptible to Despair. In this episode, the reader sees Redcrosse made vulnerable to pride. Out of all of the faults attributed to "holiness," pride may be the worst since it is the driving force behind each of Redcrosse's most regrettable mistakes. Redcrosse often refuses to question the reality set before him as if he believes himself to be impervious to deception and incapable of being affected by the evil he inevitably encounters at every turn. His belief in his own foolproof ability to recognize truth renders him incapable of even considering the thought that he has been deceived. Immediately following his encounter with Errour, in which he refuses to heed the wisdom of "truth," Redcrosse is led to believe that Una has betrayed him. The

sorcerer Archimago deceptively sets a false representation of Una in a sexually compromising position: "Come see, where your false Lady doth her honour staine" (Spenser I.ii.4.9). Redcrosse never doubts the veracity of his own sight. In a world in which the fantastic and the supernatural are commonplace, his confidence in his own sight can be seen as somewhat asinine. This oversight is especially poignant for the reader when one considers that while Redcrosse's eyes are deceived by Errour, Archimago, and Duessa, the readers' eyes are equally deceived. This circumstance recalls Rufus Woods' assertion that Spenser constantly calls into question his readers' ability to interpret the text. An encounter with the horrible giant of misappropriated pride is a destabilizing reminder to both the textual characters and Spenser's audience of the human susceptibility for pride. This reminder is crucial in that it reemphasizes the allegorical message of the Errour episode.

Unlike the more fantastically deformed Errour, Orgoglio is literally an exaggerated or inflated version of a human deformation with which Spenser's audience would be familiar—a giant. Spenser removes the intangible element of pride from within the human heart and allows it to manifest into a physically monstrous figure. Both Redcrosse and the audience are faced with Orgoglio's hideous physicality, while the audience is simultaneously left to wonder whether or not their own pride renders them capable of either transforming into or producing such monstrosity. Identification with a creature that exists in their own reality and is hypothesized to have been created by corruption of the mind and soul would be natural inclination for an Early Modern

audience. In other words, Orgoglio's threat would be innate. The physical impact of the

scene is conversely highlighted by the dichotomy between this human-like monster and

Redcrosse. The giant is described as vividly large and strong—"his tallnesse seemd to

thret the skye, / The ground eke groned vnder his for dread" (Spenser I.vii.5-6).

Redcrosse is conversely portrayed as weak and frail: "Eftsoones his manly forces gan to

faile, / And mightie strong was turnd to feeble fraile. / His chaunged powres at first them

selues not felt…" (Spenser I.vii.6.6-9). The readers' focus is inevitably drawn to the

alliterative rhyming words at the conclusion of each line: "faile," "fraile," and "felt".

Redcrosse's fragility and insubstantiality in the passage are undeniable; his strength is

failing and his powers are barely felt. It is also significant that as his "manly" forces fail

him, the alliteration in the passage features the feminine "f." A.C. Hamilton suggests in

his notes that Spenser's references here and in the first canto to Redcrosse's manliness

are references rather to his humanity (Hamilton 37, 92). If Spenser's Early Modern

readers still identified at this point with Redcrosse as a natural human, they would be

forced in this passage to recognize their own weakness and consequent susceptibility to

deformation. Redcrosse's masculinity and correlatively his humanity fail him. This

weakness not only allows Redcrosse to appear indefensibly susceptible to anamorphized

pride, but it also allows Orgoglio as pride to become more empathic. Orgoglio is cruel

and monstrous, but he is nevertheless strong and undeniably masculine: his masculinity is

established by his conquest of Duessa following Redcrosse's defeat. In short, Spenser

allows his audience little chance to escape some identification with this monster and a resultant jarring self-realization regarding their own relationship to pride.

Though significantly less prominent in the text, the giant Argante first appears in Book III as an equally jarring representation of gargantuan lust. Argante and her twin brother, Ollyphant, are described as twins born of the incestuous relationship between mother earth and her son, Typhoeus (Spenser III.vii.47-48). The origin of their birth explains their representation as a distortion of natural sexuality. These giants represent the antithesis of chastity in its ugliest form—lust. It is fitting that pride and lust both be represented as hideous giants, or inflated and conversely magnified versions of humanity itself. They are powerful, uncontrollable, and yet simultaneously distorted reflections of humanity devoid of goodness and purity. These giants serve their own purpose as allegorical and physically significant figures intended by Spenser to serve some pedagogical purpose; again, they also seem to serve as literary buffers between Spenser's more fantastic, transformative monsters and the monsters that Early Modern readers would have encountered in reality.

The monsters that stand out as the most powerful vessels through which Spenser is able to instruct and caution his audience are the monsters that are the most viscerally transformative and narratively upsetting. Errour can be placed in this category as a creature that appears to have undergone some sort of transformation before her introduction to the poem; it could be speculated that she was once fully woman and then transformed into something hybrid and serpentine. As a culminative reminder to his

readers that they may not separate monstrous entities like Errour from their own conflicted human identities, Spenser introduces a monster in Book III that is undeniably a human initially and a beast finally. Like Marie de France, Spenser therefore uses transformative monstrosity to pointedly convince his readers of their own capacity for inner bestiality. "Malbecco" is introduced in Book III as nothing more than a jealous man—a human being and husband to a young and beautiful wife (Spenser III.ix.5-6). Spenser's audience is encouraged to recognize that Malbecco, like every human being since the Judeo-Christian fall of man, suffers from an inclination in his heart toward sin and evil. This characteristic, in and of itself, makes him no different than any other human character in the poem. If anything, Malbecco becomes an "everyman." He is initially an allegorical representation of nothing in particular: a genuine human character with which human readers might more easily identify than they would any other figure in the poem. It would seem plausible to expect that such a genuinely human character— similar to Redcrosse—would eventually be tasked with battling and defeating some physical representation of his manifest sin nature. Instead, Malbecco becomes that monstrous manifestation.

In the tradition of Spenser's other human characters, the audience begins to suspect that Malbecco will encounter a monstrous representation of covetousness as his susceptibility to jealousy for his wife increases over the course of the episode. Eventually, Malbecco's wife runs away with another man and submits to a life of sexual impurity. Malbecco's reaction is not to defeat or even to encounter "jealousy" as an entity

outside of himself; rather, he is actually transformed himself into an anamorphic

exemplification of jealousy: "Hateful both to him selfe, and every wight; / Where he

through privy grief, and horror vaine, / Is woxen so deformed that he was quight / Forgot

he was a man and Gaelousie is hight" (Spenser III.x.60.6-9). Unlike Errour, who is

already transformed into a hybrid of human and beast, or the giants who more

realistically represent a monstrosity familiar to Early Modern readers, Malbecco begins

his appearance in the text as a human and subsequently allows sin and vice to corrupt his

mind and body before his audience's eyes. He banishes himself from all human society,

and spends the remainder of his existence in a dark cave. This self-banishment and

subsequent change in lifestyle to that of a beast allows him to gradually become as

monstrous in physical appearance as his mind had been when transformed by jealousy:

> But through long anguish, and self-murdring thought
> He was so wasted and forpined quight,
> That all his substance was consum'd to nought…
> But chanced on a craggy cliff to light;
> Whence he with crooked clawes so long did crall,
> That at the last he found a caue with entrance small
> (Spenser III.x.57.1-3 and III.x.57.6-9).

Malbecco and his disturbing physical transformation become allegorically representative

of the destructive powers of jealousy. Jealousy seems to eat away at his very being; he is

"wasted," and his substance is "consum[e]d" (Spenser III.x.57.2, 3). It is as if jealousy is

dissolving his humanity, and all that is left is a warped and wasted creature left to crawl

into a cave in hiding. This episode once again reminds Spenser's readers of their own

mental and physical susceptibility to monstrosity. Malbecco's jealousy openly transforms

and deforms his body into a monster in the same way that error may have transformed a woman into the reptilian Errour.

Once again, Malbecco represents a different kind of monster than those with which Spenser's audience would already be familiar in contemporary or earlier texts. Malbecco is a monster who is first described as a human. Louise Gilbert Freeman observes that "Spenser's exploration of the origin and evolution of jealousy [in the Malbecco episode]…deepens Malbecco's humanity and develops a model of the frustrated relation between self and desired object" (Freeman 311). In other words, Malbecco in human form becomes one of Spenser's more dangerous monstrous figures; his readers may fully identify with Malbecco before he transformed into a monster. Spenser may have augmented this likely identification by first introducing more familiar human deformations like the giant and the dwarf. Their introduction to a more fantastic and potentially transformative deformation in the form of the reptilian Errour allows Spenser's readers to speculate on their abilities to monstrously transform; after the Malbecco episode, their fears of bestial transformation are played out on the page. Malbecco's humanity allows such transformation to appear conceivable. Spenser thus utilizes three significant and distinct forms of monstrosity to guide his readers gradually into a forced identification with this sort of transformative monstrosity. This trajectory seems to reveal some sort of intended pedagogical purpose on Spenser's part through his use of varying monstrosities as reflections of human depravity. The pièce de résistance,

so to speak, of Spenser's monsters combines these disturbing characteristics of hybridity

and transformitivity

Chapter 3

"So as she bad, that witch they disaraid": The Disruptive Nature of Duessa's Allegorical Multiplicity and Clandestine Monstrosity in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*

One of the most studied and indeed most controversial monsters in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is Book I's ideologically provocative Duessa. Duessa is examined last in this study not only because of her distinguished place in Spenserian scholarship, but also because she is perhaps the most effective pedagogical monster in Spenser's proverbial line-up. Like many authors before him, Spenser capitalizes on his audience's belief that fantastic extensions to realistic monstrosity exist by immediately presenting the figure Errour as a monster that is at once partially monstrous and partially human—this hybrid monstrosity presents itself throughout the text. Malbecco, the transformative monster presented in Book III, seems to represent a sort of literary capstone by which Spenser variably forces his human readers to identify with these monstrous figures, as Malbecco is first a man and finally a monster. It would seem that between the exaggerated deformity epitomized by Errour and the more jarring transformative monstrosity evident in the Malbecco episode, Spenser tapped into the fears and anxieties of an Early Modern reader with regard to their own capacity for monstrous transformation. Duessa, however, presents an entirely different and wholly more unsettling representation of the effects of human vice in *The Faerie Queene* because she appears human to both the human protagonist in the text and to the reader before she is revealed as a monster in disguise. In other words, she represents a more

deceptive monstrosity that is at once fully human and fully monstrous. The most

horrifying aspect of Duessa's duplicity is the fact that her false humanity allows her

monstrosity to remain unnoticed by Redcrosse—Spenser's human representation of

Holiness—for six cantos (Spenser I.i). The idea that a monster as hideous as the one

revealed in the eighth canto of the text could be invisible to even the most virtuous

human eye would have been fathomable and noticeably disturbing to an Early Modern

audience.

Fidessa, as Duessa is known until her revelation in the eighth canto of Book I, is

introduced in the second canto as a captive lady to a faithless knight. The knight for

whom she is introduced as a "companion" is called "Sans foy," a French name that

literally translates to "without faith" (Spenser I.ii.12.8, I.ii.13.1). Duessa/Fidessa is

etymologically set as a foil to this faithless figure when she introduces herself in Stanza

26 as "*Fidessa*," a name that A.C. Hamilton translates from Latin to mean "Faithful"[10]

(Spenser I.ii.26.2, Hamilton 49). Fidessa's pitiable situation and attractive demeanor

allow her a certain level of empathy—her fidelity and her humanity are taken for granted.

Despite this favorable introduction, Fidessa is established almost immediately as also foil

to the lady Una—Spenser's allegorical representation of Truth. The comparison is

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[10] In his notes on the text, A.C. Hamilton notes that the Latin roots *fides* and *esse*
combine literally to mean "being faith, though only seeming to be so," insinuating that
Duessa is a deliberate perversion of faith (Hamilton 49).

established immediately as Fidessa first appears on a palfrey[11]; this is similar to the way

in which Una first appears on an ass (Spenser I.ii.13.7). In the twentieth stanza of this

canto, we see that—like Una—Fidessa travels in the company of a dwarf[12] (Spenser

I.ii.13.7). Fidessa is also initially represented as "faire" and "goodly," which further

allows for a comparison between Fidessa and the overtly righteous Una (Spenser

I.ii.13.1-2). Only by the advantage of hindsight might a careful reader note the several

clues in Duessa's introduction that indicate her troubling and multiplicitous identity. For

example, foreshadowing of Fidessa's deceptive and multiplicitous nature is vaguely

evident in the description of her palfrey: "[h]er wanton palfrey all was ouerspred / With

tinsell trappings, wouen like a waue, / Whose bridle rung with golden bels and bosses

braue" (Spenser I.ii.13.7-9). The wanton beast on which Fidessa rides is disguised as

something much grander and more beautiful than it is; its trappings are woven like the

false story that allows Fidessa to appear so innocent: The "scarlot red" of Fidessa's

garments and the "wanton" behavior of her palfrey are in stark contrast to the "lowly

Asse more white than snow" on which the pure and truthful Una presents herself

(Spenser I.i.4.2). These contrasts provide a nice foundation for many scholarly

interpretations of Fidessa as a figure that lies in contrast to truth.

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[11] A palfrey is simply an Early Modern English description of a small horse. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a palfrey as a "horse for ordinary riding (as distinct from a warhorse; *esp*. a small saddle horse for a woman" ("palfrey").

[12] This dwarf similarly acts as an anchor to the reader's reality much as Una's dwarf represented a bridge between realistic deformity and Errour's monstrous hybridity in the first canto.

Indeed, upon thorough examination, Fidessa almost immediately demonstrates her more veiled allegorical multiplicity by demonstrating her lack of loyalty to Sans foy. In the fourteenth stanza, "[w]ith faire disport and courting dalliaunce / [Duessa] intertainde her louer all the way" until he is defeated by Redcrosse (Spenser I.ii.14.1-2). After Sans foy's defeat, she immediately acts the part of the damsel in distress, "[m]elting in teares" and begging for support (Spenser I.ii.22.1). Despite her apparent disingenuousness, her tears and helplessness allow her to remain a potentially empathic character; she masquerades as an unprotected woman who takes advantage of her options. She is identifiably human in these first stanzas of the second canto, attractive and desirable to both her textual and real audiences. Thus, though Duessa's duplicity is revealed explicitly to Spenser's readers in the very same canto, Spenser notably allows these moments of empathy. Because Redcrosse remains imperceptive to Duessa's more monstrous tendencies until the eighth canto, it would seem unnecessary to demonstrate Duessa's powers of deception for the reader as well; the fact that her monstrosity is clandestine will be made through Redcrosse's narrative. This study, however, suggests that Spenser allows these moments in order to unequivocally emphasize the potential for such clandestine monstrosity in his readers' own lives. Spenser includes multiple anamorphic manifestations of evil in his text, but because of her ability to deceive even Spenser's readers at first, Duessa emerges as the most potent and perhaps the most dangerous of these monsters. It is the efficacy of her superficial humanity that allows her to penetrate so deeply into both Redcrosse's emotions *and* the reader's subconscious. Seeing her as

Fidessa, the reader imagines Duessa simply as fallible human and therefore a character with whom they can consciously identify. Duessa's initial revelation as a monster, then, becomes particularly jarring.

Duessa is revealed to Spenser's readers as both evil and duplicitous through the testimony of one of her earlier victims. Shortly after Duessa trades Sans foy's companionship and protection for Redcrosse's, Redcrosse falls hopelessly for her graces and plucks a bough from a nearby tree with which to crown her. The tree bleeds and cries out in pain: "once a man *Fradubio*, now a tree" cried out so loudly in lament that Redcrosse and Fidessa drew near to hear his tale (Spenser I.ii.33.3). Fradubio relates the story of his demise and transformation into a tree: an evil witch first turned his lover, Fralessa, into a tree in order to keep Fradubio for herself, and when Fradubio beheld the witch's concealed ugliness while she was bathing, she turned him into a tree as well. Fradubio describes his first impression of the witch thus: "Lyke a faire Lady, but did fowle *Duessa* hyde" (Spenser I.ii.35.9) In other words, Duessa concealed her vileness in the guise of a beautiful woman (since Duessa has heretofore been referred to as "Fidessa," the audience is still unaware that these characters are one in the same). Fradubio's description of Duessa indicates a being in possession of entirely despicable qualities. The spelling of the adjective "fowle" indicates not only that Duessa is in reality a *foul* creature, but that she is also *fowl*. This is a foreshadowing of Duessa's monstrously bird-like features revealed in the eighth canto. The dual meaning of the word "fowle" is only accentuated by the fact that Spenser spells this word as "foule" three stanzas later

(Spenser I.ii.38.8). His use of the word "hyde" in Fradubio's description of Duessa is further indicative of Duessa's multiplicity. Not only does this word refer to Duessa's ability to *hide* her identity as a monster, but also to the animal-like nature of her monstrosity; her skin is revealed in the eight canto to be "wrizled" and "rough, as maple rind" (Spenser I.viii.47.8).

Eleven stanzas after Fradubio begins his tale, Spenser finally reveals Fidessa's true identity to his readers: "[t]he false *Duessa*, now *Fidessa* hight, / Heard how in vain *Fradubio* did lament, / And knew well it was true" (Spenser I.ii.44.1-3). It is significant that the audience becomes aware of Duessa's duality *before* Redcrosse is able to do so— this dramatic irony indicates disturbingly how difficult it might be to perceive a person's duality when embroiled in the situation itself. It is further significant that Duessa is only revealed to the audience here as a witch and a foul creature. Her deformity is hinted at by the way in which she is associated with a "fowl," but the extent of her monstrosity is by no means overt. That is to say, her duality is revealed to Spenser's readers at this point, but the fullness of her monstrous deformity will not be revealed to either Spenser's readers or to Redcrosse until the eighth canto. Again, this is a method by which Spenser is able to augment the effect of Duessa's eventual revelation; a witch with a mild deformation expressive of her spiritual and mental deformity would have been something with which his audience was already familiar.

This ugliness of Duessa's character and corresponding mild deformity would be enough to command the audience's attention and discredit her person, but the level of her

"monstrosity" at this point in the text would be by no means indicative of any unfamiliar phenomena—monstrous behavior and correspondingly witchlike haggardness would have seemed realistic to Early Modern readers. Tellingly, it is only in the physical presence of Una, the text's anthropomorphized "truth," in the eighth canto that Duessa is revealed fully as a physically monstrous and as a total distortion of humanity. Spenser foreshadows the presence and influence of truth in this revelation much earlier in the text. He intentionally guides the reader into comparing Una and Duessa in order to emphasize the importance of truth in the exposition and expulsion of monstrosity.

In a manner which mirrors Duessa's eventual revelation at Una's behest, Una is only named when her spectral double appears in Canto I. A.C. Hamilton's footnotes reveal that the word "Una" is Latin for "one"—an indicator that Una is Spenser's representation of the one and only truth (Hamilton 41). This oneness allows Una to become a perfect foil to Duessa's allegorical, physical and etymological duality. Duessa will eventually be exposed as extensively if not unbelievably monstrous and physically deformed—she is correlatively revealed in her relationship to Una to be deformed in the etymological sense. Roland M. Smith proposes a significant etymological relationship between Una and Duessa: the first syllable of Duessa's name, "Du" is similarly of Latin origin. Smith lists six character names found in eleventh and twelfth century Irish texts that bear a striking similarity to the name Duessa. These names appear to be variant forms of the name "Dubhéasa…a compound of *Du*, "Black," and *Ésa*, itself a woman's name" (Smith 918). According to Smith, "[t]he pronunciation of the Middle-Irish form

Dubhéasa would be well-represented, to an Englishman of sixteenth century hearing it,

by the spelling *Duessa* (Smith 918). Further establishing the Irish origins of Duessa's

name, Smith provides the English translation for the Irish words of origin, *dóibhéas* and

do-bhéas. He defines *dóibhéas* as "vice" or "bad manners" and *do-bhéas* as "a bad habit"

or "an ill custom" (Smith 918). These definitions are clearly aligned with Duessa's

loathly characteristics as revealed in Spenser's poem. Smith continues by revealing that

> [t]he plural of this noun would be identical in form with the proper name
> Dubhéasa, which would consequently (divided Du-bhéasa) have the connotation
> "wicked customs," or "evil usages,' just as Una to one familiar with Latin would
> suggest "uniqueness" or singularity (Smith 918).

Smith observes that Spenser would have been keenly aware of the Irish meaning behind

the name "Duessa" and that he would, therefore, be "struck by the single and dual (Latin)

implications in the Irish names Una and Duessa" (Smith 919). Smith's study has

significant implications with regard to Spenser's intentionality; in his creation and

execution of Duessa, Spenser purposely renders a figure complexly related to his human

figures and yet also broadly deformed.

It is as if Edmund Spenser's goal in the introduction and duration of Duessa's

character is to completely dismantle and systematically deconstruct his audience's

understanding of monstrosity. Her multiplicity becomes apparent in her behavior and

etymological identity first and in in her physicality second. Duessa's multiple allegorical

meanings further enhance the multiplicity and disconcertedness of her role as a monster

with multiplicitous deformations. Beyond more or less missing the pedagogical impact of

her multiplicitous physicality, critics do not often recognize the impact of her

multiplicitous allegorical identity. The critical focus tends to be on one meaning or

another: for example, some critics focus on Duessa's allegorical relationship to the

Catholic Church while others focus on her resemblance to traditional literary tropes like

the "loathly lady" (Waters, McCabe, and Carter). Notwithstanding her role as a clear,

allegorical representation of falsehood and duplicity, Duessa has been ceaselessly

redefined and re-ascribed with new identity and meaning over the course of the last

century. Indeed, Duessa is assigned a bizarre though justifiable number of meanings by

several of the most noted Spenserian scholars—curiously, however, these allegorical

meanings are usually studied separately rather than in correlation with one another.

Again, Duessa's critics may be missing that it is precisely Duessa's lack of definability

and her obvious multiplicity in meaning that allow her monstrous physicality to be so

effective as a pedagogical tool. Many of these allocations of meaning do a great deal to

emphasize her humanity and many others do the same for her monstrosity. It is in fact the

conflation of the two that allow Duessa's presence in the poem to become so significant.

By limiting Duessa to one specific allegorical meaning and by disregarding the

significance of her physical hybridity, critics limit her import and the force of Spenser's

cautionary warning to a human audience so inherently susceptible to the threat of

transformative or clandestine monstrosity. In order to fully establish the import of

Duessa's allegorical multiplicity and the way in which it accentuates the impact of her

hybrid physicality, it is therefore important that this study contextualize interpretations of Duessa within her critical history.

Duessa is unquestioningly the most widely interpreted of Spenser's allegorical figures. As with the scholarship surrounding Errour, Duessa's established multiplicity in meaning serves to encourage further interpretations with regard to her physicality. The critics most relevant for this study tend to initially accept Duessa as an obvious representation of duality and falsehood, making her an easy foil for the character Una, a figure established previously in this argument as a representation of truth. Once again, Smith's ascription of Irish etymological origins to Duessa's name serves to highlight English sixteenth century anxiety regarding Irish Catholicism. Correlatively, many critics—particularly D. Douglas Waters, Richard McCabe, and Susan Carter—seem to agree that Duessa serves as a representation of the Catholic Church, or at least a representation of some negative element that can be associated with the Catholic Church. This interpretation coincides with the common critical interpretation of the monster Errour as an allegorical criticism of the Catholic Church and its propensity for falsehood and heresy. In his many seminal works on the subject of Duessa's allegorical and anagogical meanings[13], D. Douglas Waters focuses on this potential criticism of the Catholic Church as the foremost rationale for Duessa's appearance in the poem. Waters begins, like Smith, with a recognition of the "basic polarity of Duessa and Una as

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[13] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "anagogical" as being characteristic "[o]f words and their sense: mystical, spiritual, having a secondary spiritual sense, allegorical" ("anagogical").

allegorical figures" (Waters 258). Waters further recognizes the common critical

association of Duessa with "St. John's Babylonian Whore in Revalation,…the pope, the

church of Rome, Mary Tudor, and Mary Queen of the Scots" (Waters 258). However, his

thesis establishes his belief that Duessa serves most strongly as a representation of the

Catholic mass. He argues that her "'scarlot whore' characteristics of duplicity, treachery,

and lechery" are specifically intended as allegories relating to the church. Waters

theorizes that Duessa's weakening of Redcrosse in Book I parallels the Catholic Church's

ability to weaken Protestant "spiritual health" (Waters 259).

 To support this argument, Waters proceeds with an understanding of Duessa as a

representation of the mass in concordance with a sixteenth century rhetorical movement

known as the "Mistress Missa" tradition[14]. Waters performs a close reading of Duessa's

disrobing, in particular, in order to draw parallels between her and the despicable

Mistress Missa. He writes, "The disrobing of the beautified Roman mass in Mistress-

Missa writings proves her to be a foul, misshapen whorish hag, much akin to a witch"

(Waters 264). This is obviously a description that correlates directly to the disrobed

Duessa. Waters continues to describe the parallel between their paternal origins, Duessa

having claimed an emperor as a father and Mistress Missa being understood as daughter

to the Pope. Waters also draws a comparison between the claims to chastity expressed by

both Mistress Missa and Duessa. Finally, in a further close reading of Deussa's

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[14] In a related article titled, "Shakespeare and the 'Mistress Missa' Tradition in King Henry VIII," Waters defines this tradition as one that employs "symbolic lust and symbolic witchcraft to personify the Roman Mass as a whore and a witch" (Waters, 459).

relationship to Redcrosse and his eventual deliverance from her clutches, Waters details

the allegorical journey necessary for a Protestant's delivery from the deceptive clutches

of a Catholic mass. According to Waters, "Recurring despair, contemplated suicide, and

thwarted suicidal attempts– these lamentable results of hearing mass may have come

bearing upon the obviously similar problems of Redcrosse in the Despaire Canto"

(Waters 272). In a retrospective examination of Water's article, it becomes clear that his

identification of Mistress Missa with Spenser's Duessa serves to further establish Duessa

as Una's foil. Waters concludes that "Symbolically, as Falsehood (Duessa) and Truth

(Una) are opposites, they cannot coexist, just as 'the falsehood of the pope's mass' and

'the truth of the Church of England' could not dwell in one house together" (Waters 275).

Though Waters makes a fairly specific interpretation of Duessa's allegorical

meaning, he does accept that the provocative trial and summary execution of Duessa in

Book V is read by many critics as an allegorical representation of Queen Mary of

Scotland's similar ordeal in 1587. In his article, "The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary

Queen of Scots, and James the VI," Richard McCabe presents evidence to support the

theory that Duessa represents Mary not only in Book V, but also in Book V. Like Waters,

McCabe discusses the common interpretation of Duessa in Book I as a representation of

the Whore of Babylon, a character that the Elizabethans would consider to be a symbol of

"dangerous political force" (McCabe 226). McCabe asserts that "[b]y having the same

character represent the Whore of Babylon in Book I and Mary in Book V, Spenser

contrives to establish a narrative and thematic continuity more acutely responsive to the

anxieties of the times than has hitherto been recognized" (McCabe 227). McCabe

continues to establish that the relationship between Duessa and Mary Queen of Scots

begins in Book I by discussing the obvious dichotomy between the character Una, a

"Protestant virgin princess," and Duessa, a "Catholic queen denied…her true inheritance"

(McCabe 227). There is an obvious correlation to the conflict between the Protestant

virgin queen of England and her Catholic Scottish nemesis. McCabe also establishes that

even the differences between Book I and Book V are evidence of Duessa's relationship to

Mary. In Book I, Una allows Duessa to go free, just as Elizabeth I allowed Mary to

escape execution during the Norfolk scandal (McCabe 229). Though Mary was

imprisoned at this time, she was free to continue scheming politically from her cell as

Duessa was free to continue scheming (McCabe 234). After Duessa attempts to usurp

Mercilla's power in Book V, the compassionate ruler reluctantly condemns Duessa to

death. Spenser's readers would be aware that a merciful Elizabeth I had publicly

remained opposed to Mary's execution.

Susan Carter, on the other hand, draws attention back to Spenser's evident

English Protestant anxiety regarding Irish Catholicism. Carter suggests that Spenser's

Duessa is, in fact, a "new and improved," or rather, an even more disgusting version of

Chaucer's Loathly Lady from the *Wife of Bath's Tale*; more significantly, she writes,

Duessa "bears a resemblance" to an even older form of the Loathly Lady– "the Irish

sovereignty hag" (Carter 9). According to Carter, the "Irish motif allegorizes sovereignty

in lovely/loathly flesh, so is attuned to the political didactics underpinning the *Faerie*

Queene" (Carter 9). Carter theorizes that Spenser intentionally used Duessa as a vessel through which to promote English imperialism, and specifically to express a desire for dominance over Ireland. She suggests that he attempts to achieve this goal by using the Irish sovereignty hag as a basis for Duessa and subsequently transforming her into something so terrible as to undermine the original Irish conception. According to Carter, "[t]he Irish sovereignty hags are described more entertainingly" with a comedic focus on the exaggerated characteristics of an aging woman and the repulsiveness of her active sexuality (Carter 10). In contrast, the horror of Spenser's Duessa undressed is meant to be overwhelmingly disgusting and anything but amusing. The initial description of a stripped Duessa in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* is described as being so repulsive that its "secret filth good manners biddeth not be told" (Spenser I.VIII.47). Of course, Spenser continues on to describe Duessa's monstrosity in detail[15]. Carter explains Spenser's methods as follows: "Spenser reminds us of how revolting decay can be" (Carter 10). Carter attributes a certain amount of power to Spenser's description of Duessa in the text. As Spenser no doubt intended, Carter joins many other readers in her consideration of Duessa as a pedagogical invention. She writes, "[Duessa] is horrid through both human degeneration and beastliness; both kinds of abjection are evidence of how unacceptable, how repulsive, her active sexuality is when exposed incarnate" (Carter 11). Duessa is made intentionally repulsive to both the characters with whom she interacts and the readers themselves.

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[15] This is an example of "mentioning by not mentioning," or praeteritio.

In addition to reading her as a distortion of the sexual and comedic Irish sovereignty hag, Carter does seem to attribute to Duessa a certain level of multiplicity that encompasses several of the interpretations encountered in previous criticisms. Carter writes, "She is not one entity, but at times is Catholicism, at times Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, and at times deceit itself, particularly the deceit of performed femininity, the female side to the courtly Romance tradition" (Carter 11). Duessa's embodiment of this final entity is indicative of the distortion that Spenser's loathly lady has undergone in comparison to Chaucer's playfully romantic loathly lady and even more so to the bawdily comedic Irish loathly lady of sovereignty. Essentially, however, Carter's main argument centers around the idea that Spenser's Duessa was a purposeful distortion of the Irish loathly lady intended to bias his audience against the Catholic Irish entity that he desired Elizabeth I to subjugate. Carter describes Spenser's "larger project" in painting Duessa the way he does as an attempt to bring "the Irish into a Protestant English social order" (Carter 13). Spenser uses Duessa specifically to this purpose in his representation of Mary Queen of Scots in Book V. According to Carter, "Spenser uses Elizabeth's condemnation of Mary to try to persuade his queen to go further in Ireland" (Carter 14). In conclusion, Carter writes that "[u]sing the Loathly Lady Duessa, Spenser turns the Irish Sovereignty motif against the Irish with the vigour and energy of his Talus" (Carter 14).

All four of these critical interpretations of Spenser's Duessa display obvious elements of congruity. The somewhat intuitive allegorical interpretations of Duessa as

falsehood or as a representation of Mary Queen of Scots are acknowledged by most

critics—as is the characterization of Duessa as a symbol of Catholicism, or even more

specifically, Irish Catholicism. Duessa could easily represent all of these things for the

reader, which is why it would be a mistake to accept even one of these arguments

unilaterally. What is missed by compacting Duessa into one or even several specific roles

is the intentionality of her multiplicity. It is more easily accepted that several of Spenser's

other monsters, some specifically named for the vice they represent (Errour and Orgoglio,

for example), could be interpreted as one particular human frailty or vice. Critics have

established that Duessa encompasses multiple meanings; it is not one of these meanings,

but rather Duessa's ability to encompass *all* of them, that then makes her multiplicitous

physicality so conspicuous. Her revelation as a monster allows the multiplicity of her

allegorical and etymological identity to become overshadowed by her physical

multiplicity. Before the eighth canto of Book I, Spenser's readers are aware of her

potential allegorical meanings and her deformity as a fowl-like hag, but the reality of her

complete monstrosity and the accompanying conglomeration of so many hideous and

bestial parts allow her to become the most effective tool for inducing self-reflective

reading in Spenser's readers. A close reading of her stripping and her both symbolic and

physical revelation as a monster will further demonstrate the ways in which her

physicality would inevitably become the focus of an Early Modern reading.

When Una, the representation of "oneness" and everything that is true and

genuine, encounters Duessa in Canto VIII of Book I, the "false one" is finally stripped of

her disguise. Una refers to Duessa in this passage as "[t]he roote of all [Redcrosse's] care, and wretched plight" but nevertheless expresses her wish that Duessa not be killed (Spenser I.viii.45.5). Una recognizes that it is within Redcrosse's power and moral right to kill Duessa for her crimes, but she instead cites Duessa's weakness as an incentive for mercy (Spenser I.viii.45.8). Spenser is once again toying here with his audience's capacity for empathy. Duessa may be an evil witch with fowl-like appearance, but she is nevertheless a pitiable human—spiritual deformation withstanding. Spenser further confirms Duessa's identity as a witch rather than a monster when Una's suggestion to "spoile her of her scarlet robe" is obeyed: "So as she bade, that witch they disaraid / … / A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill fauoured, old, / Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told" (Spenser I.viii.45.9, I.viii.46.8-9). Again, Duessa is described as a hag—her only physical deformity being old age and wear. Despite the implication that Duessa's "secret filth" will not be described in detail, Spenser, of course, sets aside "good manners" and goes on to describe Duessa's shocking monstrosity. The reality is that she not simply a traditional loathly lady or a spiritually deformed witch; hiding beneath Duessa's believably weakened human façade is a monstrous conglomeration of both human and beast. Indeed, they are so intrinsically enmeshed that she cannot be entirely human or beast. The importance of this revelation is signified by the fact that Spenser spends two full stanzas describing her grotesqueness. This first stanza emphasizes her despicability as a partially human being:

Her craftie head was altogether bald,

> And as in hate of honorable eld,
> Was ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
> Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
> And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;
> Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
> Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
> Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
> So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind. (Spenser I.viii.47.1-9)

Duessa, as a witch and loathly lady, is the epitome of natural deformation—she is filthy, rotten, dried up, and scabby; she is a figure that would draw the loathing of every naturally formed woman in existence. Before revealing the extent of her monstrous deformation, Spenser firmly establishes her basest existence as a physically deformed human. It is in the second stanza that Spenser exposes her as a monster.

Spenser lingers on this transformative revelation purposefully. He is no longer dealing with deformations or monstrosities with which his audience is familiar. Spenser is describing a vile monstrosity that exists within the guise of a naturally formed human body, and he spends a significant amount of time describing each deformed portion of her body in detail:

> Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
> My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write;
> But 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,
> With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,
> The other like a Beares vneuen paw:
> More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw. (Spenser I.viii.48.1-9)

As the embodiment of deception of duplicity itself, Duessa's hidden monstrosity must necessarily be more hideous and convoluted than any of the monstrosities revealed preciously or later in the poem. Her allegorical multiplicity must be matched by her physical multiplicity on order for her monstrosity to have the impact that Spenser so clearly must intend. Duessa is portrayed as a bald hag with misshapen parts and a fox tail. She has "monstrous" feet, one the claw of an eagle and one the paw of a bear. A. C. Hamilton notes that "[t]he animal imagery is conventional: the crafty fox, the predatory eagle, the cruel bear…" (Hamilton 112). Spenser forces his audience to move abruptly from the distrust developed by her earlier behaviors and the disgust inspired by her previous descriptions to complete and utter horror. C. S. Lewis discusses the effect of such an unveiling on Spencer's readers in his book *Spenser's Images of Life*: "The effect of this…unveiling is to make us distrustful of outward show. We are constantly kept awake to the deceptiveness of the forms of life— to complex difference between appearance and reality" (Lewis 82). The psychological discomposure associated with the idea that even the reader themselves were initially deceived by Duessa's disguise might allow them to become distrustful of even their own "outward show." Anyone may be overcome or transformed by their own monstrosity; even worse, that monstrosity may already exist incognito.

Duessa's multiplicity becomes intrinsic to the exposition of her excessive and ultimate monstrosity. By associating her with any particular meaning or set of meanings, readers may find themselves capable of softening the awesome terror that an

anthropomorphic monster like Duessa represents in comparison to the other allegorically significant monsters in the text. Her allegorical multiplicity compounds and enhances her physical significance. It is the multiplicity of *both* her allegory and her complicated physicality that allow Duessa to become the most threatening of Spenser's monsters because her multiplicity encompasses both undeniable humanity and undeniable monstrosity. Again, while most scholarly interpretations of Duessa deal with the horror of her transformation and the significance of her revealed monstrosity, they also tend to focus on the way that these circumstances reinforce her varying analogies. Few of these studies focus on the significance of her *physical* transformation. The fact that Duessa required some sort of transformation to reveal her deformations rather than display them openly is significant in that she was in all appearances human first and monstrous second. She appeared *fully human* to both Spenser's human figures and to his audience. Unlike any of Spenser's previous and later monsters, who are either human or monster at any given point, Duessa is at once both human and monster—her monstrosity veiled by a deceptively complete humanity. This circumstance allows her to become the most evocative of Spenser's monsters in that she is initially the most identifiable to a human reader. While a reader may, with effort, separate themselves in identity from a *partially* human monster, they cannot prevent some sort of cathartic identification with an attractive humanlike character portrayed as one who is both lost and in need of aid. Duessa's shocking transformation is therefore, I suggest, the most effective episode in the text as far as the reader's own self-examination is concerned. "What is my own capacity

for deception and monstrosity?" one might ask. Duessa's allegorical multiplicity then becomes secondary in importance to her physical duplicity.

Duessa thus represents the worst kind of evil with which humanity may struggle—she is an evil that *manifests* as truth or goodness, an evil that is disguised by falsehood and deceit. Duessa's ability to masquerade as an attractive and sympathetic human invites Spenser's readers to examine their own capacity for immorality and deception. The horror of Duessa's revelation makes it impossible for Spenser's readers to ignore the vastness and horrific ugliness of the evil that threatens to distort their own humanity. According to the predominantly Protestant tradition of Spenser's culture, the fall of man was the catalyst that ushered into men's hearts a 'sin nature' or natural tendency toward evil (Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 2:3). This insemination of good with evil would have allowed humans a conflicting understanding of themselves. Spenserian Isabel MacCaffrey discusses the imperfections of human understanding in the fallen world thus: "The fall of Man was both a fall into time and a fall from lucid to imperfect vision, from univocal to equivocal language, from a world of light to a cloudy grove" (MacCaffrey 35). Consequently, the understanding that evil is inherent and that darkness is an intrinsic part of humanity's struggle to survive is essential to one's ability to return to the "world of light" (MacCaffrey 35). In other words, Spenser's monstrosity becomes a vessel for his readers through which they may fully comprehend their own intrinsic monstrosity. MacCaffrey goes on to describe Spenser's particular use of allegory as " designed to demonstrate the darkness of our situation as fallen human beings…by introducing us to a

fictive world whose enigmatic surface darkly reflects the everyday darkness in which we grope" (MacCaffrey 40). Under the falseness and heretical teachings of the Catholic Church so obviously criticized in Spenser's poem, sinners might find themselves instantly forgiven by virtue of a purchased pardon. Spenser would have believed that if humans were at once blind to their imperfections due to the fall and simultaneously dependent upon nothing more than a pardon of the church to eradicate those imperfections when they surfaced, then evil would be effectively inseparable from good. In other words, evil triumphs when it is able to grow undetected. In Spenser's religiously driven post-Reformation England, allowing evil to exist uncontrolled or unnoticed would be an abomination. The Early Modern journey toward understanding and recognition of oneself could not be abandoned.

With Duessa's uncanny and jarring transformation in the eighth canto of Book I, Edmund Spenser toys with his audience's capacity for empathy and self-loathing. If at any point the modern early reader's susceptibility to Fidessa's deceit lead them to empathize with her plight as a helpless woman in search of protection, they would be made to feel guilty of their folly once the horror of Duessa's truly monstrous nature is revealed. In this way Spenser abruptly reminds his readers of their own innate susceptibility to monstrosity. He taps into contemporary anxieties regarding mental and spiritual corruption and confirms them to a shocking degree. Duessa does not transform from a human being to monstrous one by way of some innately monstrous behavior. She is innately monstrous both physically and allegorically, while her disguise is

simultaneously fully human. Transformative monstrosity would have inspired its own anxieties, but the possibility of an undetected inner deformity this despicable and multiplicitous may have shocked Spenser's audiences into a penetrating self-reflection. Once again, as is the case of Errour, Orgoglio, and Malbecco, Spenser establishes that evil exposed in a tangibly monstrous form is too ugly and relevant of a deformation for Early Modern audiences to ignore. Spenser portrays deception itself—a monstrosity that apparently has the power to lie undetected—to appear in the form of a terrifying distortion of the natural human body. Spenser represents evil as something that must be aesthetically revealed in order to be examined. The message of Duessa's appearance in the text is one that is hopeful and simultaneously grim; while recognition of imperceptible monstrosity, or evil, is possible, Redcrosse's encounter with Duessa suggests that only by actually witnessing a physical manifestation of the ugliness of human frailty and vice is one able to genuinely examine their own capacity for monstrosity. Thus Spenser's use of monsters, both real and imaginary, indicate their function as vessels of instruction and demonstration to a flawed and potentially monstrous humanity.

Conclusion

If Spenser's intention was to use monstrosity as a pedagogical tool, an important question would be whether or not such a use would matter to contemporary audiences. Based on the scientific and etymological history of monstrosity as it was known in the Early Modern era, it is likely that the allegorical and physically descriptive use of monsters in such a well-known text would have made an impact on the morality and self-evaluative capabilities of Spenser's audience. As I bring this study to a close, it is important that I address why this argument holds weight in the greater critical conversation regarding Spenser's work, and more importantly, why this topic holds weight in the modern western literary tradition. Monsters were and remain a significant presence in literary and visual art. While their presence today may not be intended to function as it did in the sixteenth century, their presence does denotes a continued fascination and affectation amongst modern audiences.

The prevalence of horror and monstrosity as a pedagogical tool did not fade with the sixteenth century. Indeed, by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, popular literature became apparently dominated by human deformation and the fantastically monstrous. Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* relates the tale of a living creature pieced together from the body parts of various corpses. The story becomes less a tale devoted to the horror of the creature's monstrosity and more a tale revealing the horror of Frankenstein's monstrosity. The creature itself is in search of a humanity that can never be his while Frankenstein gradually loses the humanity that was once his. Robert Louis

Stevenson's 1886 novella *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* relates the tale of a man suffering

within a mentally and physically disassociated identity. Dr. Jekyll's bestial tendencies

manifest themselves in a separate personality. When under the influence of this

personality, Dr. Jekyll's physical being is altered to reflect his inner monstrosity. Each of

these texts—despite clearly changing attitudes toward the reality of bestially hybrid

deformity—seem to demonstrate a continued understanding of monstrosity as a reflection

of humanity's more bestial tendencies.

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, an imaginary universe conceived in his 1937 novel

The Hobbit and his subsequent *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (published in 1954 and 1955),

boasts dozens of these bestially hybrid monsters. Like J.K. Rowling's famed *Harry*

Potter series (published over the course of ten years from 1997 to 2007) and the myriad

popular fantasy novels that dominate young adult bookshelves today, Tolkien's universe

includes dragons, talking trees, trolls, orcs, and multiple other figures easily interpreted as

deformations of the human body. While not as explicitly anthropomorphic as

Frankenstein's creature or Mr. Hyde, these monsters are still reflective of the kind of

corrupt nature that Early Modern audiences would have seen as a warning against bestial

behavior. J. R. R. Tolkien explicitly describes the orcs in *The Silmarillion*—a fictional

history of Middle Earth—as elves that had been corrupted and defiled into something

deformed by an evil entity. This kind of explicit deformation of a "natural" being is

almost exactly the kind of deformation that is scattered across Edmund Spenser's epic

poem.

Simply turning on the news today reveals that the kind of mental and spiritual deformities described in Spenser's poem are clearly still in existence. That they manifest as physical deformity, however, has been clearly exposed as scientific naiveté. Today's scientific understanding of actual human deformity has advanced to the point at which there are medical explanations for most congenital deformities. To term a dwarf or a giant a monster would be categorically wrong and unthinkable. At the same time, fantastic and unrealistic deformations like the ones represented by Error, Duessa, and Malbecco are correlatively known to be fiction. Reality has in many ways been separated from imagination more than it ever has in the past. Monsters nevertheless continue to captivate audiences in the 21st century. The topic of monstrosity and its influence in contemporary literature and film is a topic absolutely worth further research and development. Monsters and correlatively monstrous human beings portrayed in horror literature and film reflect a fascination with or desire to understand the darker side of human nature. There is something about fear and the revelation of the grotesque that allows human beings to examine their own weaknesses and capacity for corruption.

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