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A Defense of Prince Arthur's Position as Magnificence in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh about *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser claims that his character of Prince Arthur embodies magnificence, the perfection of all virtues. Several twentieth century critics take issue with this claim, noting that the character of Arthur seems unfinished and inconsistent throughout the text. However, a close reading of the poem reveals that the actions of Prince Arthur are structured throughout the six books to reveal different aspects of magnificence and to allow the character of Arthur to be appealing both as a character and as an allegory for magnificence.

Table of Contents

The Importance of Prince Arthur

Edmund Spenser constructed his epic allegory *The Faerie Queene* with specific goals in mind. He clearly expresses, in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, that he wishes for the poem to glorify England and its Protestant values. To represent magnificence, or the perfection of all virtues, Spenser chooses the character of Prince Arthur. Many critics believe that Spenser fails his construction of Arthur as the allegory for magnificence; the character seems to be incomplete, lacking both cohesion and a regular place in the plot. However, this critique can be refuted through the careful reading of Arthur's position in each of the six books of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser succeeds in portraying Prince Arthur as magnificence when one considers the character's actions throughout the entirety of the poem and takes notice of the patterns apparent in Arthur's behavior.

Spenser chose Prince Arthur as the perfection of virtue in part due to the importance of the historical Arthur in Elizabethan England. For the sixteenth century Protestant throne, King Arthur was not only a ruler to be

modeled; he was also claimed as an ancestor of Queen Elizabeth. Part of the justification for her rules lies in her alleged relation to King Arthur.

Charles Bowie Millican explains the historical necessity of Spenser's choice to use Arthur in *Spenser and the Table Round*:

> By the time of Spenser, therefore, the Arthurian right of Tudor sovereigns had been made a firm historical tradition, a tradition sanctioned by Elizabeth herself; and we should well expect that Spenser's idea for the inclusion of Arthurian story in *The Faerie Queene* became as much a part of him during his formative period as his notions of classical mythology of Platonic love. (52)

Because King Arthur was such an important figure for Elizabethan England, Spenser's choice to utilize Arthur as the embodiment of magnificence implies the virtue inherent in Britain's historical figures. For the Protestant throne, Arthur represented the ideal monarch. As such, Spenser's audience would easily understand Prince Arthur as a character who shows an ideal that the reader should emulate.

Spenser's Letter to Raleigh

Spenser is quite clear about his intent concerning Prince Arthur, a sentiment that he expressed in his letter to to Sir Walter Raleigh about *The Faerie Queene.* Spenser wishes to write a poem to glorify England and to teach virtue to its readers. He claims that "the generall end therefore of all the bookes is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (15). In simpler terms, Spenser intends for the text to give its reader an understanding of virtue as well as to influence the reader to act virtuously. Spenser could find no better figure to embody the epitome of these virtues than the historical Arthur, and so he allegorizes Prince Arthur as magnificence, or the perfection of every virtue. The character of Prince Arthur teaches the reader to act virtuously through his example, as explained by William Nelson:

> By Spenser's own account, then, the intention of *The Faerie Queene* is 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person' . . .It may be taken to mean that Spenser proposed to show how experience and training make a truly virtuous man out of one who is only potentially virtuous. But in the present case, Spenser's use of 'fashion' echoes a long-established tradition which shows that he must

> intend by it not ‘educate’ or ‘train’ but ‘represent, ‘delineate’. . . he is saying that he has portrayed the virtue itself, not the growth of that virtue in its champion. (121-22)

For Spenser, Arthur is the epitome of the virtue toward which all citizens of England should strive. While the other knights in the poem are shown as they develop virtue, Arthur is already an example of perfect magnificence that is meant to teach through behavior and example.

The choice of Arthur as perfected virtue is a purposeful one, as he is perhaps the closest figure to an epic hero of Britain. Spenser is careful to avoid a claim of writing a history of Prince Arthur, as he makes the point that he is a Poet, not an Historian:

> For an historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even whereit most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all. (Spenser 16-17)

As a poet, Spenser must analyze and judge history rather than record it. *The Faerie Queene* not a historical text, but rather an allegory that not only explains but also justifies the virtues important to Spenser and to British nobility.

Because Spenser never wrote the additional books of *The Faerie Queene*, we only have books representing three private virtues - holiness, temperance, and chastity - and three public, or political virtues - friendship, justice, and courtesy. From the letter, it seems that Spenser intended to write the private virtues first, an intent that obviously wasn't fulfilled.

> I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues. . . which is the purpose of the first twelve books: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged, to frame the other parte of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king. (Spenser 15-16)

In this statement, Spenser claims that if he decides to write twelve books for each of the public virtues, then he will use Arthur as king rather than prince to accomplish this. For whatever reason, Spenser never enacted this plan. In all six books, containing both private and public virtue, Arthur appears as Prince, not King. While small plot discrepancies occur between the letter and the books of *The Faerie Queene*, the fact that Prince Arthur never matured into King Arthur for the political virtues is a discrepancy in his character.

While Prince Arthur can demonstrate his devotion to holiness, chastity, and temperance, would he as effectively

convey magnificence in the political virtues? I argue that he effectively demonstrates justice, courtesy, and friendship, although I cannot predict his effectiveness with the other nine. Perhaps Spenser planned for Arthur to become king during the political books, but this is pure speculation. Regardless, we do not have access to what Spenser might have written, and so it is unfair to assume whether or not a prince could adequately represent the political virtues.

This point, however, is not the main reason that critics have denounced Prince Arthur. One of the most common critiques of the character is the relationship between the Arthur described in the Letter to Raleigh and the Arthur who appears throughout *The Faerie Queene*. Millican describes Spenser's use of Arthur as follows: "Spenser attempts to combined the single epic action of a single epic hero by interweaving Prince Arthur's search for Gloriana into the many actions of the many other knights and ladies" (116). The key word in this quote is "attempts"; while Millican seems to approve of Prince Arthur's portrayal of magnificence, this view is hardly universal.

For a dissenting and less positive opinion on the character of Prince Arthur, we can turn to Graham Hough's *A Preface to The Faerie Queene*. He suggests that the discrepancies appearing throughout the letter imply that the letter is not entirely important to interpreting the text. Hough sees the text itself as a vision, with the letter as an attempt to impose a specific order and meaning on *The Faerie Queene*. "Above all, the letter was a second thought, not the shaping spirit that gave rise to the poem in the first place" (91). For this reason, Hough claims that Arthur's importance in the poem is conflated by Spenser in the letter since, for Hough, Arthur has very little effect on the poem. He says:

> Prince Arthur is clearly an attempt to impose unity of hero on the multiple scheme. Spenser makes much of him in the letter and he does appear at critical points (Canto viii in each case) of every book except III. But he never occupies a commanding position. The student, concerned to interpret the allegory and find the rationale of Spenser's plan, may contrive to make something of Arthur, but I think it is safe to say that the ordinary reader hardly notices his alleged central importance. . . As a unifying factor he is of no effect whatever on the poem as we have it. (Hough 89)

For Hough, the letter and the poem are worlds apart. The text is Spenser's vision, while his letter to Raleigh only appeases those who want a unified theme throughout *The*

Faerie Queene. The letter, therefore, says very little about the text as Spenser had written it. While there are discrepancies between the letter and the text, Hough exaggerates the gap he perceives between the letter and the poem.

Other critics go beyond Hough's assertion and claim that the portrayal of Arthur throughout the poem intends to unite each knight's story, but that this attempt at unity fails. Josephine Waters Bennett makes such a claim, and Ronald Arthur Horton summarizes this theory:

> The introduction of Arthur as a symbol of divine benevolence, kingliness in the highest degree, belongs to a stage in the development of the poem where the Faery Queen has become Gloriana. It is this exalted conception which the poet had in mind when he wrote the letter to Raleigh, in which he represents Arthur as the hero-in-chief of the whole poem. Yet the management of Arthur's part in the poem indicates clearly that he was a late addiction to the plot, 'a mere afterthought.' (Bennett 60)
>
> Neoclassical critics debated whether the Arthur story is prominent enough to impart the required unity of action, and the consensus up to the present has been that Arthur's quest is neither sufficient dominant nor sufficiently well integrated with the other adventures to provide effective unity. (Horton 3)

For these critics, Arthur is not only lacking cohesion, as Hough claims, but the character is "merely an afterthought" who was added to the plot at the last minute in order to

impart some kind of unity to the text as a whole. While a cursory glance at Prince Arthur's actions throughout the poem could give one this impression, it becomes clear upon closer examination that Arthur is a principal aspect of the poem and not merely Spenser's failed attempt at unity.

It is worthy to note that while there are knights for each virtue, Arthur is the only knight who begins his journey as magnificence. To take Book I as an example, one may question why we need two knights to embody holiness, but Arthur and Redcross are both very necessary. The Redcross knight is an individual on a path to holiness, while Prince Arthur has achieved his virtue. While Arthur can always improve, the Redcross knight has barely attained any holiness or virtue. In the letter, Spenser describes him as "that clownish person" and notes his inexperience in knightly pursuits. The Redcross knight portrays for the reader the path to holiness, a path that requires one to persevere through many difficulties and hardships. Arthur, on the other hand, is the end result of such perseverance: he is magnificence, what Spenser's readers must strive to become.

The most common objection to Arthur's embodiment of magnificence lies in his actions during Book III. Unlike

the other five books, in which Arthur performs a magnificent deed in one of the later cantos, Arthur disappears after the sixth canto of Book III. I believe that this placement of Arthur was due to a very specific intention of Spenser's and not the result of an oversight about the character of Arthur. In order to understand Arthur in Book III, it is helpful to consider Alastair Fowler's *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*. Fowler asserts the importance of the order of the books and cantos in *The Faerie Queene*, as he believes that the order of the books is dictated by a detailed system involving numerology. For the issue of Arthur, his comments about canto placement are especially pertinent. Fowler explains that Spenser needed to closely connect Books III and IV due to the form he utilized to arrange the books in his epic:

> For the division of twelve books into four groups of three, there was again a famous precedent. St. Augustine included such an arrangement of books in his *Civitas Dei*. . . In applying such a scheme to a poetical work, Spenser ran the risk that his epic would fall apart into separate three-book poems. But he has avoided this danger by making an unusually close narrative suture in the case of Books III and IV. (Fowler 52)

Six years passed between the publication of the first three books and the last three, increasing the risk that the six books would be seen as only two sets of three and not as a

united work. As such, Arthur's perceived inaction in Book III is actually a literary strategy to ensure that Spenser's text was read as a whole, a strategy that will be explored further in the section about Books III and IV.

Not only do these middle books seem to work as a pair, but so do the first and last books of *The Faerie Queene*. The similarity between Arthur's encounters in Books I and II contrasts immensely to his actions in the third and fourth books, just as the final two books have mirroring patterns that do not follow any of the previous books. Concerning the actions of Arthur, the books do appear to fall into pairs. A close reading of Arthur's actions in the three pairs of books reveals a pattern involving the importance of Arthur's magnificence and three different ways that magnanimous virtue can be enacted in the world. Additionally, reading the books in this way conveys Arthur's importance to the poem and defends his character against critiques of his uselessness and ineffectiveness. In order to fully justify Arthur's effectiveness as a character, it is necessary to closely examine his actions throughout *The Faerie Queene*, beginning with Books I and II.

Books I and II

The first book of Spenser's epic poem is that of the Redcross Knight of Holiness. Prince Arthur first appears in the seventh canto. The maiden Una, distraught from the trouble facing Redcross, meets a knight, revealed as Prince Arthur, who has glittering armor and an adamantine shield (Spenser 126; I.vii.29-33). The poem suggests that Una is fortunate to encounter Arthur; she has lost one virtuous knight and meets another through "good hap" (Spenser 126; I.vii.29. Not only is Arthur's virtue suggested by the reference to Una encountering him as good fortune, but the attire of Arthur also suggests holiness. He has a sword "whose hilts were burnisht gold" and a "haughtie helmet, horrid all with gold" that bears a fierce dragon (Spenser I.vii.30-31). Carol V. Kaske explains the importance of Arthur's helmet, of which an entire stanza of the poem is devoted:

> Taken out of context, this helmet could be that of a villain; but it bears favorable political connotations because it hints at Arthur's lineage and destiny. . . It is morally exemplary by being at once strange and appropriate, thus manifesting, like the rest of Arthur's elaborately described costume, the ability to spend money well, a part, according to its strict

> Aristotelian sense, of Arthur's virtue of magnificence. (38)

Arthur's historical significance as the legendary King of Britain complements his position as virtue in the poem. As Britain's greatest king, Arthur must also be the penultimate virtue: magnificence. For Arthur to represent anything but magnificence would discredit the poem's claim of Britain as the greatest and most virtuous kingdom.

While the history of Arthur suggested in Book I supports his position as magnificence, it is hardly the only suggestion toward the Prince's virtue. The rescue of Redcross likewise suggests the magnificence contained in the character of Arthur. At the beginning of the eighth canto, Arthur and his squire approach the castle of the Giant and Duessa, which is strongly guarded against intruders. However, Arthur has a horn of "great vertues" that enables him to shake the walls and gates of the castle:

> No false enchauntment, nor deceiptfull traine
> Might once abide the terror of that blast,
> But presently was voide and wholly vaine:
> No gate so strong, no locke so firme and fast,
> But with that percing noise flew open quite, or brast. (Spenser I.viii.4)

The castle, like the giant inhabiting it, cannot withstand the power of virtue, whether it is in the form of the horn or Arthur, as the battle with the giant will show.

Arthur battles with the Giant as Duessa watches, and at one point manages to cut off the Giant's arm (Spenser I.viii.10). However, Duessa's vice manages to overcome Arthur in the form of a "secret poison" that

> She lightly sprinkled on his weaker parts;
> Therewith his strudie courage soone was quayd,
> And all his senses were with suddeine dread
> dismayd.
> So downe he fell before the cruell beast.
> (Spenser I.viii.14-15)

Unfortunately, in this fight, magnificence is not enough to overcome evil; virtue sometimes requires divine aid. This intercession by God occurs through Arthur's shield, the piece of Arthur's equipment that represents the divine grace given through faith that accompanies true virtue. Pienaar explains this aspect of the prince's shield:

> Arthur's shield, in fact, is like St. George's, a shield of faith. . . Faith, therefore, is always a defense but it is our final salvation and means of victory when we battle against unequal odds. (65-66)

With the help of God's grace in the form of the shield, Arthur can defeat the Giant. The grace of God blinds vice and the Giant can fight no more, for he "has read his end In that bright shield" (Spenser I.viii.21). Take note that

the grace of God does not defeat the Giant; God only assists Arthur, who must use his own virtue to administer the final blow to the Giant. At this point, Arthur can strip Duessa of her duplicitous identity and rescue Redcross. Before they part, Arthur and Redcross exchange gifts, which serves to connect the two and relate their virtues. As magnificence, Arthur can rescue other knights when their own virtue fails them.

This remains the case concerning Arthur's interaction with Guyon in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. As in the first book, Arthur appears just past the middle of the text, coming upon Guyon in need of assistance in the eighth canto. Guyon has fallen unconscious and is under the care of his Palmer, who has heard the voice of God tell him that he must protect Guyon. Unfortunately for the pair, two Paynim knights come across the scene and decide to steal Guyon's armor. However, God sends help in the form of Prince Arthur, a knight not unheard of by the Palmer:

> For yonder comes the prowest knight alive,
> Prince Arthur, flowre of grace and nobilesse,
> That hath to Paynim knights wrought great distresse,
> And thousand Sar'zins foully donne to dye.
> (Spenser II.viii.18)

While any character could state that Arthur is "the prowest knight alive," the phrase has special significance coming

from the Palmer (Spenser II.viii.18). The Palmer guides Guyon and acts as his conscience when the knight struggles with his path to temperance. It is not in the nature of the Palmer's character for him to lie or exaggerate, and so his utterances can be understood as truth. According to the Palmer's words, Arthur is magnificence; he is "the prowest knight alive, flowre of grace and nobilesse" to whom other knights look for inspiration and example.

As such, Arthur is the only one who can come to Guyon's rescue. The Palmer, as an allegorical part of Guyon, can only embody virtue to the extent that Guyon can achieve it. In this case, Guyon needs extra help from magnificence, although this help does not come freely. When Arthur battles the Giant in Book I, he falls and God's grace saves him. However, God's grace only intervenes when absolutely necessary. In this battle with the pagan knights, Arthur also falls, but it is not God's grace that intervenes. Rather, the Palmer helps Arthur:

> Whom when the Palmer saw in such distresse
> Sir Guyons sword he lightly to him raught,
> And said; faire Son, great God thy right hand
> blesse,
> To use that sword so wisely as it ought.
> (Spenser II.viii.40)

Magnificence, with the help of temperance, manages to overcome the Paynims in a version of the cliché "God helps

those who help themselves." While Guyon as a character may be unconscious, the virtue of temperance is embodied in the Palmer, who helps Arthur defeat evil and defend virtue.

Arthur now joins Guyon in his journey, where the next stop is the House of Temperance. In the first book, Arthur parts from Redcross before he enters the House of Holiness, but Arthur must accompany Guyon at this point so that the text can further relate Prince Arthur to the legendary king and therefore to the kingdom of Britain. The tenth canto is summarized as such:

> A chronicle of Briton kings,
> from Brute to Uthers rayne.
> And rolles of Elfin Emperours,
> till time of Gloriane. (Spenser II.x)

Arthur reads the history of Britain's kings up to the time of Uther Pendragon, unaware that he reads his own lineage:

> The land, which warlike Britons now possesse,
> And therein have their mightie empire raysd,
> In antique times was salvage wildernesse,
> Unpeopled, unmaurd, unprov'd, unpraysd.
> (Spenser II.x.5)

Note that the great kings of Britain did not start out on the land; rather, they conquered a land that was undeveloped and occupied by:

> [H]ideous Giants, and halfe beastly men,
> That never tasted grace, nor goodnesse felt,
> But like wild beasts lurking. . .
> All naked without shame. (Spenser II.x.7)

While the ancestors of Arthur may not have begun as the inhabitants of the land, they are responsible for its greatness and for modeling it into the grand British kingdom. This history justifies British colonialism and ties it to morality and prosperity; before Arthur's ancestors civilized Britain, the land was full of wasted potential and lacked the blessing of God.

Guyon reads a similar, albeit shorter, chronicle about the history of the faerie people. For Spenser, Faerieland and Prince Arthur's Britain are different aspects of the same Britain. When Prince Arthur finally finds his elusive Gloriana, the historical Britain will be united with the ethereal and divine Britain represented by Gloriana and Faerieland. Arthur, of course, symbolizes historical Britain and reminds the reader that magnificence is embodied not only by his character, but also by the historical Arthur's descendent, Queen Elizabeth.

At this point in the book, the paths of Arthur and Guyon separate. Guyon leaves Alma's castle to defeat Acrasia and destroy the Bowre of Bliss, while Arthur stays behind to defend Alma:

> Till that the prince seeing her wofull plight,
> Gan her recomfort from so sad affright,
> Offring his service, and his dearest life
> For her defence. . .

> Eftsoones himselfe in glitterand armes he dight. (Spenser II.xi.16-17)

His reaction to Alma mirrors his reaction to Una's need for help; a truly magnificent knight would help defend virtue against any threat, whether it is a threat to a knight of holiness or to a castle of temperance.

At this point, the second book breaks from the pattern of the first. In Book I, Arthur rescues Redcross, but then leaves as Redcross continues his adventures and final battle. In this case, Arthur remains a part of the story even as Guyon continues his task elsewhere. Arthur's defense of Alma's castle compares to the defeat of Acrasia by Guyon, and so Arthur has moved into the position of mirroring Guyon. This method of connecting magnificence to the other virtues appears first in this book and continues to occur throughout the poem. However, Books I and II still seem closely related since the rescue of each knight by Arthur is such a significant and unique part of the two books. This mirroring in the final two cantos adds an extra dimension to Arthur's actions that hints to the mirroring that will occur between battles involving Arthur and the battles of the knights in Books V and VI.

Books III and IV

The mirroring introduced in the second book provides a way to read Arthur's curious actions in Book III, actions that seems far more understandable if Arthur is read alongside Britomart. In the last lines of the proem to Book III, Spenser writes,

> But either *Gloriana* let her chuse,
> Or in *Belphoebe* fashioned to bee:
> In th' one her rule, in th' other her rare
> chastitee. (Spenser III.proem.5)

Because *The Faerie Queene* is written in the form of an allegory, two distinct and different characters can represent a single idea or concept. In this case, the text presents both Gloriana and Belphoebe as chaste muses. Pursuing either character would suggest that one seeks chastity rather than an actual woman. Fortunately for Prince Arthur's reputation, these last lines shed light on his pursuit of Florimell and seeming distraction from Gloriana.

Prince Arthur and Guyon first glimpse Florimell as she flees from peril:

> A goodly Ladie did foreby them rush,
> Who face did seeme as cleare as Christall stone.
> (Spenser III.i.15)

The text reserves the term “goodly” only for those characters who show true virtue; the word often describes Arthur and other knights. Arthur pursues Florimell, a chase that continues in Canto IV. The description of the canto reads: “Faire Florimell of Arthur is long followed, but not fond” (Spenser III.iv). A similar mention of the pursuit appears in the description of Canto V: “Prince Arthur heares of Florimell” (Spenser III.v). If it warrants mention in the descriptions of these two cantos, then surely Arthur chasing Florimell carries some significance. On the surface, Prince Arthur’s behavior seems shallow and unheroic, but revealing the allegorical meaning of his behavior conveys quite a different interpretation.

From her presentation in Canto I, the reader can assume that Florimell’s representation is a virtuous one. She is not only “goodly,” but her beauty radiates, and the text never presents true beauty as immoral or lacking in virtue. At one point, Prince Arthur’s squire, Timias, approaches Florimell himself in order to assuage her fear at being pursued; he wishes to offer her assistance from Arthur and Guyon. However, she swiftly runs from him for reasons explained in the text:

> But nothing might relent her hastie flight;
> So deepe the deadly feare of that foule swaine
> Was earst impressed in her gentle spirit. . .
> With no less haste, and eke with no lesse dreed,
> that fearefull Ladie fled from him, that ment
> To her no evill thought, nor evill deed;
> Yet former feare of being fowly shent,
> Carried her forward with her first intent.
> (Spenser III.iv.49-50)

Florimell no longer follows reason in her flight, as she runs due to the memory of being pursued. Even though Arthur and Guyon mean to her "no evil thought, nor evil deed," she escapes from them out of fear. Florimell allegorically represents virtue and what is good; the text consistently uses phrases such as "gentle spirit" to imply such virtue in her.

However, Florimell's virtue is more helpless and submissive than the strong chastity portrayed by Britomart. Graham Hough claims her as an antithesis of Britomart, noting that Florimell "is beauty and desirability alone. She has no other qualities, besides purity and constancy. She is timorous and passive, her only activity is flight" (171). Until her eventual unification with Marinell, Florimell (and Marinell, for that matter) seem incomplete. Florimell's timidity not only allows her to act as a foil for Britomart, but it also facilitates the telling of the story and furthers its allegorical significance. Florimell

must run from Prince Arthur because he cannot yet obtain what she symbolizes; he must wait till his eventual unification with the Faerie Queen to achieve such glory.

As the text at the beginning of the canto implies, many characters in *The Faerie Queene* are allegorically significant in similar ways, and Florimell is no exception to this rule. She represents the chastity, beauty, and virtue that Gloriana also possesses. As Arthur rests from the chase, his thoughts imply the congruence of the two ladies:

> Oft did he wish, that Lady faire mote bee
> His Faery Queene, for whom he did complaine:
> Or that his Faery Queene were such, as shee.
> (Spenser III.iv.54)

In the text, Florimell and Gloriana are essentially the same person. Florimell does not distract Arthur; following her is a continuation of his path to honoring Gloriana. Paul J. Alpers explains: "Thus, for Arthur the quest for the beloved object and the pursuit of any desirable object are identical" (395). When Arthur pursues Florimell, he simultaneously chases after the Faerie Queen and her elusive glory.

The description of Florimell given in the next canto confirms this allegorical meaning:

> That Lady is (quoth he) where so she bee,

> The bountiest virgin, and most debonaire,
> That ever living eye I weene did see;
> Lives none this day, that may with her compare
> In stedfast chastitie and vertue rare.
> (Spenser III.V.8)

Significantly, her association with chastity relates Arthur's quest to that of Britomart, as they are both knights seeking chastity, albeit in different forms. Unlike in the previous two books, Arthur does not rescue the titular knight, but his pursuit of chastity instead reflects the similar activities of Britomart.

In addition to this, both Arthur and Britomart seek lovers that they have only seen in visions. Britomart sees Artegall in a vision and realizes that she must seek him; her quest for him symbolizes her devotion to chastity. Arthur similarly seeks Gloriana, who he has seen only in a vision. Their respective visions of their lovers reflect the similarities of their quests. Britomart quests:

> [T]o seek her louer (loue farre sought alas,)
> Whose image she had seene in *Venus* looking glas.
> (Spenser III.i.8)

When Britomart encounters this mirror, she sees:

> [A] comely knight, all arm'd in complet wize,
> Through whose bright ventayle lifted up on hye
> His manly face, that did his foes aggrize,
> And friends to termes of gentle truce entize. . .
> Achilles armes, which Arthegall did win.
> (Spenser III.ii.24-25)

Arthur does not see his lover in a mirror, but rather in a dream. He dreams that:

> [B]y my side a royall Mayd
> Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:
> So fair a creature yet saw neuer sunny day. . .
> And at her parting said,
> She Queen of Faeries hight. (Spenser I.ix.13-14)

Arthur sees a beautiful woman, while Britomart sees a handsome man. Once again, the physical appearances of characters reflect their inner morality. This aspect of Spenser's allegory appears in both Arthur's and Britomart's visions of their respective loves, but even with this congruence, the reader is still left with the problem of Arthur's inaction. He disappears midway through the third canto without having accomplished magnificent feats such as those in the first two books. Thomas P. Roche offers one explanation for Arthur's disappearance, stating that Spenser must utilize the relationship of Artegall and Britomart to symbolize Arthur's union with Gloriana because the latter would lead to a premature ending of the story:

> Literally, the marriage of Arthur and Gloriana would have been the union of a prince with his loved one after a number of marvelous adventures. Allegorically. . . the marriage becomes the fulfillment of the old order of British kings in the new Tudor monarchy. Tropologically, or morally, it means the union of virtue with glory, or for Spenser's purpose, the completion of the perfect gentleman. . . In this sense Arthur's marriage with Gloriana is the unification of

> England and Faeryland, of Elizabeth and Gloriana. (Roche 50)

It is also the end of the poem, with quite a few virtues left to cover. Florimell flees from Arthur as his union with Gloriana is indefinitely delayed, but the text needs a hint of the union that will eventually occur. The parallelism between Arthur and Britomart, as well as Arthur's relationship to Artegall (they are blood relatives) allows the text to suggest the eventual culmination of a marriage between Arthur and Gloriana through the unifications of Artegall and Britomart as well as Marinell and Florimell.

Arthur's disappearance in the third book can also be explained through the close relationship between Books III and IV. In *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*, Fowler proposes that Books III and IV connect closely in order to unite all of the books as a whole. Because three years passed in between the publications of Books I-III and IV-VI, it is tempting to view the books as two sets. However, Spenser is quite clear in the Letter to Raleigh that he desires *The Faerie Queene* to be experienced as one work. For this reason, Fowler asserts, Spenser continues the story of Book III into Book IV to prevent readers from seeing the two publications as separate works (Fowler 52).

The fact that the first three books deal with private virtues and the latter three deal with public virtues increases the need for unity among all six books. The flow from Book III to IV provides this connection and, additionally, helps to explain the place of Arthur in Book III.

Arthur disappears after Canto Six in Book III; this is the only book in which Arthur does not appear in the later cantos to aid the hero or heroes. While Arthur's finding of Gloriana is deliberately delayed throughout the poem, Britomart is the first knight to have her goal delayed with Arthur's. Unlike Redcross and Guyon, Britomart's virtue will not culminate in her book; rather, like Arthur, she must wait to unite with her love. The actions of the knights in Book IV similarly provide a thread that ties Books III and IV together.

Book IV begins with Britomart protecting the chastity and honor of Amoret and then Florimell, quests outside of her central journey to find and marry Artegall. Like Arthur, Britomart completes other honorable deeds on her journey. Arthur rescues Redcross and Guyon because his place as magnificence allows him to be superior in all virtues. Similarly, Britomart as chastity ensures that

this virtue is preserved in Florimell by dueling and overcoming the knights competing for the maiden's honor:

> So did the warlike *Britomart* restore
> The prize, to knights of Maydenhead that day,
> Which else was like to have bene lost, and bore
> The prayse of prowesse from them all away.
> (Spenser IV.iv.48)

Fortunately for Britomart, meeting the love from her vision will not be delayed for twelve books; she encounters Artegall in Canto VI of the book. Not only is Britomart amazed and bewildered by the unexpected meeting with her knight, but Artegall is also stunned by Britomart, who appears like a "heavenly goddess" (Spenser IV.vi.22). However, Britomart, as chastity, must save the virtue of Amoret before she can stay with Artegall, a delay once again echoing Arthur's seemingly endless side quests to ensure the virtue of others through his place as magnificence. Britomart states,

> I vow, you dead or living not to leave,
> Till her I find, and wreake on him that her did
> reave. (Spenser IV.vi.38)

As Britomart postpones her union with Artegall in order to ensure chastity in others, Arthur appears in the book, "seeking adventures" (Spenser IV.vii.42). As one would expect of magnificence, he helps others throughout the text to achieve virtue, specifically the title knights

of the book. In the ninth canto, Arthur helps to facilitate friendship, one of the public virtues, among several knights and other characters. The descriptive lines state “Prince Arthur stints their strife,” thereby facilitating friendship (Spenser IV.ix). Arthur, in fact, settles battles between two groups, a pair of lovers and a number of knights. Before Arthur encounters the knights, he first helps establish peace among the lovers:

> Thus when the Prince had perfectly compylde
> These paires of friends in peace and settled rest,
> Him self, whose minde did travel as with chylde,
> Of his old love, conceav’d in secret brest,
> Resolved to pursue his former quest.
> (Spenser IV.ix.17)

At this point, Prince Arthur intends to once again pursue Gloriana, but he must first ensure the safety of Amoret, who does not fear Arthur:

> [W]ho goodly learned had of yore
> The course of loose affection to forstall,
> And lawlesse lust to rule with reason lore.
> (Spenser IV.ix.18)

While Arthur has just facilitated the friendship focused on by Book IV, he also upholds the chastity of Book III. This further establishes the connection between the two books, as Arthur is practicing these two virtues specifically.

In the second encounter in the canto, Arthur helps a group of knights to understand one another and cooperate.

As magnificence, Arthur must help facilitate friendship in other knights because even though they may themselves be virtuous (as in the case of Britomart), they do not encompass the perfection every virtue as Arthur does. To convey his magnificence in relation to friendship, the text describes carefully Arthur's speech. He uses "gentle words" and "speeches mild" in order to "perswade to friendly peace" and "disswade from such foule outrage" (Spenser IV.ix.32-34). He accomplishes this by encouraging the knights to empathize with one another and to discuss their grievances: "He ment to make them know their follies prise" (Spenser IV.ix.35). In facilitating friendship through understanding, Arthur instills empathy in the knights that will allow them to practice the virtue of friendship even after Arthur departs.

Books V and VI

Book V focuses on the virtue of justice as embodied by Artegall and his iron man, Talus. While Book V resembles Books I and II in that Arthur assists the title knight in the eighth canto, Arthur's interaction with Artegall differs greatly from his experiences with Redcross and Guyon. Arthur does not rescue Artegall from peril; in fact, Britomart has the task of rescuing Artegall in this book, further drawing a parallel between her and Arthur that helps to explain his actions as mirroring Britomart in Books III and IV.

Arthur, however, does assist Artegall in his fight for justice, although he does it without rescuing the knight from peril. Instead, Arthur fights alongside Artegall. The short descriptions of cantos VIII and IX clearly exemplify that the two fight as equals:

> Prince Arthure and Sir Artegall,
> Free Samient from fear:
> They slay the Soudan, drive his wife,
> Adicia to despaire. (Spenser V.vii)

> Arthur and Artegall catch Guyle
> whom Talus doth dismay,
> They to Mercillaes pallace come,
> and see her rich array. (Spenser V.ix)

Arthur never has to come to the aid of a fallen and defeated Artegall; instead, the two mirror one another, although this mirroring differs from the parallels between Arthur and Britomart. While their adventures stretch across two books to set up the parallel, Arthur and Artegall mirror one another more directly. They fight together, as equals, in cantos eight and nine, and then the knights fight similar but separate battles in the latter cantos.

In cantos ten and eleven, Arthur defeats the Tyrant who has unjustly taken power from Belge. He fights honorably, and the poem predictably describes the ways that Arthur outwardly conveys his magnificence: “his armor bright,” “th’ Adamantine shield, which he did beare,” and “with shield so blazing bright” (Spenser V.xi.5,10,26). After he defeats his foe, Arthur leaves, and the next canto immediately turns to Artegall, relating the adventures of the two closely in the reader’s mind:

> And to his former journey him addrest,
> On which long way he rode, ne ever day did rest.
>
> But turne we now to noble Artegall;
> Who having left Mercilla, streight way went
> On his first quest, the which him forth did call.
> (Spenser V.xi.35-36)

By the final canto, Artegall slays his own monster in the name of justice. Both knights defeat a significant foe in a way that increases justice in the world. In this way, the text sets Arthur next to Artegall as an equal purveyor of justice. Both knights succeed in establishing justice in the world, Artegall because he is the embodiment of justice and Arthur because he is magnificence, which encompasses all virtue, including justice.

The relationship in Book VI between Calidore and Arthur resembles the events in Book V with a key difference: Arthur and Calidore do not fight together as Arthur and Artegall fought in cantos eight and nine. However, the poem sets up the two knights as equals in a way that elicits a comparison to the relationship between Arthur and Artegall, although the interaction between Arthur and Calidore is far more limited.

The description of Canto VIII reads as follows:

> Prince Arthure overcomes Disdaine,
> Quites Mirabell from dreed:
> Serena found of Salvages,
> By Calepine is freed. (Spenser VI.viii)

Two lines are devoted to each knight to explain what he does, and the actions parallel one another. Both Arthur and Calepine overcome a foe in order to free a lady in

distress. Nohrnberg describes this characteristic as a supreme form of chivalry, or courtesy:

> But beyond [the] requirements of the chivalric conception, there is the spirit of chivalry itself, and Calidore possessed this in a preeminent degree. There is a kind of overlap here, since both Calidore and the traditional Arthur are notable for their generous spirit. (667-8)

Both Arthur and Calepine perform their acts in order to defend those who are helpless and to further the presence of courtesy and chivalry in society. Not only do they perform the virtue, but, within the allegory, they are courtesy.

In Arthur's case, he acts with courtesy when he observes the plight of Mirabell and her squire:

> Abusde, against all reason and all law,
> Without regard of pitty or of awe.
> (Spenser VI.viii.6)

Calepine also comes across a scene that defies the conventions of courtesy; in his case, he sees Serena as a captive of Savages:

> At first they spoile her of her jewels dear,
> And afterwards of all her rich array. . .
> Now being naked, to their sordid eyes
> The goodly threasures of nature appeare:
> Which as they view with lustfull fantasyes,
> Each wisheth to him self, and to the rest enuyes.
> (Spenser VI.viii.41)

After rescuing Mirabell, Arthur disappears from the poem with these lines:

> But Arthure with the rest, went onward still
> On his first quest, in which did him betide
> A great adventure, which did him from them divide
>
> But first it falleth me by course to tell
> Of Faire Serena. . . (Spenser VI.viii.30-31)

The reader already knows that Calepine will rescue Serena, and so the end of Arthur's tale meets the beginning of Calepine's adventure in which the knight will similarly rescue a woman from a perilous situation. The change in subjects closely resembles the way that the story changed from Arthur to Artegall in Book V. Even the syntax is similar: "But turne we now" and "But first it falleth me by course to tell" each let the reader know that there will be a turn in the story. Narratively, Arthur's adventures occur directly before those of Calepine and Artegall, providing a clue as to what the knights will now accomplish. As individuals representing one of the many virtues encompassed in magnificence, Artegall and Calepine will have adventures that relate to Arthur's.

Conclusion

Upon careful reading of *The Faerie Queene*, Arthur's position in the story is not as contentious as many critics claim. Spenser's letter to Raleigh asserts the importance of Prince Arthur as magnificence, and the poem expresses his character as all-encompassing virtue throughout. He clearly portrays each of the six virtues contained in the title knights and reflects the virtue each individual portrays.

However, the problem in reading Arthur lies in the tendency to want Arthur to parallel each knight in the same way. After reading Books I and II, in which Arthur rescues the title knight and surpasses the virtue of both Redcross and Guyon, it can be difficult to clearly identify Arthur's purpose in Book III. He does, after all, disappear after the middle of the book and seemingly without accomplishing his typical magnificent deed. Nowhere in the letter to Raleigh does Spenser imply that Arthur will have the same place in each book, and it would be a less interesting poem if he did. In reading Books III and IV as a continuous story, the quests of both Arthur and Britomart resemble one

another clearly and assert the importance of chastity and friendship. Books V and VI break from this pattern, portraying Artegall and Calepine as more direct parallels to Arthur. Unlike Britomart, whose story and its relation to Arthur stretch across two books, Artegall and Calepine are portrayed as similar knights to Arthur in a very succinct way.

Spenser does not explain his reason for portraying Arthur's virtue in so many different ways. Allegorically, his use of Arthur to define magnificence would have been as clear, if not more so, if Prince Arthur had rescued each knight as he rescued Redcross and Guyon. Would this have been effective for Spenser's purpose in writing *The Faerie Queene*? As a strictly didactic allegory, the answer could be yes. However, the poem itself would be significantly less interesting. Spenser claims that "the generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (15). It seems unlikely that a dull and predictable poem would inspire anyone to read it, let alone to enact the virtues portrayed within it. In creating Prince Arthur as both an allegory for magnificence and as a character who behaves in interesting ways, Spenser increases the chance that a

reader may be inspired to act virtuously through admiration of the character of Prince Arthur.

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