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Abject Horror and the Renaissance Imagination: Plotting the Intersection of Human and Monster in Book I of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melissa Joy Rack
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For my beloved children: Jade, Caleb and Danae, whose belief in monsters, despite my insistence otherwise, persists.

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Abstract

The 16th century marked an explosion of interest in "true" accounts of monsters and monstrous births in early modern England. The fascination with grotesqueries and objects of wonder was a curious preoccupation of the learned elite of the Elizabethan court. The influence of early modern medical texts that anatomized such creatures, and historical chronicles that attempted to explain the "unnatural" aspects of the natural world, can be traced in Book I of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. This thesis is concerned with the way Spenser revises the characteristic tropes of these early modern texts to present monstrosity in his own distinct way. When these portraits are thrown into relief with Spenser's monsters, we see the poet's unique manipulation of the cultural notions presented in these texts. The following chapters plot moments in Book I when the tropes of these texts are revised with the intention of portraying an essential state of horror within the subject. This horror is a psychological phenomenon that occurs at the intersection of human and monster, as the subject is overcome or "infected" by monstrous vice and the boundaries between self and object, interior and exterior, seem to collapse. Julia Kristeva terms this state of horror *abjection.* She writes that the abjection of self "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within" (5). This moment is critical to the journey of the heroic subject in *The Faerie Queene* and essential to the fashioning of virtue, the poet's professed intention, as the representation of the moment of virtue's collapse allows the poet to reinvent and redefine a true virtue that resists the deceit of the fallen world.

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Introduction

In 1559, Pierre Boaistuau prepared an elaborate dedication copy of his influential *Histoires prodigieuses* for Elizabeth I.[1] The volume was a history in the traditional sense and a narrative of "true" accounts of monsters, creatures whose physical anomalies were objects of fascination among the learned elite in Renaissance Europe. Included in Boaistuau's volume was the famous Krakow monster, reportedly born in the 1540's. The accompanying woodcut shows a creature with additional heads on the joints of its arms and legs, a long forked tail, claws, and a curving, serpentine nose. (See figure i). Boaistuau sought explanation for the monster's origins and suggested that its existence illustrated the truth of the notion that demons could reproduce by human means. Thus he underscores Judeo-Christian ideology as he aligns the monstrous with the forces of the devil, while at the same time clearly defining the monster's form as antithetical to virtue. The birth of a monster in the Renaissance was often said to be the result of human intercourse with demons or other beings. This notion is fully explicated in a number of early modern texts, most notably French surgeon Ambroise Paré's essay "How Demons can Deceive Us."[2] Historians have documented the way the Krakow monster's depiction recalls the conventional iconography of demons, which are similarly portrayed with heads on their joints (Daston and Park 185). While we can only speculate as to Elizabeth's attention to Boaistuau's volume, the existence of this dedicatory copy suggests that the proliferation of these accounts in early modern Europe and the public's obsession with these marvels can be directly linked to the Elizabethan court.

[1] Boaistuau, according to Daston and Park, prepared a "splendid dedication copy" specifically for Elizabeth's use. See Daston and Park, p.185.
[2] See Chapter II

In this thesis, I will show how these "monstrous" texts comprise the context for Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. When these portraits of monsters are thrown into relief with Spenser's monsters, we see the poet's re-vision of these cultural notions of monstrosity. Julia Kristeva's theory of *abjection* is essential to understanding the difference between the way these monsters are literally abjected from society's moral center and the way Spenser manipulates the tropes of these portraits to portray a significant state of horror within the heroic subject. This horror is a psychological phenomenon that occurs as previously assumed boundaries essential to the formation of the psyche seem to collapse; boundaries between self and object, interior and exterior, *I* and Other. This collapse occurs at significant moments in the text when the subject succumbs to the vice that the monster represents, as he is "infected" by vice and "finds the impossible within" (Kristeva 8). Spenser revises the way these monsters are presented in early modern natural philosophy in order to illuminate the moment when the subject loses his way. This crisis, this moment of abjection, is critical to the journey of the heroic subject and essential to the fashioning of virtue, the poet's professed intention, since previously assumed boundaries of meaning, for Spenser, must be erased in order to reinvent and redefine a true virtue that resists the deceit of the fallen world.

To undertake the plotting of these moments in Spenser's text and uncover their significance in regards to the poet's professed intention, it is important first to examine the legacy of the monstrous and the way Renaissance rhetors attempted to explain, marginalize, and abject these creatures from the moral center of society. First it is helpful to write of the abject in a literal or what can be called a *social* sense. When using the term abject *literally*, one speaks of a casting out which debases. To abject (v.) is to exclude, to

reject. When you abject someone or something, you throw them (or it) away as if it were a kind of noisome refuse. The abjected is thrust outside of normative culture, and debased as it is excluded. My interpretation of abject in the *social* sense is etymological:

> **1.** To cast off, throw off or away, cast out, exclude, reject, *lit.* and *fig.*; generally, though not always, as inferior, unworthy, or vile, and hence passing into the idea of casting down, degrading. **2.** To cast or throw down; hence *fig.* to lower, degrade, abase, debase. (*OED*)

An understanding of the social abjection of these creatures illuminates the function of these historical records of "monsters" and "monstrous births" in early modern Europe. For such purposes, it is possible to view the function of these socially abjected creatures as texts that bolster a collective fear of societal ills. These texts display the Otherness of these "real" 16th century monsters in order to define acceptable moral norms vis-à-vis physical form. As these monstrous anomalies of the body are defined and explained, the vice which the monster signifies is cast out or excluded. The social (literal) abject demarcates the normative from the anomalous, both physical and moral, the corporeal as a symptom of immorality.

The Ravenna monster, like the Krakow monster, is another example of a creature that is abjected from society through rhetorical display and manipulation. Its birth is a famous account from the early sixteenth century with a complex and influential iconographical history (see figure ii). In March of 1512, a Florentine apothecary by the name of Luca Landucci made this entry in his diary:

> We heard that a monster had been born in Ravenna, of which a drawing was sent here; it had a horn on its head, straight up like a sword, and instead of arms it had

> two wings like a bat's, and at the height of the breasts it had a *fio* [Y-shaped mark] on one side and a cross on the other, and lower down at the waist, two serpents, and it was born a hermaphrodite, and on the right knee it had an eye, and its left foot was like an eagle's. I saw it painted, and anyone who wished could see this painting in Florence. (Daston and Park 176)

The attention to detail Landucci portrays here is an attempt to "read" the monstrous form. He is undoubtedly responding to a medieval tradition of monsters as composite figures in which various body parts are anatomized and inscribed with symbolism, and each part or symbol is said to signify a particular social symptom. The sacking of Ravenna by a coalition of papal, Spanish and French troops occurred eighteen days later, and Landucci's response tells of yet another common way of "reading" these monsters: as portents symbolizing impending military or natural disaster. Landucci's entry clearly indicates the portentous nature of such creatures:

> [These troops] took Ravenna and sacked it, being guilty of many cruelties . . . It was evident what evil the monster had meant for them! It seems as if some great misfortune always befalls the city where such things are born; the same thing happened at Volterra, which was sacked a short time after a similar monster had been born there.[3]

Both the Ravenna and Volterra monsters provide exemplars of monstrous portents, of the Renaissance notion that monsters signified impending doom. The power of the monster's portentous nature combined with the inexplicability of its existence, made the manipulation of the monstrous form a powerful weapon for religious reformers. The

[3] Daston and Park, p.177

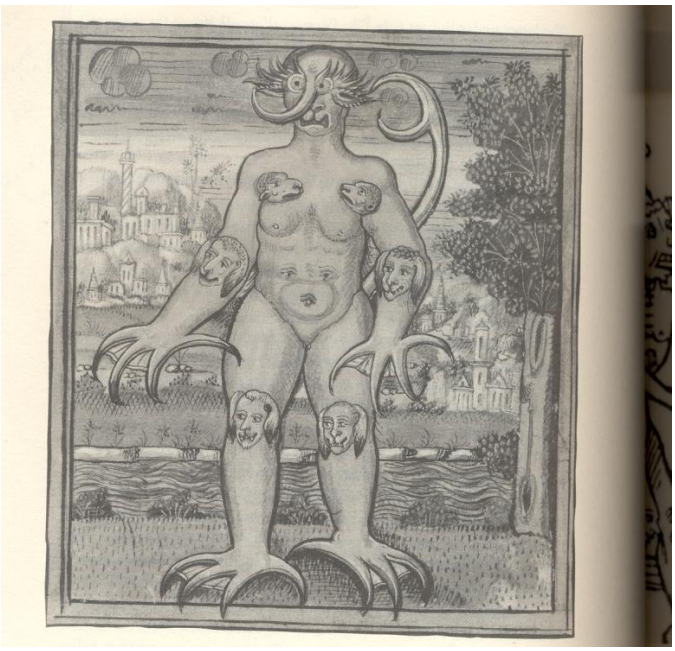


Figure i

This portrait of the famous Krakow monster is a miniature taken from the dedication copy that Boaistuau prepared for Elizabeth I. From Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, p. 185

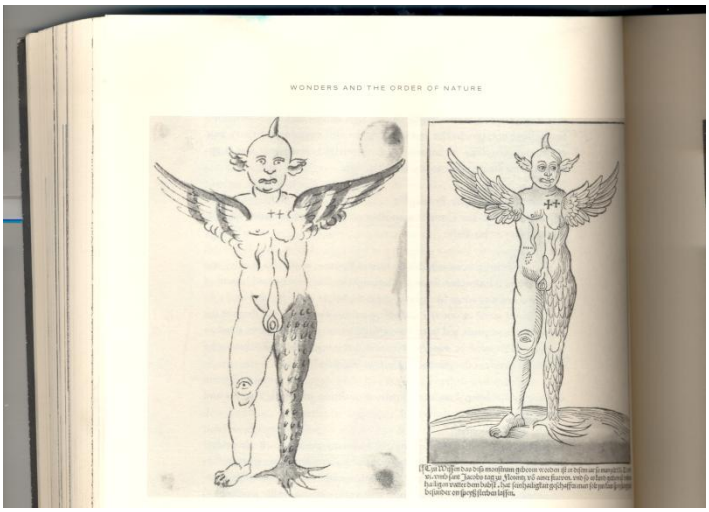


Figure ii

Two portraits of the Ravenna monster taken from the diary of Marino Sanudo, MS Marc. It. VII.234 (=9221), fol. 179v, Biblioteca Marciana, Venice. In Daston and Park, p. 178

vision of these monsters seemed to incite in early modern audiences not only fear, but also fascination, a longing for the ability to make sense of these creatures.

The Reformation provided the ideal environment for rhetoricians to exploit the fear incited by such monstrous anomalies. Protestant reformers asserted that God had sent such creatures as a warning against earthly depravity. As these monstrous bodies were "read" or allegorized in this way, the rhetoric of the monstrous body was manipulated by its chronicler for didactic purposes. In a 1523 Wittenberg pamphlet, *Duettung der cwzo grewlichen Figuren, Bapstesels czu Rom und Munchkalbs zu Freijberg ijnn Meijsszen funden,* Luther and Melanchthon used woodcuts by Lucas Cranach the Elder of recent monstrous births to illustrate papal corruption. The Pope-Ass, an upright, solemn and decidedly female figure (depicted with breasts and a protruding stomach) covered with scales, is shown with the head of an ass, one cloven hoof, one clawed, bird-like foot, and an additional monstrous head protruding from each buttock (see figure iii). Reportedly found dead in the Tiber in 1496, Melanchthon asserts that the Pope-Ass's numerous deformities indicate the "multiple and monstrous corruptions of the Roman papacy" (Daston and Park 188). This monster belongs to a genre of allegorized creatures that are linked to the Ravenna monster (188). Similarly, the Monk-Calf, a calf born outside Freiberg, was characterized by a mantle of skin which resembled a cowl, and was used by Luther to illustrate that the monastic state was "nothing other than a false and lying appearance and outward display of holy, godly life" (see figure iii).[4]

Conversely, early modern medical texts sought not to exploit the fear of monsters,

[4] Luther qtd. in Daston and Park, p.188

Figure iii

The monk-calf (right) and the Pope-ass (left). Lucas Cranach the Elder, illustrations for Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, *Deuttung der czwo grewlichen Figuren, Baptstesels czu Rom und Munchkalbs zu Freijberg ijnn Meijsszen funden* (Wittenberg, 1523) From Daston and Park, p.188

but rather to master the unknown through taxonomy. Physicians and surgeons classified such creatures into distinct empirical categories as they theorized both moral and physiological reasons for their existence. These "medical" writers include the surgeon Jakob Rueff, whose *De conceptu et generatione hominis, et iis quiae circa haec potissimum considerantur* (1554) chronicles the early modern attempt to demystify the process of childbirth; Fortunio Liceti, whose medical treatise detailed the types and causes of monsters; and Ambroise Paré's vernacular "Des Monstres et prodiges" perhaps the most comprehensive examination of monstrous phenomena at this time. Although it was technically a medical treatise, Paré's work was widely read, as its availability in the vernacular extended its audience beyond the borders of the medical community. Paré himself straddled these borders, as surgeons were considered laymen, and excluded from the elite group of physicians which comprised the faculty of medicine in early modern France.

Paré groups monsters into distinct categories according to his understanding of their cause. Thus, we are given "An Example of the Wrath of God," "An Example of Too Great a Quantity of Seed," and "An Example of Monsters Who Are Created, the Mother Having Received Some Blow or Fall, Being Great with Child" among others.[5] Imagination is purported to be a cause of monstrosity, as is intercourse with demons, narrowness of the womb, or "Wicked Spital Beggers" seeking fame. Specialized medical writings during this time were characterized by a theorizing of causality. Three kinds of monsters figured most prominently in these texts:

> those interpreted as the result of an excess or defect of matter (for example, giants, dwarfs, conjoined twins, people with missing or supernumerary limbs);

[5] Pallister's translation.

> those produced by the mother's imagination (for example, hairy children); and those caused when the contributions of mother and father were almost evenly balanced (hermaphrodites and people of unstable sex). Hybrid monsters seen as springing from the intercourse of human and animals- though there was debated as to whether this was possible – had a somewhat different status, as the behavior that gave rise to them was itself abhorrent. The resulting monster, even if not the product of special divine intervention, was nonetheless a sign of sin. (Daston and Park 192)

While these accounts specify individual sin, the rhetoric of these texts displays these monsters as "lessons" intended to further the moral health of society, and they identify a social *fear* incited by the intermingling of these defined categories of human and monster and the similar commingling of human and beast. Furthermore, these early modern accounts assert the facticity of monstrous potential at the center of society. They display a mastery over these creatures as they are rhetorically anatomized. This mastery is necessary to ensure that monsters are socially abjected, or thrust from the ideological center.

Recent work on monstrosity has similarly concerned itself with the complex response these monsters incited in early modern audiences. However, historians like Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston, whose work provides perhaps the most complete account of the progression of these monster texts from the medieval period through the Enlightenment, do not seek to explain the public's fear of such creatures and the role that the apparent fascination plays in defusing this fear, but are instead concerned with relating the public's fascination to the evolution of natural philosophy. Their work is

significant not only for its capaciousness, but because they deal with the *affect* these stories provoke. It is only in an examination of the way these texts influenced Renaissance minds that we can begin to understand the psychological power of such creatures. Daston and Park's book seeks to elucidate this fascination, as it is concerned with changing ideas or "sensibilities" during these historical periods. These sensibilities involve and include the emotion of *wonder*, and they seek to define and describe the prevalence of this emotion, particularly among naturalists in the circles of the intellectual elite.

Late medieval and Renaissance natural philosophers view the emotion of wonder: 1) as a prelude to divine contemplation; 2) a shameful admission of guilt or ignorance; 3) an experience of cowardice in the face of the unknown; or 4) an energetic dive into investigation. Tracing the evolving etymology of the word *wonder*, Daston and Park assert that the multiplication and refinement of the vocabulary of wonder in the early modern period indicates the prominence of the passion at that time. An object often becomes the catalyst for wonder when its meaning is reassessed or a previously veiled characteristic is revealed. They show the way in which philosophers use marvels to "break up familiarities" (Foucault qtd. Daston and Park 18). Furthermore, they suggest that the root of the monster's horror lies in the way it manifests collective sin:

> Because such catastrophes were communal, Christians usually interpreted monsters as signaling not individual but collective sin; it is for this reason that they rarely blamed the monster's parents, still less the monster itself. The horror of the monster was thus manifold, directed at the precipitating state of sin, its impending punishment, and the monster that served as a sign of both. (181)

While the absolution of the parents in this schema seems reductive, as a number of these early modern texts reveal a significant concern with the parents' vice, these historians aptly configure the monstrous body as a text of Otherness that is manipulated to construct and define meaning in a time of social upheaval. This societal fascination that Daston and Park call *wonder* is a simultaneous repulsion and attraction brought on by images of the socially abjected. What must be understood beyond the limit of their analysis, however, is that this fascination is re-presented as a psychological phenomenon in Spenser's text, as he portrays the *horror* of a similar monstrous image, an image which is confined to the individual experience and conversely defined by its potential to disrupt categories and defy classification.

While Daston and Park are concerned with the fascination with monstrosity among the learned elite, Julie Crawford suggests that the widespread availability of the numerous broadsheets, ballads and pamphlets published between the 1560's and the 1660's reveals that the audience of these monster texts can be expanded to include "popular culture." She specifically relates the popularity of monsters to theological reform and argues that these monstrous narratives are tales of divine repercussion that creatively re-imagine particular social and religious debates. In these narratives, the monstrous body is rhetorically anatomized and reveals the crimes that its very existence punishes.

While Crawford's work is distinct in its concern with Reformation rhetoric, it is critical in establishing not only the significance of these texts to sixteenth century culture, but in providing numerous examples of the way the fear of the monstrous body was exploited for rhetorical means. This rhetorical "mastery" of the monstrous is an attempt

to construct boundaries essential to the functioning of societal norms, since such mastery relegates the monstrous to the category of the Other. As these texts assert the knowledge of the unknowable, the fear of the monster is overcome. In becoming a rhetorical puppet, the monster's form is de-monstered, so to speak, or defused of its power to horrify. By contrast, this thesis will show the way that Spenser's text recuperates the monstrous by re-infusing the monster with the potential to disrupt boundaries and systems of order.

While natural philosophical texts attempt to "master" and thus de-monster the monstrous form through rhetorical manipulation, Spenser makes use of the tropes of these monster texts to show a significant crisis in the subjective experience. He seizes on the different ways of defining the monstrous – as generative, something that issues forth from the female form, as a product of intercourse between witches or sorcerors and demons, and as a metaphor for something horrific in human experience – in order to show the horror the subject realizes as he becomes "infected" by vice. This emotion of horror is what defines the moment when human and monster intertwine. Julia Kristeva's theory of *abjection* is particularly useful in illuminating the psychology behind these moments of horror.

Kristeva, in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, complicates the epistemological or *social* abject by speaking of the psychological state of abjection as a phenomenon of horror. This state of abjection is horrifying because it reveals a collapse of definitive categories of symbolic meaning or boundaries essential to the distinct identification of self: subject and object, self and Other, human and monster, inside and outside. In this moment, the subject's previous methods of identifying the self as distinct from the Other seem to collapse. As the monstrous Other is found to constitute part of the

subject's very being, as he is confronted with a multiplication of contradictory signifiers (human / monster, self / Other), he is powerless to identify with anything on the inside or outside. This is the moment of *abjection.* The abject is neither subject nor object. The abjected self experiences "one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, because it cannot be assimilated" (1). The subject cannot "assimilate" the monstrous, although he finds it has "infected" him, because doing so would mean reconciling two antitheses. Thus, the abjection of self "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject; one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject" (5).

Abjection is a breaking down of the boundaries of inside and outside. As the body comes to signify the self for the subject, what is outside the body signifies what is distinct from the self. Thus, breaching the boundaries of the body breaks down this binary opposition between self and Other. Food repulsion is, according to Kristeva, one of the most primal forms of abjection. We experience nausea and a gagging sensation at the sight of what is considered improper or unclean, such as excrement, spoiled food, or the skin-like surface on a glass of milk. In this process of revulsion, we attempt to identify what is improper or unclean as something separate from ourselves, something that we cannot assimilate or accept (because of its repugnant nature) as part of our own bodies.

Kristeva writes, "But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their[6] desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*. That trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that *they* see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death" (3)

The corpse is a similar instance of abjection in that its very form reminds us of the boundaries of our existence. As the body is a signifier for the living, speaking being (or more than a signifier, something that *shows* life), the inanimate body signifies (or *shows*) both the life of that being and its death; it inhabits the liminal space between living and dying:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death . . . No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show* me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

The human form, which in life *shows* or displays the self, the *I* that we see in the mirror, in death loses that signification. Kristeva writes, "in that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (4).

[6] "Their" and "they" in this formulation refer to the mother and father who offer the milk.

The abjection of self is marked by helplessness and a loss of the boundaries established by signification (or the law of the father), boundaries which provide the subject with a means of constructing and controlling the *I*. The abject is helpless precisely because he has lost all means of defining his existence. The obliteration of meaning returns the subject to a primal state that existed before language, beyond the complacency of *narcissism*, near to what Lacan has named the elusive *Real*. Kristeva writes, "abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (10). This return to the *precondition of narcissism* is marked both by want and a permeating sense of loss. The horror of abjection is a loss of self or death of self that engenders a new and frightening image.

This image, in Spenser's text, occurs when the heroic subject and the monster intertwine, as boundaries of the body are breached, as the subject is represented as an image of death and characterized by helplessness and defeat. As Redcrosse knight encounters the monster and becomes infected with the vice that the monster signifies, he finds that monstrosity is part of his very being. This moment of defeat provides Spenser with the opportunity to rebuild, reconstruct and redefine virtue on *his* terms. It is a necessary state for both the psychological journey of "fashioning" and the poet's aesthetic quest. Kristeva writes:

> In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task – a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct – amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless "primacy" constituted by

> primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, "subject" and "object" push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.(Kristeva 18)

Thus, in the representation of the abject, the poet or writer must re-examine and expose not only the binaries constructed by signification (self / Other, human / monster, virtue / vice) but their fragility, the slippage between them and the way they confront and disrupt each other.

This obliteration and reconstruction of the categories of meaning that define selfhood is complicated by the continual fluctuation of the notion of identity in the *Faerie Queene*. It is reductive to suggest that there is only one single formulation of self in Spenser's text. Rather, the notion of identity varies from book to book and works to fulfill the poet's predetermined end. The end result of the subjective experience in the *Faerie Queene* is of course the fulfillment of the virtue for which each character is named. Critics such as Stephen Greenblatt assert that we should not over-value the subjective experience in Spenser's text, because the poet's intention is not fulfilled "in the intensity of subjective experience but in its moral meaning and hence in its end" (*SE* 386). Greenblatt asserts that identity is a given in the *Faerie Queene*. The hero's quest is to fulfill his name:

> In the most complex instances in the poem, characters seem to achieve their names through long trial and adventures – hence Redcrosse learns his name, George, only near the end of his quest – but here, too, the name already exists as the true essence of his character; and the hero's experiences, though necessary, do

> not actually create an identity which has already been, as Contemplation says, 'ordaind.' As Contemplation's language suggests, this conception of identity is bound up with a theology that at once demands vigorous human action and regards the outcome of that action as already determined. (*SE* 387)

Greenblatt's observation is apt, as it points to the evidence for the Calvinist philosophy of predetermination in Spenser's text. However, I would assert that defining the "true essence" of character is indeed an integral part of the journey of the heroic subject. In Spenser's project, the explication of character extends beyond the flat, one-dimensional association of name with definition that allegory demands. We know that Redcrosse will be holy, Guyon will be temperate, and Britomart will be chaste. However, as readers we cannot deny that the great delight of Spenser's text is the heroic quest to expel and vanquish vice and preserve and fashion virtue. Neither can we deny Spenser's attention to the unique fashioning of virtue on the individual level, particularly because Redcrosse (who Greenblatt asserts is always already George) suffers a number of non-heroic moments of defeat from which he barely escapes.

Spenser reveals the psychological repercussions of the subject's entanglement with vice at particular moments in Book I in which the human and the monster "intersect." This thesis will locate these moments and place them side by side with early modern accounts of monsters in order to examine Spenser's revision of the cultural notions of monstrosity presented in these texts. Two very different genres will be considered: the medical treatises of French surgeon Ambroise Paré and the historical chronicles of Pierre Boaistuau. When the moments or "images" in Spenser that allegorize human entanglement with vice are thrown into relief with these early modern portraits of

monstrosity, Spenser's focus on the individual experience and the necessity of reframing the way the subject sees himself in relation to both virtue and vice becomes evident.

Chapter I will focus on the way the hermaphroditic form that Paré seeks to explain and classify in his essay "On Hermaphrodites" resists the surgeon's attempts at aesthetic mastery. A particular "type" of hermaphrodite emerges from the four that he names, a monster that requires social sanctions to restrain its lascivious and generative potential. The frightening generative potential of such creatures is amplified in the moment that Redcrosse is caught in Errour's "endless traine." In this moment, the subject experiences a loss of self that is critical to the journey of the believer in the schema of Calvinist theology. Chapter II will show how the "misshapen nether partes" of the witch Duessa engender a "death of self" that collapses or "castrates" the illusion of human agency and reveals the tainted nature of the believer's "workes." Paré's essay "How demons can deceive us" details the early modern conception of witches that Spenser is drawing from in his portrait of Duessa. Similarly, Boaistuau's account of the plight of Margareta Wulczer, who carried a child dead within her belly for five years, sheds light on the womb / tomb formulation that is significant in explaining Redcrosse's encounter with the lascivious witch. Chapter III is concerned with the idea of the monstrous as a metaphor for something horrific in human experience. Boaistuau's essay "A Wonderfull Historie of Crueltie" explains how the monstrous nature of humanity is an integral part of the history of mankind and how such monstrosity is aligned with the forces of hell. As Redcrosse imagines hell in light of the monstrous nature of humanity, he succumbs to the particular type of death that Despair offers him: death as annihilation, as an end of being.

Chapter I

"Errour's endlesse traine"

A regal soul, inadvertently surrendering to the crab of lust, the octopus of weakmindedness, the shark of individual abjection, the boa of absent morality, and the monstrous snail of idiocracy!

Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*

French surgeon Ambroise Paré recorded the curious phenomenon of the hermaphrodite in his 1585 *Les Oeuvres,* in an essay entitled "Des monstres et prodiges." Perhaps the most unusual of Pare's writings, the essay focuses on aberrations of the human body and the natural world. The straightforward title of the chapter on hermaphrodites, "Des hermafrodites, ou Androgynes, c'est à dire, qu'en un mesme corps et trouvé deux sexes"[7] presents the first of a number of definitions that the surgeon provides for such creatures. The primary focus of the essay is definition and explication:

> Hermaphrodites or androgynes are children who are born with double genitalia, one masculine and the other feminine, and as a result are called in our French language "hommes et femmes" [men-and-women]. (Androgyne in Greek means man and woman, and woman and man) (Pallister 26)

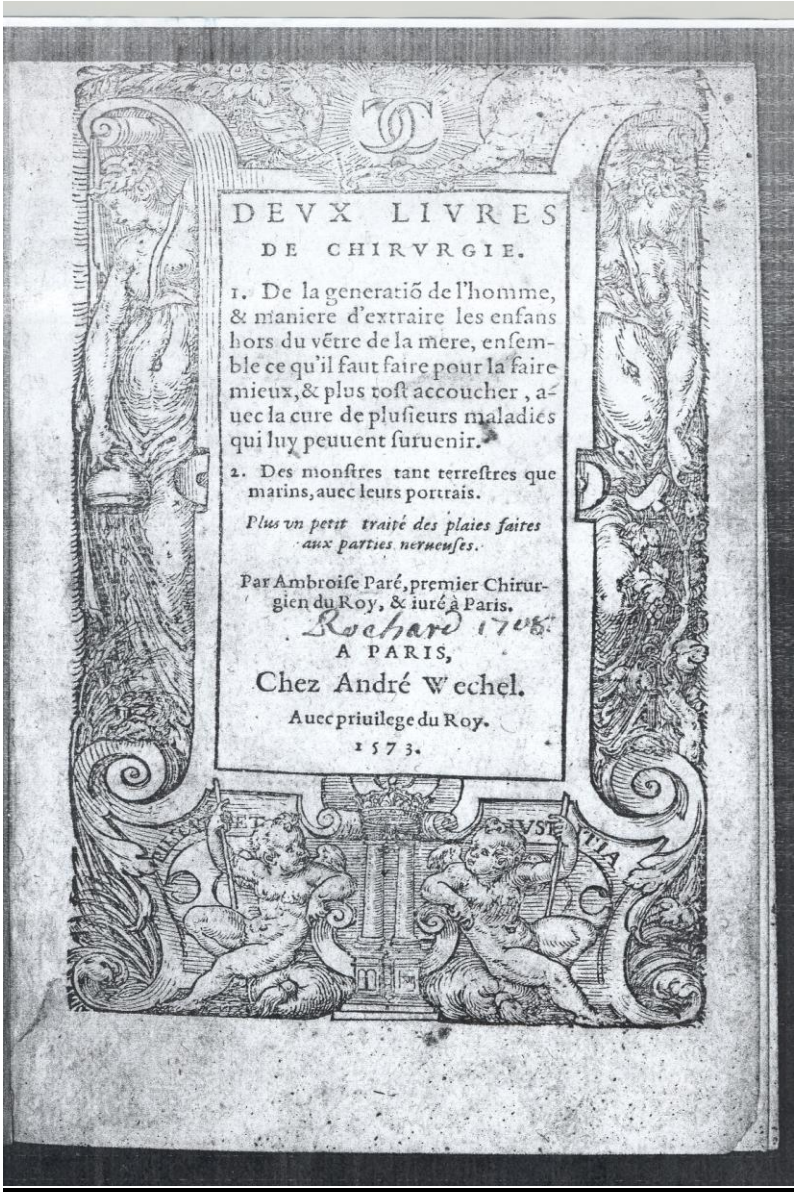
Although at times a philosopher, a moralist and a "demonologist who displays a fundamentally Christian attitude," Paré is above all an anatomist who seeks a rational explanation for anomalies of the natural world (Pallister xv). While early translations of Paré's *Les Ouevres* were made from the extremely faulty Latin translation of Jacques Guillemeau, a surgeon and former student of Paré's (see figures I.i, I.ii and I.iii), the

[7] Of the hermaphrodites, or the androgynous, that is to say, those who have in the same body two sexes. All translations of Paré's text are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

work was curiously not translated from the original French into English until1982, when Janis Pallister compiled a precise translation that perhaps is most reflective of the surgeon's style and intention. Pallister writes that "Paré's essential focus is on the architecture – the infinitely varied shapes and sizes – of nature, its engineering, especially as regards mechanics and anatomy, its order (the normal), and its accidental anomalies and disorders, including unusual size and proportion, irregularity, and rare or strange phenomena" (xv).

In his exhaustive study of the hermaphroditic form, Paré records a distinct social fear incited by the monster's form, a fear caused by both the unknowability of a definitive gender and the creature's defiance of what was considered sexually normative. While Paré attempts to overcome the monster's threat through classification (his essay divides the hermaphroditic form into four distinct categories), a singular "type" emerges from this group that seems to resist aesthetic mastery (see figure iv):

> Male-and-female hermaphrodites are those who have both sets of sexual organs well-formed, and they can help and be used in reproduction; and both the ancient and modern laws have obliged and still oblige these latter to choose which sex organs they wish to use, and they are forbidden on pain of death to use any but those they will have chosen, on account of the misfortunes that could result from such. For some of them have abused their situation, with the result that, through mutual and reciprocal use, they take their pleasure first with one set of sex organs and then with the other: first with those of a man, then with those of a woman, because they have the *natures* of man and of woman suitable to such an act. (Pallister 27).



DEVX LIVRES
DE CHIRVRGIE.

1. De la generatiõ de l'homme, & maniere d'extraire les enfans hors du vẽtre de la mere, ensemble ce qu'il faut faire pour la faire mieux, & plus tost accoucher, auec la cure de plusieurs maladies qui luy peuuent suruenir.

2. Des monstres tant terrestres que marins, auec leurs portrais.

Plus vn petit traité des plaies faites aux parties nerueuses.

Par Ambroise Paré, premier Chirurgien du Roy, & iuré à Paris.

Rochare 1708

A PARIS,
Chez André Wechel.
Auec priuilege du Roy.
1573.

Figure I.i

This is the title page of an early abridged "pocket" version of Paré's account of the hermaphrodite (1573) that was apparently owned in the early 18th century by someone named "Rochare" (as the inscription reads). The book was written at the request of the Duke d'Uzès, and is a work concerned with human reproduction. The size attests to its value as a medical manual. A surgeon could carry such a book with him in his pocket or medical bag. This book was published prior to Paré's *Les Oeuvres*, which did not appear until 1575. The text reads: "Of the genesis of man, and the way of extracting children out of the mother's belly. Together with what must be done to make her better[8] and rather deliver her from the cure of some diseases that could happen to her. Monsters terrestrial as well as marine with their portraits. Plus a short treatise of wounds made to the nervous parts. By Ambroise Paré, first surgeon to the king and the jurisdiction of Paris."

[8] Could possibly mean "To make it better," referring to the birth process rather than the mother.

LES
OEVVRES
d'Ambroise Paré,
CONSEILLER, ET
PREMIER CHIRVR-
GIEN DV ROY.

Diuisees en vingt huict Liures,

Auec les figures & portraicts, tant de l'Anatomie, que des instruments de Chirurgie, & de plusieurs Monstres.

Reueuës & augmentees par l'Autheur.

Quatriesme Edition.

A PARIS,
Chez Gabriel Buon.
1585.
Auec Priuilege du Roy.

Figure I.ii

The 1585 version of *Les Oeuvres*, within which is contained the hermaphrodite essay. This was the last version published in Paré's lifetime

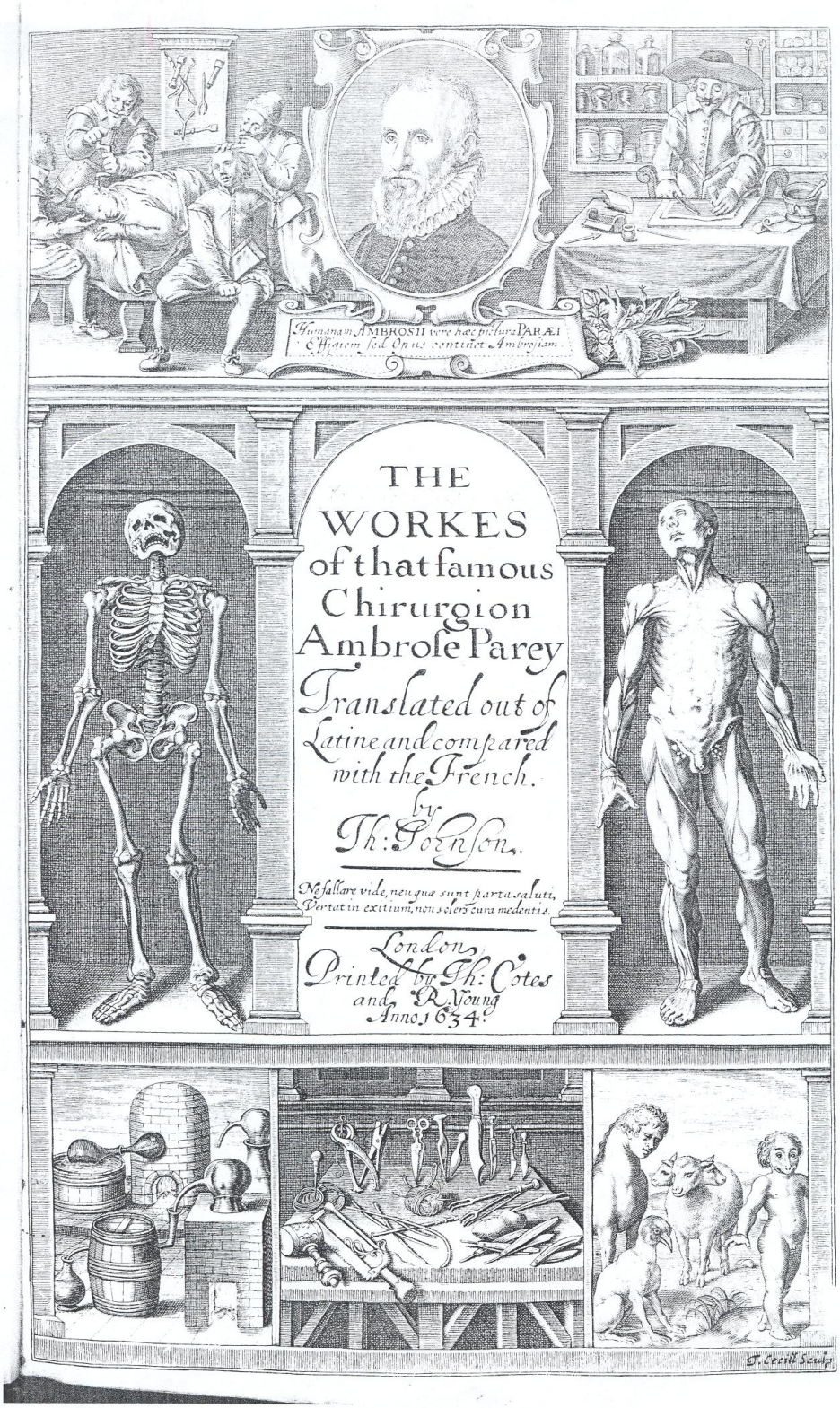


Figure I.iii

The first edition of *Les Oeuvres* published in English (1634). The author's portrait appears at the top center.

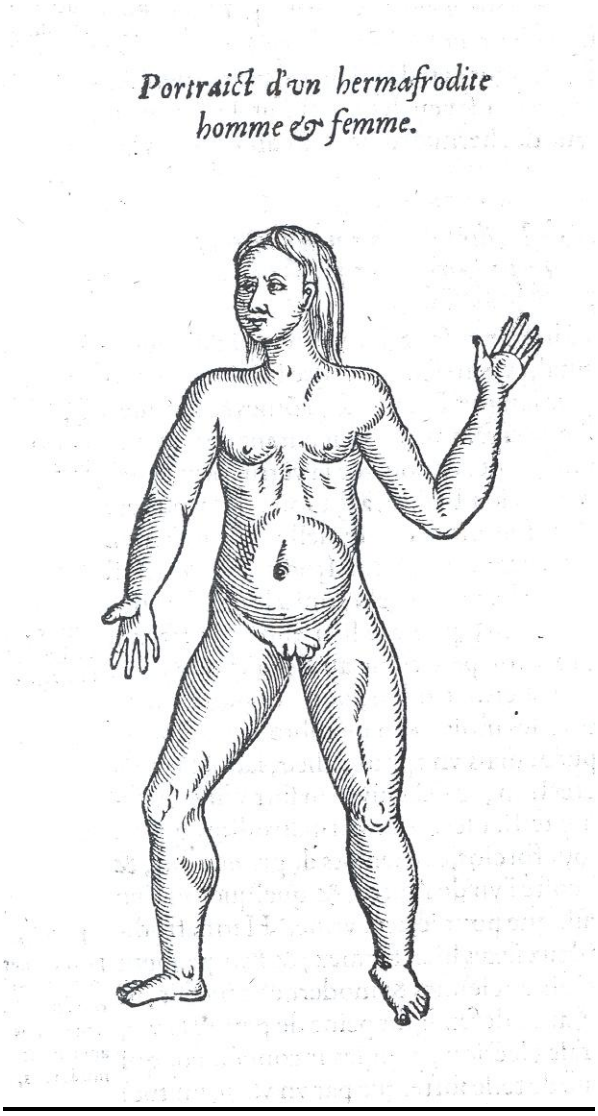


Figure I.iv

The portrait of the hermaphroditic type *masles et femelles* that appears in both the 1575 and 1585 editions.

Social sanctions are required to minimize "the misfortunes that could result" from the lascivious acts of such creatures, acts which have the potential to engender distortions of the sexually normative. While vast speculation can certainly be made as to what the surgeon meant by "misfortunes" (whether pregnancy, the temptation of virtuous people into lascivious acts, incidents of mistaken gender, etc.), here he appears to be concerned with the *natures* which contribute to such acts, and by *natures,* Paré means functional reproductive potential.

The meaning of *natures* becomes clear in Paré's definition of the three other types of hermaphrodites, the ones whose forms harbor little social threat and thus do not require legal sanctions. These types, although not explicitly labeled as to their category, appear in the woodcuts which vary in each edition of the essay (see figure I.v, I.vi, I.vii). The anomalies of these other types are purely aesthetic: 1) the female hermaphrodite, whose female reproductive organs alone are fully functional; 2) the male hermaphrodite, whose male reproductive organ is the singular functional one, and 3) the "neither one nor the other" hermaphrodite, who possesses the nonfunctional organs of both sexes. These types are static and non-threatening, as they are easily grouped into a gender category and can either be called *homme, femme* or asexual: "If the sexual organs of the hermaphrodite are more like those of a man than of a woman, he is to be called a man; and the same will be true for a woman. And if the hermaphrodite is as much like one as another, he will be called a hermaphrodite, or a 'man-and-woman'" (Pallister 30). As the surgeon's concern is with the function of the sexual organs, "more like" comes to mean "capable of reproduction" in terms of Pare's four categories. Thus, the *hermafrodites masles & femelles* (see figure I.viii) is the third gender in this schema and is marked by a

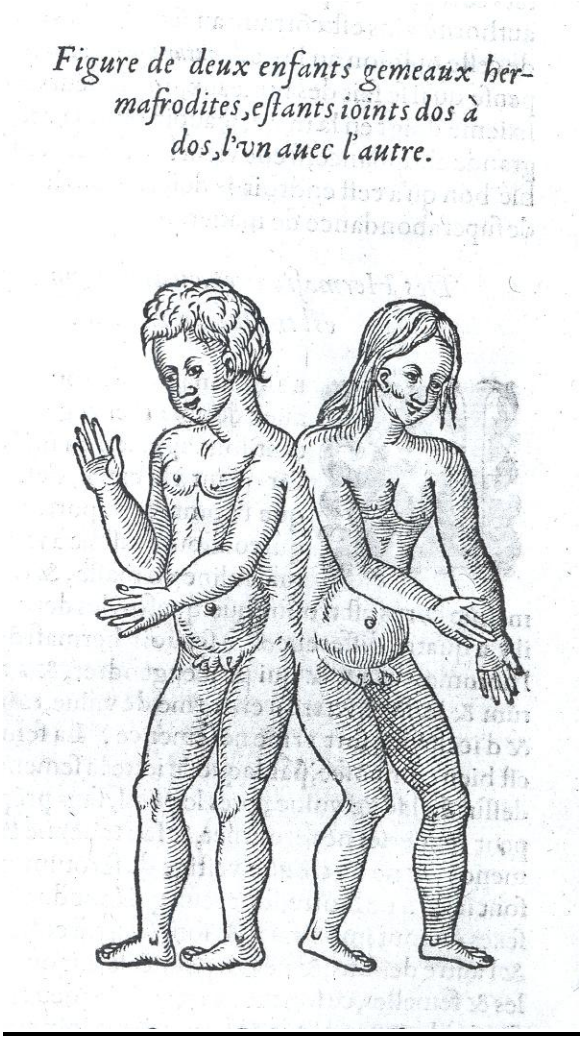
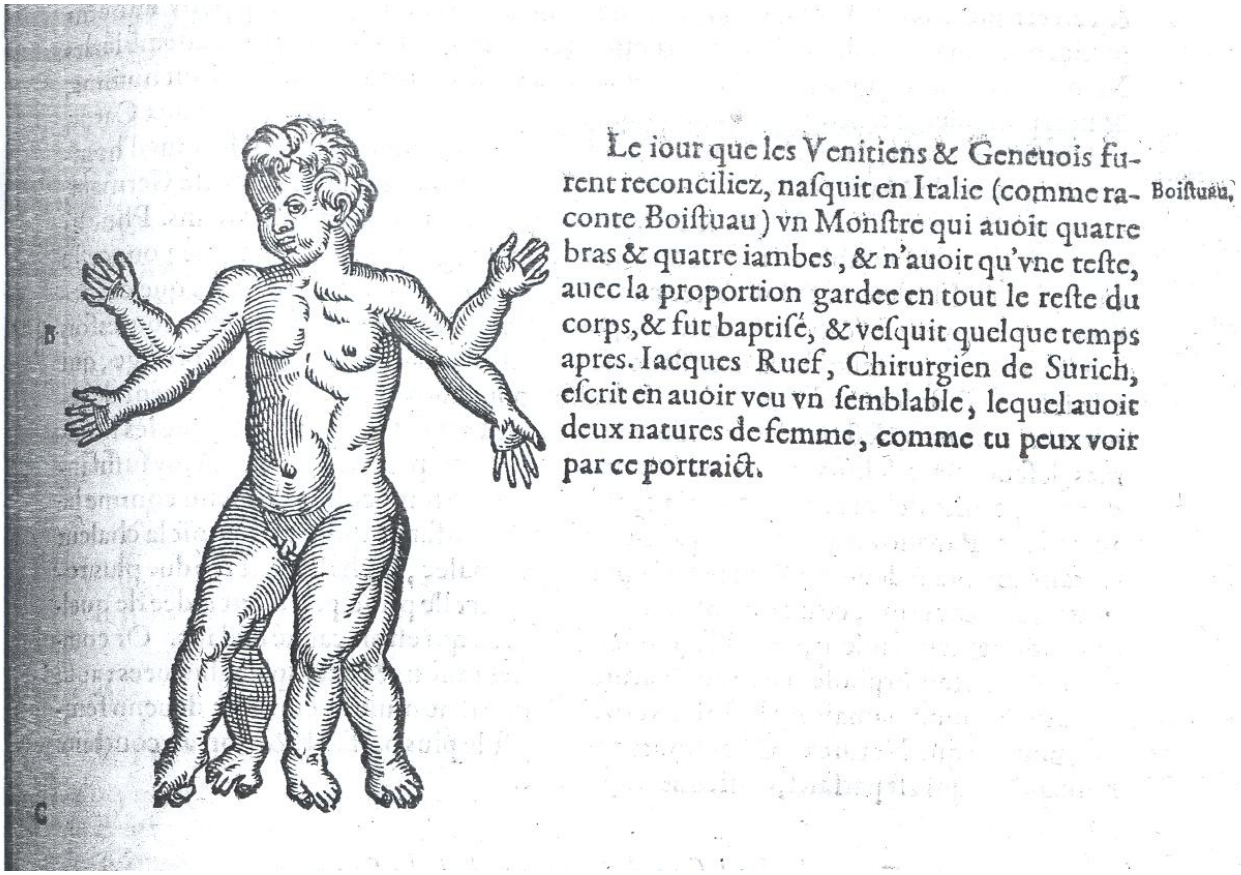


Figure I.v

This woodcut appears in the 1575 version. The author's caption reads: L'an mil quatre cens quatre vingt & six on vit naistre au Palatinat, assez pres de Heidelberg, en vn bourg nommé Rorbarchie, deux enfants gemeaux s'entretenans, & ioints ensemble dos à dox, qui estoient hermafrodites, comme on les peut voir par ce portraiet. [The year 1486 we saw the birth at the Palatinat, near Heildelberg, in a village named Rorbarchie, of two independent[9] twin[10] children, joined together back to back, who are hermaphrodites like we can see them by this portrait.

[9]"S'entretenant" literally means "who take care of themselves." I have replaced this phrase with "independent."

[10] "Gemeaux" is the zodiac sign gemini, which probably turned into the modern word "jumeau," meaning "twin." A literal translation would be "gemini" but I assume "twin" in this case.



Le iour que les Venitiens & Geneuois furent reconciliez, naſquit en Italie (comme raconte Boiſtuau) vn Monſtre qui auoit quatre bras & quatre iambes, & n'auoit qu'vne teſte, auec la proportion gardee en tout le reſte du corps, & fut baptiſé, & veſquit quelque temps apres. Iacques Ruef, Chirurgien de Surich, eſcrit en auoir veu vn ſemblable, lequel auoit deux natures de femme, comme tu peux voir par ce portraict. Boiſtuau.

Figure I.vi

This woodcut portrait of a hermaphrodite appears in both *Deux Livres* (1573) and *Les Oeuvres* (1585). The author's note (1585) reads: On the day the Venitians and Genevans were reconciled, was born in Italy (thus recounts Boistuau) a monster which had four arms and four legs, and had only one head in proportion with the rest of the whole body, and was baptized, and lived some time thereafter. Jacques Ruef, surgeon of Zurich, wrote about seeing a similar one, which had two female[11] natures, as you can see by this portrait.

[11] "femelle" is only used in French to refer to animals, never humans. Thus, "woman" might be substituted here.

Figure I.vii

This particularly menacing portrait of the hermaphrodite is depicted only in *Deux Livres* (1573). Notice how the female genitalia is peripheral to the male's, and also the way she leans over his shoulder as if snarling.

doubled reproductive potential. This epitome of the definition "hermaphrodite" not only carries the potential to reproduce, both with others and by "reciprocal" means, but to incite lasciviousness in others.

Northern European anatomists such as Martin Weinrich and Jean Riolan the younger, who based their work on the Aristotelian and Galenic notion that the anatomical form must fit the physiological function, "regarded monsters as organisms that had failed to achieve their telos, their perfect final form" (Daston and Park 202). These anatomists insisted that the true hermaphrodite that Pare explicated, one that was purported to have the functional reproductive organs of both sexes, was an impossibility. Riolan, especially, criticized other anatomists for distorting and exaggerating anatomizations of the hermaphrodite in order to sensationalize the portrait of such creatures and thereby gain mass public appeal. He instead identified the hermaphrodite as deformed men or (more frequently) women, insisting that physicians had mistaken an enlarged clitoris for a penis. Interestingly enough, Riolan also cites the "grave legal risks" that hermaphrodites (or deformed women) face when they are accused of "abusing their sex . . . scandalous crimes which brought prejudice to the honor and the life of the persons accused," thus identifying the potential of such creatures to engender lascivious acts with formerly "honorable" persons (Daston and Park 203). Riolan's attempt to downplay the anomaly of the hermaphroditic form is telling. The third gender that Paré theorizes is an impossibility for Riolan. Instead, Riolan asserts that such anomalous forms must be a deformity of the female body, a suggestion that reveals not only the frightening enigma of female sexuality during the Renaissance, but the relegation of all things unknowable to the realm of Other. While Paré attempts to master what appears unknowable through

explication and categorization, Riolan goes a step further as he denies the very existence of such creatures.

What is threatening, horrifying and repugnant about Paré's *hermafrodites masles & femelles* is not merely their aesthetic anomaly (as is the case with the other three "types"), but their spreading, breeding potential. While the coming together of two distinct genders to form is menacing in itself, the horror of these creatures lies in their doubled ability to reproduce "monstrosity," to distort not only human reproduction, but to spread the seed of their lasciviousness. The social sanctions that require such creatures to "choose" a gender are evidence of the threat that they harbor. What emerges from this essay is an image of an incontinent hyper-sexual body that resists containment.

Paré's image of the hermaphrodite is useful in explicating Spenser's portrait of the monster Errour in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*.. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has aptly theorized, the unknowability of a monster, its defiance of boundaries and categories, is at the heart of the fear it incites.

> The refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. (6)

Spenser seizes on this fear of the unknowable in his portrayal of the monster Errour. In the midst of the battle between Errour and Redcrosse, in the moment when Redcrosse Knight first loses his way, the poet portrays an image that manipulates the trope of the early modern hermaphrodite. Spenser blurs boundaries of gender and order with the

intention of 1) representing spiritual error as an all-encompassing, ravenous vice that overcomes the subject, resulting in a loss of all previous conceptions of the self as "virtuous"; and 2) show how the subject becomes part of the spreading, breeding, potential of spiritual error, and how thus becoming a part of it, goes on to perpetuate that vice in the community. Julia Kristeva's notion of *abjection* will be useful in explicating the loss of the boundaries of selfhood at this moment in Spenser's narrative. While Paré seeks to construct meaning rather than to portray its collapse, the incontinent, breeding image of the hermaphrodite is one that is transformed by Spenser into a moment when symbolic meaning is lost, when the subject loses his way and thus loses *himself*. While Paré attempts to overcome the monster's unknowability through categorization, Spenser seeks to amplify it as a means of portraying a sense of horror within the subject at the moment of virtue's collapse.

This collapse of previous methods of defining the self in relation to the Other is essential to Spenser's declared intention in Book I. The portrayal of the journey of Redcrosse Knight functions as a means of showing the necessary steps for the believer to achieve "holinesse." Spenser's early readers would have understood holiness according to prevalent methods of interpreting scripture in the Elizabethan and early Stuart church. Literary historians are nearly unanimous in their assertion that the theological view that dominated during Spenser's time could be called "Calvinist." However, as Darryl J. Gless suggests, the religion established in 1559 "warrants the label 'Reformed,' a term somewhat less reductive than 'Calvinist'" (28). Gless explains the basic doctrines of "Reformed" salvation:

> 1) God predestines individual souls to salvation or to damnation; 2) the corrupt human will is utterly incompetent to undertake, much less to accomplish, works that can meet the standards God imposes; 3) only the gift of the predestined, unmerited grace makes such works, and salvation, possible; 4) salvation results from faith alone, itself a gift of grace which imputes Christ's merits to the believer; 5) holiness of life follows from and constitutes an outward sign of this divine gift. (28)

In this schema, the predestined individual is not a passive receiver of salvation vis-à-vis election, but must have faith in order to become "sanctified," as only the sanctified believer will manifest the outward signs of sanctification: holiness. James Nohrnberg asserts that the aim of Book I is sanctification by faith:

> Broadly speaking, the theme of Book I is the establishment of faith: faith in one's self, faith in an ideal, and faith in the Word of God. These faith-relations are symbolized by the "troth" of Redcrosse and Una, the faithful knight and the true bride of Revelations. "Sanctify them through thy truth," Christ prays for his disciples, "thy word is truth." Sanctification through truth is the goal of Book I, and together Una and Redcrosse manifest the "one faith" – Unam Sanctam – of Ephesians 4:5: "Knights ought to be true, and truth is one in all." (128)

It is only through faith that Redcrosse can achieve sanctification and thus manifest true holiness.

"True" holiness, in Reformed theology, relies on sanctification, as it is a virtue that is equivalent to spiritual and moral purity. The scriptural origins of holiness[12] acknowledge the Lord Himself as the model of this virtue. God's holiness refers to "His

[12] See the "law of holiness," Leviticus 17-23

separateness, absolute purity and awe-inspiring transcendence – the terrifying majesty displayed in the theophanies of the Pentateuch where no one, not Moses himself, can look upon Yahweh and live (e.g., Exod. 33:20)" (Gless 26). When the term "holy" is used to describe objects, priests of God and Christian believers, they are imagined as morally and spiritually clean. Gless writes, "Isaiah's own and later prophets' conceptions of holiness as spiritual and moral purity became dominant in the New Testament, and its pre-eminence there helped to ensure that "sanctity" defined as moral purity would dominate Protestant treatments of the subject" (27).[13] When Calvin speaks of the "image of God" in man, it is an image of "true holiness and righteousness" (27). Holiness is outwardly manifested in the good works of a believer. In order to achieve holiness, one must become "sanctified" or cleansed in spirit. Sanctification is the "process of gradual, uneven, and never (in this life) perfected spiritual cleansing [that] brings a measure of desire and power to accomplish good works" (29). The clean spirit that drives the good works of the believer is the result of sanctification. Thus holiness (the outward manifestation of one's election) is not possible without sanctification or cleansing of the spirit.

Gless asserts that although justification entitles the believer to salvation, humans are not entirely passive, and "it is important to note that major reformed theologians, including the English authorities, were adamant in affirming that when true faith results in good works, those works are *collaborative in nature*" (30). When God predestines salvation, he also predestines a means to achieve salvation. Gless writes:

[13] For more on holiness as a metaphor for moral and spiritual cleanliness, see Lancelot Andrewes, *A Pattern of Catechistical Doctrine, "The works of Lancelot Andrewes,"* ed. J.P.W, 6 vols. (1854; New York: AMS Press, 1967), VI, p. 69 (Gless's gloss)

> Following Paul (especially Rom. 8:29-30), the Elizabethan Thirty-Nine Articles elucidate the matter somewhat by listing in Article 17, the sequence of events that result from predestination. People whom God has predestined to salvation, the Elizabethan article declares, "be called according to [His] purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity. (28)

Thus, the stepping stones on the path to salvation are, in order: calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Gless aptly notes that "Although, in taking up the Armor of God, the subject is propelled by God to do good works and 'all the good is God's', the *Homilies* also relentlessly exhort listeners to the energetic pursuit of good works. However absolutely attributable to grace, works of holiness will entail all the sensations of strenuous voluntary endeavor" (Gless 33). Justification is therefore the result of cooperation between grace and an inspired human will. Salvation requires the active participation of the believer in the pursuit of holiness.

A vital acknowledgement for the elect individual is that man's deeds, however well-intentioned, will always be "tainted." What the believer needs to recognize is that he is not inherently "holy" or virtuous because of his election, and that his works will always fall short of God's great example of holiness. Alexander Nowell writes in his Elizabethan *Catechism*:

> The dutiful works of godliness, which proceedeth out of faith, working by charity . . . though they be derived from the Spirit of God, as little streams from the

> spring-head, yet of our flesh, that mingleth itself with them, in the doing by the way, they receive corruption, as it were by infection, like as a river, otherwise pure and clear, is troubled and mudded with mire and slime, werethrough it runneth" (Gless 37).

In Reformed theology, one can only find the standard of virtue in God's Law, and his law reveals mankind's depravity, the utter impossibility of achieving the demands therein. As Richard Hooker, meditating on the "great commandment" of Matthew 22:37 perceived, God evaluates our intentions, and "Cut off" from our list of good works are "all those things wherein we have regarded our own glory, those things which we do to please men, or to satisfy our own liking, those things which we do with any by-respect, not sincerely and purely for the love of God; and a small score will serve for the number of our righteous deeds" (Gless 38). Even humankind's best thoughts and works are tainted by sin. The aim of the Law is to reflect back to us, like a mirror, our utter depravity. This depravity is uniquely presented by Spenser in the moment of the collapse of previous modes of identifying the self as "virtuous." In this moment, the subject's depravity is recognized in a revolt of being: horror.

This acknowledgement of depravity is the final step for the believer in turning towards God and understanding that only through faith in His grace and the truth of His word can one achieve salvation. Pauline and Protestant models of salvation purport that mankind can only be saved from its sinful nature by faith. Gless writes that "Reformed descriptions of faith normally ascribe three characteristics to its possessors: an ever-increasing knowledge of the truths of the Bible, especially of the Gospel's merciful promises; a particular application of those promises to the believer himself; and a

resilient assurance that God's good will enables the believer to persevere in grace" (41). Christ's promises to each individual distinguish the Reformed concept of faith from the Roman Catholic. William Perkins writes that the Catholics understand faith to be "a general . . . faith, whereby a man believeth the articles of religion to be true. But we hold that the faith which justifieth is a particular faith, whereby we apply to ourselves the promises of righteousness and life everlasting by Christ" (42). The life of the believer should imitate the life of Christ, enacting the psychological fluctuations of the redemptive act, of dying and rising, death and resurrection. As Perkins asserts, "the right way to go unto heaven, is to sail by hell, and there is no man living that feeleth the power and virtue of the blood of Christ, which first hath not felt the pains of hell" (45). Similarly, "the Pauline metaphor . . . of 'putting on' Christ [can not only] project in a single image the dying and rising pattern of baptism, repentance and sanctification; it also images both the predestined and the willed elements in the life of holiness. It presents holiness as an extrinsic, purely outward thing, a garment; yet men must labor to 'put it on'" (Gless 46).

Seen in light of the prevalent theology of Spenser's time, it is apparent that what is at issue in Book I is the necessity of Redcrosse's adventure. Redcrosse, as one of the elect who is "chosen," must not only strive, as he takes up the armor of the Christian warrior, to achieve the "good works" that will come to define him as "holy," but these works must be driven by a clean spirit, a "sanctified" self. In order to become sanctified, the knight must learn to overcome his own vanity and recognize that as one who lives in the flesh he will always fall short of the divine paradigm of virtue, that his works will always be "tainted" by his sinful nature. It is only through conviction of his sins and faith in God's grace that he will achieve salvation and the glorification that is his destiny. The

structure of Book I follows this theology; Redcrosse must fulfill the armor that he dons at his calling, for "Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield," by recognizing and battling the outward evidence of his inward monstrosity: the monsters of "faire lond" (I.i.1).

The believer must "die" to the sins of the world in the moment that he recognizes the "impossible within" and acknowledges the depravity of the flesh. The collapse of all t previous notions of the self as "virtuous" can be thought of as a kind of sacrificial crucifixion for the subject. As the subject "dies" to the sins of the world, he becomes eligible for grace. The idea that the life of the believer must imitate the life of Christ is present in the very nature of allegory. As Carol Kaske aptly asserts, medieval and renaissance poetry, and allegory in particular, often function as a form of biblical exegesis:

> One poetic strategy that a poet would derive from [biblical] commentaries, particularly those on the [Old Testament], was allegory. The symbolic modes are most conveniently organized under the four exegetical senses. They are defined in the mnemonic jingle "littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quo tnedas anagogia" (The *letter* teaches the events, the *allegory* [*figura*, or typology] what you should believe, the *moral* [sense, or tropology] what you should do, the *anagogy* where you should be headed). (15)

Kaske goes on to assert that "by allusions to the Bible, by imitations of its structure, style, and method of presentation, by calling on prevalent habits of biblical reading and listening, Spenser shapes his poem so as to make his audience read, mark, and inwardly digest it as if it were the Bible" (17). An example of tropology in Spenser, 'what you should – or should not – do,' is the character of Despair, in particular since he functions

as Redcrosse's "inner voice" (16). Kaske explains that "Among the four senses of the term, 'allegory' in its limited sense of 'what you should believe' is better known by the medieval term *figura* or the modern typology. Surprisingly but fortunately for poets, *quid credas* means not abstract doctrine but narratives of salvation history – Creation, Fall, vicissitudes of Israel, Redemption, Second Coming, and Last Things. Strictly defined, it is the analogy between two events in salvation history" (16). Book I indeed narrates, on the typological level, salvation history as it is represented in the plight of the Christian warrior: 1) the rise, through election; 2) the suffering of the cross through worldly tribulation and the endless striving to achieve sanctification through the truth of God's word; 3) the crucifixion that occurs in the visceral agony of the believer as he recognizes and acknowledges his shortcomings, "dying" to the flesh as he gives himself over to God's grace; and 4) the resurrection offered to the believer in the promise of the New Jerusalem.

The wood in which Spenser's knights seem perpetually entrapped is the place where the self's spiritual plight is geographically mapped. This familiar wood indicates to the reader that salvation is at issue. As the subject wanders in the dark wood, he is in danger of being "lost" to salvation. The very nature of the labyrinthine wood suggests (in Book I) earthly pleasure and misdirection. Redcrosse's infection begins as he is first led astray, even as he enters the "wandering wood." The first testing of the knight's armor, of his resistance to misdirection, occurs in the battle with the monster Errour, whose lair lies in the heart of the wandering wood. Una and Redcrosse enter this labyrinth and are "with pleasure forward led" (I.i.8). The beauty of the wood serves to entice the travelers astray. Nohrnberg writes, "Spenser specifically calls his wood a "labyrinth" (I.i.11), signifying,

according to Comes, 'the life of man to be full of perplexity, *multisque difficultatibus implicatam,* and from which no man can extricate himself except through singular prudence and fortitude' (137). Similarly,"A Renaissance commentary on Dante's first canto. . . [by Vellutello] describes Danta's wood as the 'selva erronea di questa vita,' 'una selva di spessi error,' and 'selva di errori.' The wood is also 'materia corporea' – 'this wood is dark because all error always proceeds from ignorance and blindness of mind' (Nohrnberg 138).[14]

The "taint" of Redcrosse's good works is apparent even as he first encounters spiritual error. Redcrosse begins to lose his notion of self as "virtuous" as he enters the wandering wood. As Redcrosse and Una become lost in the maze at the heart of which lies spiritual error and false faith, Redcrosse's conception of his own identity as a Christian knight begins to deteriorate. He second-guesses himself:

> Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
>
> Vntill the blustring storme is ouerblowne;
>
> When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
>
> They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
>
> But wander to and fro in waies vnknowne,
>
> Furthest from end then, when they neerest ween,
>
> *That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:*
>
> *So many paths, so many turnings seene,*
>
> *That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been*. (I.i.10)

[14] Nohrnberg is quoting from *Dante con l'espositione di Christoforo Landino et di Allesandro Velutello.* (Venice, 1964).

This moment of doubt for the knight (although problematically shared by Una) foreshadows the collapse of his identity as a Christian knight who relies on spiritual guidance. Redcrosse begins to lose himself as he loses his way.

As the travelers first encounter the monster Errour, it is quickly revealed that Redcrosse intends to rely on his own agency rather than God's. Una warns him that brashly provoking "suddaine mischiefe" is foolish, and that he should "with-hold, till further tryall made" (I.i.12). However, Redcrosse vainly asserts his knightly prowess, entering the dark cave (here the Platonic allusion is clear – light is equivalent to knowledge and clarity, darkness to ignorance and obscurity) and answers Una's motherly admonitions with "Vertue gives herself light." His arrogance here is evident. Virtue (the virtuous one, the Christian knight) does not provide its own light, as Redcrosse suggests, God provides this light through his one truth. The believer is but a shadow that pales in comparison to God's brilliance. Here we see Redcrosse's over-estimation of his own virtue, a virtue that he purports to motivate his attack on spiritual error. Una, in her role as spiritual leader (and maternal figure) warns Redcrosse that tangling withVice can lead to spiritual death. She names Errour "a monster vile, whom God and man does hate . . . this is no place for liuing men." Her statement both reinforces the yoking of the monstrous with sin and warns Redcrosse that he should leave well enough alone. This is no place for men who seek Life, both literally and figuratively. To seek out spiritual error in order to prove one's virtue or knightly prowess is not the way of the Christian knight and will only lead to fleshly as well as spiritual death, for bodily risk is equated with spiritual risk throughout Book I.

Spenser's representation of Errour defies gender boundaries in a way that appropriates the tropes of early modern narratives of monstrous bodies. In particular, he plays with the blurring of distinct categories of gender, a monstrosity that, as we have seen in Paré, is often yoked with sexual transgression. Errour herself is not definitively male or female, although we think of her as female because of her reproductive qualities. She is both male and female as well as both human and beast: "Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But the other halfe did womans shape retaine." Errour has a distinctively human female torso and a phallic, serpentine tale. She is a grotesque intermingling of the biblical Eve and her serpent cohort. Errour's female part (her upper half) is capable of breeding – her young monsters (undoubtedly products of former lasciviousness) "Into her mouth . . . crept" as they return to the yonic[15] space from which they were spawned. In stanza 22, Errour vomits books, papers and tiny (hermaphroditic) monstrous beings from this generative space. Conversely, the lower half of Errour is a distinctively phallic weapon. In stanza 16, she is described as "Armed to point" with her stinging tail, and in stanza 17, she "[turned] fierce, her speckled taile aduaunst, / Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay."

This portrait of Errour provides an image of breeding which appropriates the tropes of early modern monster texts that often depict the monstrous birth as an exposure of secret sin. This is evident in I.i.15:

And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,

Her huge long taile her den all oeurspread,

Yet was in knots and many boughes vpwound

[15] From the sanskrit *Yoni*: A figure or symbol of the female organ of generation as an object of veneration among the Hindus and others. Hence **yonic** *a.* (OED). I'm using it here as an antonym for *phallic*.

Pointed in mortall sting. Of her there bred,

A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,

Sucking vpon her poisnous dugs, eachone

Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill fauored:

Soone as that vncouth light von them shone,

Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

Spenser's yoking of childbirth and motherhood with the monstrous is clear here. However, Errour is doing more than hiding a "secret sin," she is engendering and multiplying spiritual error in dark and hidden places. The monstrous births she spawns arise both from her inherent sinfulness and her contact and intermingling with "earthly" rather than heavenly things. Her procreative contact with the earth (not in the motherly sense that Spenser endows the earth; here, literally the "dirt" of sin) is not unlike the human tendency to become *soiled* with iniquity, just as the believers works are "tainted" by the flesh until God's grace (vis-à-vis Christ's blood) sanctifies. This soiling of the virtuous (the 'elect,' the believer) with vice or sin is an infection that afflicts many of Spenser's heroes and is also a trope of early modern medical texts, as the causes of monstrous births are often thought to be human intercourse with sinfulness or the devil's henchmen: demons, incubi and succubi.

As the battle ensues, as Redcrosse becomes literally *intertwined* with the monster Errour, a significant image appears that blurs the boundaries between the virtuous knight and the monster that embodies spiritual error. The image of the intertwined monster and human represents a commingling that engenders a new monstrous image. Redcrosse, who has misrecognized himself as the epitome of virtue, "nought aghast, his mightie

hand enhaunst," pierces the monstrous body with his sword: "The stroke down from her head vnto her shoulder glaunst" (I.i.17). This piercing of the feminine portion of Errour's hermaphroditic body (the yonic space which issues forth tiny monsters), represents the corporeal *intercourse* between the virtuous knight and his vice-like nemesis. What follows is a startling image in which Redcrosse is paralyzed:

> Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd,
>
> Yet kindling rage her selfe she gathered round,
>
> And all attonce her beastly bodie raizd
>
> With doubled forces high aboue the ground:
>
> Tho wrapping vp her wrethed sterne around,
>
> Lept fierce vpon his shield, and her huge traine
>
> All suddenly about his body wound,
>
> That hand or foot to stirr he stroue in vaine:
>
> God helpe the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine. (I.i.18)

According to this image, it is difficult to discern the point when the monster ends and the human begins. If only for a moment, the two are intertwined, interconnected, one and the same.

The similarities between this scene and Ovid's story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus are undeniable. Both scenes portray a metaphoric sexual encounter, a loss of individual boundaries of selfhood, a repugnant androgynous image, and an emasculation of sorts. The Ovidian subtext both calls to mind the hermaphroditic image and reinforces the breakdown of definitive corporeal boundaries in this scene. A new

"monster" is engendered by this collapse, as two become one. Errour and Redcrosse are intertwined in a manner not unlike the coupling portrayed in Ovid's story:

> He fought and struggled,
>
> But she wrapped herself around him, as a serpent
>
> Caught by an eagle, borne aloft, entangles
>
> Coils around head and talons, or as ivy
>
> Winds round great oaks, or an octopus extends
>
> Its prey within its tentacles. He refused her
>
> The joy she wanted most, but still she held him
>
> Body to body: he would not escape her,
>
> Fight as he may. 'O grant me this,' she cried
>
> In prayer to the gods, 'May no day ever come
>
> To separate us!' and they heard her prayer,
>
> And the two bodies seemed to merge together,
>
> One face, one form. . .
>
> Two beings, and no longer man and woman,
>
> But neither, and yet both. (Humphries 93)

Although the Ovidian image of the hermaphrodite at the end of the 1590 version of Book III is the one that has been extensively explored, the Ovidian subtext of Book I provides a structural and thematic connection between Books I and III that demands our attention, as it asserts Spenser's concern with the metamorphosis that occurs at the intersection of the virtuous subject and his antithetical vice. Lauren Silberman writes, "Ovid's story of the Hermaphrodite is the subtext that underwrites the shift from Christian eschatology in

Book I to the project of making sense of the mortal world in Book III. Direct allusions to the Hermaphrodite function as a kind of spiritual marker that points up that shift" (49). Furthermore, Silberman argues, "Spenser secretly shifts from one tradition of interpretation to the other as he establishes a hierarchical relationship between the moral and the sensual" (55). The collapse of virtue in the Ovidian images of Book I[16] is enabled by a turn from the moral to the fleshly. As the privileging of the mind over the body is a necessary concern of Spenser as he seeks to represent virtue, it is only fitting that the horror of monstrosity should be represented in a metamorphosed human body (the intertwined Error and Redcrosse) whose warped corporeality is amplified as it entraps and captures the virtuous human (or ideal) form.

While in Ovid the boundaries that are breached are those of gender, the boundaries in Spenser are both gendered and ethical constructs of virtue and vice, human and monster, as the female body is yoked with the monstrous and the male body with virtue. Although Errour's form is hermaphroditic, she assumes a feminine role as she displays her breeding potential. Gender signification seems to flip-flop as Errour and Redcrosse become entangled. While Errour seems menacingly phallic as she advances, her tail "threatning with an angry sting," she forms a yonic space as she wraps around Redcrosse. Redcrosse's gender similarly fluctuates; he is significantly a phallic figure who wields a sword and then is feminized as he is overcome. The paralysis that he experiences indicates the familiar trope of male post-coital weakness as it robs him of his power as a subject. In addition, his subjugation underscores the trope of the feminine body as a weapon that renders men helpless. In the battle between Errour and Redcrosse,

[16] Silberman asserts that this image is also relevant to the discussion of Orgoglio, which I will approach later in the next chapter

the monster (female, although disruptive of gender boundaries) and the virtuous knight (male, phallic, misrecognized as an agent) forms a new hermaphroditic image in which the multiplicity of signs and signifiers, the flip-flopping of genders and gender signification, results in a collapse of meaning, as the subject is overcome in a moment that we can liken to Kristeva's definition of *jouissance*:

> Obviously, I *am* only *like* someone else: mimetic logic of the advent of the ego, objects and signs. But when I *seek* (myself), *lose* (myself), or experience *jouissance* – then "I" is *heterogeneous*. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing. (10)

In this moment of figurative corporeal intercourse (underscored by the sexual nature of the Ovidian subtext), the climax catalyzes an abjection of the subject. We can begin to think of Errour as a kind of *alter ego* for Redcrosse. She represents the spiritual Errour at the heart of Redcrosse's identification of himself as an agent in his own spiritual destiny. She outwardly manifests this error, and as Redcrosse embraces her, or she embraces Redcrosse, we begin to see how the two are intrinsically interconnected, how true virtue within the believer cannot exist without God, as the flesh is marked by the existence of the monster, the "impossible" within.

The loss of the definitive boundaries of monster and human that occur as Redcrosse and Errour intertwine, result in the subject's being overcome by a sense of horror. Redcrosse's horror, his utter immobility, is expressed in the last line: "God helpe

the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine." In this moment is "a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing" (Kristeva 2). In this moment, Redcrosse is not merely losing the fight, he is losing his very notion of self. He is no longer the virtuous knight that bears the name of Holinesse. As he intertwines with Errour, he becomes a "something" that is (for the moment) inextricably entangled with vice. Errour becomes a part of Redcrosse as he is infected by what she represents. In the moments that follow this image, as Una urges the knight to "add faith vnto your force," Redcrosse further entangles the two bodies as he wraps his hands around Errour's throat, as two intertwined figures seem to metamorphose into an incontinent form with the ability to spew forth monstrous vice.

Kristeva writes that abjection occurs in the Judeo-Christian schema when the believer comes into contact with what is filthy and unclean. This is often represented biblically as the entanglement of two essentially unlike things. As any sort of intercourse or intermingling of definitive categories as set forth in God's law defies the ideal model (either of gender or species) and is contaminating. "Intercourse between same and same will have to be prohibited – neither promiscuity within families nor homosexuality. Nor can there be contact with another group as constituted by law (human or 'natural,' that is, always divine): no adultery, no zoophilia" (Kristeva 103). The Lord says: "Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee" (Leviticus 19:19). The intercourse between Errour and Redcrosse is a kind of

intermingling of antithetical "pure" categories: human and monster, subject and object. Kristeva defines abjection as the collapse of definitive categories of symbolic meaning, when the separation between subject and object becomes blurred and the monstrous Other is found to actually constitute one's very being. The abject form is one that defies borders – both of the psyche and the corporeal form (which is essential to the psyche's understanding of self). In both Spenser and these early modern medical texts, this borderless form is one that spreads and breeds.

The abject form is incontinent, it breeds exponentially, engendering new monstrosity. Infection and monstrosity are born of the entangled image of Errour and Redcrosse. As Redcrosse "grypt her gorge," Errour is forced to loosen her grip on Redcrosse, "That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine," and the image of intertwined monster and human begins to deteriorate. However, in this deterioration, this image, this new monstrous body, begins to spread infection:

> Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
>
> A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
>
> Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
>
> Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke, (I.i.20).

This mess further confuses Redcrosse, and he begins to wonder at his dominance and sense of status as a subject: "welnigh choked with that deadly stinke, His forces faile, ne can no lenger fight" (I.i.22). This incontinent spreading further identifies this new figure, the intertwined human and monster, as abject.

Kristeva asserts that anything that issues forth from the body, or leaks out of body is defilement. The "clean and proper" body is one whose boundaries are closed and is a

construct of Judeo-Christian theology: "For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach; a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or anything superfluous, / or a man that is brokenfooted or brokenhanded . . . he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God" (Leviticus 21:18-21). In this schema, the body must have no blemish to be symbolic of holiness. Kristeva explains:

> The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic. In order to confirm that, it should endure no gash other than that of circumcision, equivalent to sexual separation and / or separation from the mother. Any other mark would be the sign of belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, the non-holy. (102).

The clean and proper body is not marred by wounds or leaky orifices. The Lord says, "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt though mar the corners of thy beard. / Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you . . . (Leviticus 19:27-28). The image of intertwined human and monster is twice removed from the virtuous clean and proper body. While the monster is itself unclean, defying categories, abject, Redcrosse's contact with it catalyzes his own experience of abjection. The intermingling of subject and Other creates a new abject image that defies corporeal boundaries in its incontinence and breeding potential.

Redcrosse emerges victorious over Errour, although Spenser significantly notes that his motives for slaying the monster are questionable. He is "fearefull more of shame / Then of the certaine peril he stood in" (I.i.24). Whether or not his victory is attributable to his adding "faith" to his force is debatable, but what follows from the theology is that Redcrosse's task in Book I is to become sanctified, and this can only be accomplished if

he acknowledges his own depravity and recognizes that his "tainted" state, his infected holiness, renders him in need of God's grace. The acknowledgement of one's depravity, to be brought low and "die" to the flesh, is surely not accomplished in one singular battle, however "lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine" the slain monster may be (I.i.14). The knight's first battle indeed further entangles him with spiritual error and lays the groundwork for Archimago's trickery, and while we can perhaps attribute the knight's victory to a sudden surge of "faith", it is more likely necessary, both for the narrative and the theology, that Redcrosse Knight (i.e. the spiritual warrior) undergo further trials before he is convicted of his sin and thus ready to accept God's grace.

The encounter with Errour is merely the first instance of Redcrosse's infection by monstrous vice in Spenser's allegory. His armor will be further tested in his trials with Duessa, Orgoglio and Despair, which I will discuss in the following chapters. It is my intention to illustrate how notions of monstrosity that would have been familiar to Spenser, notions that pervaded Elizabethan popular culture, were integral to Spenser's project. His monsters, his frightening portraits of virtue's antithesis, were derived not only from classical sources, but from the broadsheets, ballads and pamphlets used as rhetorical tools in the collective social sphere, and the more specialized texts on natural philosophy which incited what historians Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park refer to as *wonder* among the learned elite. It is at the intersection between human and monster, in the collapse of definitive boundaries within the subject's notion of self, that Spenser finds his most powerful rhetorical weapon: the horrific knowledge that the monsters that haunt our dreams and capture the curiosity of our waking moments are much closer than we realize.

Chapter II

"misshapen nether partes"

O Adam, what hast thou done? for in that that (sic) thou hast sinned, thou art not fallen alone, but the fall also redundeth vnto vs that come of thee. For what profit is vnto vs, if there be promised an immortal life, when we do the workes that bring death?[17]

II Esdras 7:48-49 (Geneva Bible)

The dead little girl says, I am the one who guffaws in horror inside the lungs of the live one. Get me out of there at once.

Antonin Artaud, *Suppôts et supplications*

The "workes that bring death" are the subject of *The Faerie Queene*, Book I. As my examination of Redcrosse's battle with Errour has detailed, the intertwining of the human and the monstrous in Spenser inevitably leads to what is perceived by the reader as a loss of reason, of rationale, a loss of *self* that is manifested in the emotion of horror. This is a horror that the reader shares with Spenser's subject, as emotion is a narrative device that draws the reader in, through sympathy, to the subject's experience. Within horror lies a deep-seated fear; a fear of what the monster signifies – the death of what we know, the ways we have come to envision our world, the theological and ontological categories that define us. Thus, the monster signifies *our* death in a way that is both thrilling and frightening.

This simultaneous fear and desire is at the heart of the monster's allure. As long as we can marginalize it, as long as we can control it, the monstrous body functions as a means of exploring the forbidden. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, "Through the body of the

[17] Nohrnberg p.262

monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture" (17). For early modern readers, the fascination with monsters and other repugnant curiosities is rendered "safe" by the rhetor's moralizing, by the frequent attribution of the monstrous birth to the sin of the parents, and the manipulation of the monstrous body for rhetorical means.

The disruption of such boundaries and categories, of these modes of making the monstrous "safe", is the work of Spenser's narrative. Spenser manipulates early modern tropes from natural philosophy to show how monstrosity originates within our very being. As Spenser's monsters intersect with the heroic subject, they frighten and disturb, they disrupt and destroy, for such labor lays the necessary foundation for the work of his allegory. The reader must see the death of the heroic subject to experience the sublimity of his resurrection. Although death in Spenser is never represented in its entirety, the monster itself, and the horror that the subject experiences at the discovery of the monstrous within, *show us* death in order that we might know of the life that true virtue offers.

This chapter will demonstrate how the intersection of the heroic subject with the witch Duessa leads to a sense of horror, a horror that is the result of what Julia Kristeva calls *abjection*, a collapse of established modes of identifying the self. We can call this moment a "death of self." Spenser interprets this death of self as a necessary prelude to faith for the believer. This death of self *shows* the subject his own approaching spiritual death while at the same time allowing him to acknowledge his own depravity. Horror

functions as both a warning and a moment of recognition. Furthermore, within Spenser's representation of corporeal death, within the *image* of death, is the collapse of the illusion of human agency, an illusion that inevitably drives the subject towards vice, as the "workes" of man, according to Reformed theology, are always tainted.

The transformation of the subject into an image of physical death in the moments following this death of self points to the fact that Redcrosse knight's salvation is what is at stake in Book I, for the image of death comes to represent the spiritual sickness of the subject. The knight's adventure and the acknowledgement of the monstrous within (the work of abjection) is necessary for the elect to achieve "sanctification," a vital step in the believer's journey and a necessary prelude to holiness. The loss of human agency that occurs in this moment of horror catalyzes the turn to faith that is essential for sanctification. Redcrosse cannot be truly 'holy' until he has collapsed under the weight of his own depravity, until he has been "crucified" by the suffering brought about by sin. The virtuous subject must "die" to the flesh in order to be reborn in the spirit. This death is the collapse of all previous means of identifying the self as virtuous, as an agent in one's own destiny, as a knight whose works are pure and untainted.

Kristeva writes how abjection is the moment when the subject "imagines nothingness," when he experiences a loss of self or a "death of self":

> "An 'I' overcome by the corpse – such is often the abject . . . for it is death that most violently represents the strange state in which a non-subject, a stray, having lost its non-objects, imagines nothingness through the ordeal of abjection. The death that 'I' am provokes horror, there is a choking sensation that does not

separate inside from outside but draws them the one into the other, indefinitely" (25).

Although Kristeva is referring specifically to the "speaking corpse" in Artaud, the experience of death that occurs at the moment when a subject is *shown* his death is significant in illuminating Spenser's narrative. As I have explained in my introduction, the corpse is abject in that it is both a signifier for the living speaking being and the death of that being. The corpse lies in the doorway between this life and the death beyond. It is an embodiment of contradictory signifiers and thus provides an archetype for abjection. Of course, a dead corpse cannot itself be "horrified," and that is why the *speaking* corpse in Artaud is the perfect example for Kristeva. In Spenser, it is the image of the corpse that inhabits this liminal doorway. This image (the emaciated Redcrosse knight, the living death of Fradubio) is Spenser's living, speaking corpse. The language of death both defers death and signifies its approach, a death that is at the same time an end of being (an end of self) and a threat: the loss of the new life that is offered to the saved. What Kristeva's text offers to the reader of Spenser is a way to seize on these moments that are most central to Spenser's text, moments when the poet shows us not merely the horror of the vice itself, but the depths to which we fall when we become entangled with it.

When the Spenserian subject realizes that duplicity and lasciviousness (signified by the form of Duessa) are a part of his very being, that his own notion of himself as an agent inevitably drives him towards death[18], as he is entrapped and figuratively "slain" by the very thing that he desires (the "misshapen nether partes" of Duessa) he loses his way and thus loses *himself*. This moment provides him with a recognition: not only is his own

[18] I am not speaking of the subject being driven towards death in the Freudian sense, but in the sense that the works of man are always tainted by the "death" that is sin.

desire ruled by his flesh, but the very power he seems to have over his own destiny is paralyzed by his fallen state. In this moment, his phallic agency, his knightly prowess, his sword-wielding might, become a mere illusion that is castrated by his entanglement with vice. The female pudendum, then, is a monstrous snare that in its very definition of lack threatens to emasculate, to rob the subject of his status as an agent (although, as I will show, this sense of agency is an illusion that Redcrosse must relinquish to faith). Duessa's monstrosity lies in her threatening sexuality, and this chapter will be concerned with the way she uses her sexuality to "bring about" the death of the subject.

The hidden threat inherent in Duessa's form, which is revealed in Fradubio's account, is her "misshapen nether partes." The monstrous aspect of her genitalia distinguishes her sexuality as a weapon. Freud has written of the threatening image of the female genitalia in his 1922 essay "Medusa's Head." He suggests "the terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something" (105). The threat of the feminine is derived from the moment when the boy, "who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother" (105). Noting the lack of a penis, the boy becomes frightened that the fate of his mother (castration) will become his own. Thus, the female genitalia are, for the boy, symbolic of his own impending castration, and thus capable of arousing horror. Furthermore, Freud writes, Medusa's hair, having the power to turn men to stone, conjures this fear of lack through signification:

> The hair upon Medusa's head is frequently represented in works of art in the form of snakes, and these once again are derived from the castration complex. It is a

> remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. (105)

While in Freud's formulation, the female genitalia is capable of arousing horror because it becomes symbolic for the threat of castration, what I am arguing is that the threat of castration becomes fully realized as the subject becomes entangled with Duessa, for intercourse with the witch is a figurative castration of the subject's illusion of virtuous agency. This "castration" then results in a multiplication of the symbolic, a confusion of signs and signifiers. The subject simultaneously identifies himself in a number of ways. He tells himself: I am a monster; I am a virtuous knight, I am a subject (with phallic agency); I am an object (an emasculated subject). Each of these recognitions are contradictory. Thus, the subject, powerless to identify himself as any of these things, experiences a collapse in symbolic meaning, a "death" of self.

Early modern natural philosophy, which I am suggesting includes both natural "histories" and medical writings, attempts to de-monster the monstrous by asserting man's agency over the natural world, indeed, over monstrosity itself. The historical texts that I will be dealing with in this chapter defuse the monster of its power by anatomizing and explaining natural anomalies through empirical means or revealing the triumph of such empirical means over the divine. Thus, an agon is played out that is mirrored in Book I: the absolute power of man over nature (phallic) versus the absolute power of the Creator (pure, untainted). However, Spenser uses the monstrous in a very different way. Rather than attempting to make the monster "safe" through categorization and classification, he re-infuses the monstrous body with the power to horrify, recuperating

monstrosity by amplifying its defiance of such categories, in order to show how the illusion of human agency leads to spiritual death, and how one should instead turn to faith to fulfill earthly desire.

The beautiful witch Duessa embodies Spenser's concern with doubleness, equivocation and hypocrisy in relation to the spiritual plight of the subject. She is a figure of duplicity (her name means "two-ness" or "doubleness"), a term that the *OED* glosses as "The quality of being 'double' in action or conduct; the character or practice of acting in two ways at different times, or openly and secretly; deceitfulness, double-dealing." Jonson calls the latter "the earliest and still the most usual sense." Payne's use is telling: "1597 J. PAYNE Royal Exch. 14 Suche ys the choyce that these make of duplicitie and hypocrisie." Thus, because she represents doubleness or hypocrisy, her form demonstrates her vice – outwardly virtuous in its beauty and inwardly monstrous (underneath her clothes). Like the anomalous bodies of early modern deformed births, and like Errour before her, Duessa's body defies the boundaries of the human form. She is distinct from Spenser's monsters in that she is a hybrid creature, both monster and human. Although she appears virtuous, contact with her results in the contamination of the subject. Not only does her form defy the boundaries of human and monster, but she also carries the potential to engender monstrosity, a generative power that is bound to her lascivious nature. While Duessa's form in itself could be used as evidence to define her as always already abject, entanglement, or, more explicitly, *intercourse* with her leads to a metamorphic transformation of the subject similar to the one that I have discussed in the Redcrosse episode. Duessa's duplicity serves both to entice and entrap her victims and generate their abjection or "death of self."

Duessa's doubleness confuses the knight as she presents herself as a virtuous woman in order to tempt him to lasciviousness. The juxtaposition between her initial appearance and the unveiling of her foul monstrous nature is startling. She first appears as

> A goodly Lad clad in scarlot red,
>
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
>
> And like a *Persian* mitre on her hed
>
> Shee wore, with crowns and owches garnished,
>
> The which her lauish louers to her gaue;
>
> Her wanton palfrey all was oeurspred
>
> With tinsell trappings, wouen like a waue,
>
> Whose bridle rung with golden bels and bosses braue. (I.ii.13).

The reader is clued in as to her sinful state by 1) the color of her garment; 2) the lavish trappings with which she is arrayed (her appearance calls to mind descriptions of idolatry and greed that are associated by Reformers with the Catholic church); and 3) her "wanton" palfrey. However, her appearance is interpreted by the fallen knight (in a moment of exasperation for the reader) as representative of her virtue. She is beautiful and therefore desirable. Interestingly, Spenser's description of her beauty is restricted to her outward coverings: her red garment, the "*Persian* mitre" on her head, and her palfrey "oeurspred / With tinsell trappings." Here we see Redcrosse's own tainted desire: he is unable to see beyond the literal experience. Since his entanglement with spiritual error, he cannot distinguish true virtue from falsehood. It is only towards the end of Book I,

after the witch has successfully turned the knight's fleshly desire into his own undoing, that her true foulness is uncovered:

> Her crafty 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, lyke bladders lacking wind,
> Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
> Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
> So scabby was, that woul haue loathd all womankind. (I.viii.47).

While this description ironically fulfills the reader's desire for the truth to be revealed, it stands in an abrupt contrast with the knight's previous perception. As her true monstrous nature is unveiled, her form is robbed of its sexual power. As long as Redcrosse believes her virtuous (and as long as he believes himself virtuous), Duessa appears beautiful. As he begins to acknowledge his own foulness, she no longer has the power to entice him to transgression.

Duessa's physical duplicity mirrors her moral state; the way she seems at the same time outwardly virtuous yet inwardly despicable. Duessa's "dealings with the devil or evil spirits," are antithetical to the one Christian truth that Una represents, and thus her monstrosity and her guise as Fidessa are not a denial of morality, but rather a warped misuse of seeming virtue. Kristeva explains:

> He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law – rebellious, liberating and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you . . . (5).

Duessa's physical duplicity mirrors her moral duplicity. Her duplicitous state is one that engenders the further breach of boundaries, borders, identity, systems and order.

In the Renaissance, witches were thought to be wielders of magical powers that they gained from consorting with demons and evil spirits. Their shape-changing abilities were only rivaled by their lasciviousness. Duessa's power to transform, particularly in the Fradubio episode, is similar to Archimago's. Thus, as we can call Archimago a "sorcerer," we can call Duessa a female sorcerer or a "witch" in the true sense. The early modern understanding of "witch" falls under a definition derived from the medieval use of the word which defines *witch* as "A female magician, sorceress; in later use *esp.* a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able *by their co-operation*[19] to perform supernatural acts." Shakespeare's use of the word is telling: "1591 SHAKES. 1 Hen. VI, V. iii. 34 See how the vgly Witch doth bend her browes, As if with Circe, she would change my shape" (OED). Witches were thought to have transformative, shape-changing abilities, and the yoking of this ability with the feminine gender amplifies the notion of the witches' capability to "breed," as their intercourse with the devil is thought to be at the root of their ability to spread corruption by creating new monstrous forms or "monstrous births". Likewise, they were thought of as "vgly," and if

[19] My emphasis.

they did appear attractive, it was due to their supernatural power to deceive the eyes of men.

Paré's essay "How demons can deceive us," explains the Renaissance belief in the intercourse of witches and demons and attempts to de-monster the mythical belief in the threat of such creatures by asserting the physical impossibility of such a phenomenon. Paré, unlike Spenser, who is appropriating the myth for his purposes in showing the collapse in previous modes of identifying the self as virtuous, discusses the incubi and succubi in order to render these creatures inept and defuse the social fear inspired by the belief in the otherworldly power of witches. While not denying the existence of demons (for doing so would be heresy), the surgeon is explicating what intercourse between demons and humans really entails, thus scientificating the mystical. Paré explains that demons are known to "obscure the eyes of men with thick clouds that scramble our minds giddily and deceive us by satanic impostures, corrupting our imaginations through their buffooneries and impieties" (Pallister 91). Paré defines the way in which a demon is thought to have intercourse with a witch, sorcerer or sorceress. In the case of succubi, "demons . . . transmute themselves into the guise of women. And such cohabitation is not done just while sleeping, but also while awake, which sorcerers and sorceresses have confessed while being put to death" (Pallister 91). Incubi are the male equivalent of succubi, but it is the demonic female that is most threatening. Pare relates one such experience:

> [There was once] a butcher's helper who, being plunged deep in empty musings on lust, was astonished that he suddenly perceived before him a Devil in the form of a beautiful woman, with whom, having "done business," his genital parts began

> to burn, so that it seemed to him he had a fire burning within the body, and he died miserably" (92).

Not only does intercourse with demons seem to cause physical pain to its victims, such consortium was known to engender further monstrosity, as the union of human and evil spirit was often cited as the cause of monstrous births and things of the natural world that appeared monstrous. Thus, incubi are generative and bring about monstrous birth, the earthly evidence of a woman's intercourse with demons, and thus evidence of feminine foulness and "witchcraft." Paré writes:

> For [demons] transmute themselves in a thousand ways and heap on the bodies of living persons a thousand strange things, such as pieces of cloth, bones, iron instruments, nails, thorns, thread, twisted hair, pieces of wood, snakes, and other monstrous things, which they often cause to issue through the conduit of women's wombs, which is done after having bedazzled and altered our imaginations, as we have said. (91)

While the surgeon explicitly details the myth itself and the origins of it (monstrous births, the confession of witches as they are being tortured) his intention is to prove such assumptions false through empirical means. He specifically accomplishes this by differentiating between the corporeal and incorporeal which, in the case of demons, is the difference between monster and human. He does not deny the existence of demons, but instead defines their types (incubi and succubi) and tendencies. He asserts that the only way a demon can reproduce with a human is if they "transfigure" themselves into human form. The reason is because "seed, which is made of blood and spirit [and] which is apt for reproduction, if transported very little [or slowly], or not at all, is immediately

corrupted and extinguished, because the warmth and heat of the body is absent from it" (92). Pare is not merely inferring that demons have supernatural powers, but rather he is denying the possibility of the union of the supernatural and the flesh. He writes, "You must not believe at all that Demons or devils who are of a spirit nature can have carnal knowledge of women; for in the execution of that act flesh and blood are required, which spirits do not have" (93). The surgeon concludes that "this cohabitation claimed [by others] is imaginary, proceeding from illusory impressions of Satan" (93). He writes,

> Where there are no reproductive parts, there is also no coupling: and where there is no meat or brew there is no seed . . . Besides, Demons are immortal and eternal; what necessity, then, have they of this reproduction, since they have no use for offspring, in as much as they [themselves] will always exist. (93)

As Pare defies these notions of demonic power over human corporeal form, he reinforces the boundary between natural and supernatural, human and monstrous. Indeed, in Paré's formulation, the "witch" is a mere imaginative female who has been harmed by the "illusory impressions of Satan." This de-witching breaks distinctly from Spenser's attempt to underscore the power of the supernatural over both the human psyche and the corporeal form. As Spenser uses this early modern belief in demons to show the helplessness of man's agency in the face of God and the "monster within," Pare asserts the very agency that Redcrosse must relinquish to God's grace: the power of man, of empiricism and learning, over the natural world.

Spenser appropriates a trope from these early modern texts as he portrays the witch's ability to beguile the senses through a "foggy mist." This "cloud" or "foggy mist" is characteristic of the witches' method. Paré writes that demons are known to "obscure

the eyes of men with thick clouds that scramble our minds giddily and deceive us by satanic impostures" (Pallister 91) Duessa makes use of this foggy mist to paralyze her victims so that she may exercise her transformative powers, turning beautiful shapes into ugly ones and vice versa. This power seems restricted to the appearance of beauty, equated so often with virtue in the *Faerie Queene.* Fradubio tells the tale of how she obscured Fraelissa's beauty:

> The wicked witch now seeing all this while
>
> The doubtfull ballaunce eaually to sway,
>
> What not by right, she cast to win by guile,
>
> And by her hellish science raisd streight way
>
> *A foggy mist*, that ouercast the day,
>
> And a dull blast, that breathing on her face,
>
> Dimmed her former beauties shining ray,
>
> And with foule vgly forme did her discgrace:
>
> Then was she fayre alone, when none was faire in place." (I.ii.38)

Duessa accuses Fraelissa of what the witch herself is guilty of – disguising her true hideous form with beauty: "Then cride she out, Fye, fye, deformed wight, / Whose borrowed beautie now appeareth plaine: / To haue before bewitched all mens sight" (I.ii.39). Her power to bewitch the senses appears again in I.viii.14 as she wields a golden cup:

> Then tooke the angrie witch her golden cup,
>
> Which still she bore, replete with magicke artes;
>
> Death and despeyre did many thereof sup

And secret poyson through their inner partes,

Th'eternall bale of heauie wounded harts;

Which after charmes and some enchauntments said,

She lightly sprinkled on his weaker partes;

Therewith his sturdie corage soon was quayd,

And all his sences were with suddein dread dismayd.

This passage demonstrates both the witches' potential to intoxicate her victims and her ability to "infect" them with her lascivious nature. The "charmes" are "sprinkled" on men's "weaker partes," in an effort to confuse the senses. The "weaker partes" are her target. It is Duessa's outward beauty and sexuality that forms the "foggy mist" with which men are entrapped. Her emasculating power quells the subject's "sturdie corage" resulting in a weakened moment marked both by dread and a loss of sense or reason.

Following the deception of the witch's "foggy mist," Fradubio undergoes a perverse transformation, a "death" of sorts. This transformation is a result of his interaction and specifically his sexual transgression with the witch. Fradubio's abandonment of Fraelissa, which mirrors Redcrosse's abandonment of Una, begins his relationship with Duessa, which is apparently sexual in nature: "Then forth I tooke *Duessa* for my Dame, / And in the witch *vnweeting ioyd* long time" (I.ii.40). Apparently his joy is linked to her physical beauty, for when he discovers her "in her proper hew," he regrets "that euer to haue toucht her, I did deadly rew" (I.ii.40). While we know that Fradubio has previously "toucht her," his further gazing on her in this scene is in itself sexually transgressive and suggests the depths to which he has descended. It is the revelation of the warped aspect of these "nether partes" that incites horror – a horror that

is founded not only in the sight of the symbolic female genitalia but in the knowledge that he has "ioyd" in them. Fradubio's looking, both his realization of the depravity of his past sexual transgression and the sight of the weapon itself leads to a moment when his "senses were bereaued quight" (I.ii.42).

Aware of his own depravity, Fradubio's outward form undergoes a metamorphosis, reflecting his moral illness. He experiences what can be interpreted as a spiritual death. The witch, having intoxicated him with her "misshapen nether partes" performs a mastery over his physical form. This metamorphosis is represented as a corporeal phenomenon. The physical form must be "covered": "With wicked herbes and oyntments did besmeare / My body all, through charmes and magicke might" (I.ii.42). Duessa anoints him as one would a corpse in preparation for burial. In II Chronicles 16:14, the preparation of King Asa for burial is described as an "apothecaries art": "They buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art" (KJV). Jesus was similarly buried according to the Jewish custom of preparing the body, "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury" (John 20:39-40 KJV). The horror that is experienced at the moment of abjection (the looking and remembering that signifies sexual transgression) is followed by a representation of physical death that signifies the spiritual (*shows* or displays the spiritual death). In his death, Fradubio has become part of the natural world, as bodies do when they deteriorate. However, his status as a "living"

creature (a tree) indicates the theological view of a "living" death, for the consciousness of the damned continue in the torments of hell.

The bleeding of Fradubio that is witnessed by Redcrosse further demonstrates the suffering of the spiritually dead. Fradubio's transformation is a hellish punishment for his entanglement with Duessa that defies both the boundaries of life and death and subject and object (man and tree). He undergoes a "living death" of torture:

> But once a man *Fradubio*, now a tree,
> Wretched man, wretched tree; whose nature weake
> A cruell witch her cursed will to wreake,
> Hath thus transformd, and plast in open plaines,
> Where *Boreas* doth blow full bitter bleake,
> And scorching Sunne does dry my secret vaines:
> For though a tree I seme, yet cold and heat me paines. (I.ii.33)

The visceral punishment of his death – the "scorching Sunne" and cold winds depict a hell that is peculiar to the topography of Faerie land, but yet recalls an otherworldly hell. The boundaries of his form are breached, and his bleeding both identifies his hybrid nature (he is a tree with the characteristics of a man) and points to a similar suffering in a familiar wood. The "bough; out of whose rift there came / Small drops of gory bloud, that trickled down the same" (I.ii.30) is a direct parallel to the pilgrim's encounter with the shades of Dante's wood of the suicides:

> Allor porsi la mano un poco avante
> e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
> e 'l tronco suo gridò: "Perché mi schiante?"

Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno

ricominciò a dir: "Perché mi scerpi?

non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno?

Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi.

[Then I stretched out my hand a little before me

and plucked a small branch from a great thornbush;

and its stem cried out: "Why do you split me?"

When it had become dark with blood, it began

again: "Why do you pluck me"

Have you no spirit of pity at all?

We were men, and now we have become plants[20]]

(13.31-37)

While it is unclear whether Spenser intended to indicate that Fradubio's fate was self-inflicted in some manner, Fradubio has indeed committed a "suicide" of sorts in his submission to the lusts of the flesh, in his failure to practice what Book II calls Temperance.

The blood that is spilled here not only indicates suffering or "living death," but also marks the abject form as infected or impure. What issues from the abject, incontinent form is foul and tainted in biblical terms: "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off" (Leviticus 17:14). The foulness of the body's spilled life force goes beyond the prohibition of meat. As blood is the "life of all flesh," bleeding or spilling of such

[20] Durling's translation.

blood marks the flesh as unclean. Kristeva discusses blood impurity within the Judeo-Christian framework:

> The various connotations of blood impurity . . . takes in the following: prohibition of meat diet (following upon prohibition against killing), the postdiluvian classification of meat as in conformity or nonconformity with the divine word, the principle of identity without admixture, the exclusion of anything that breaks boundaries (flow, drain, discharge) (103).

As Fradubio bleeds, the boundaries of his form are broken, and his body can thus be identified as abject. For Kristeva, the fundamental pollution of blood and the horror of the leaking form are linked to the trauma of the nascent separation from the maternal body. This unconscious trauma that is repugnant in memory is necessary for the subject's assertion of an agency that is separate and distinct from the maternal life-giving force. Thus, memories of maternal separation, of the breaking and bleeding of the mother's body, arouse a sense of horror in the subject. The abject state, in this way, is a return to the trauma of this moment; it is a death of separation, a death of individual agency, of previous means of identifying the self as separate from the maternal body.

The social horror incited by death's infection of the living, and the societal compulsion to heal death's infection and restore previously established boundaries is discussed in Boaistuau's chilling story of Margareta Wulczer. The essay opens with several accounts of difficult births in which the mother's womb was surgically opened to extract the infant or infants, particularly in the case of multiple births. Boaistuau then details the story of poor Margareta, who was found to have carried a child dead within her belly for the span of five years. Her plight begins in the year 1545, in Vienna, while

she was laboring while attended by "hir mother and certain other sage women" (109). This was customary, as childbirth was usually assisted by the mother's female relatives and perhaps a midwife. In the course of Margareta's labor, her attendants "perceived such a brute noise as it had been a thunder clap within the belly of that poor martyr" and concluded that the child must have died (109). The "thunder clap" is an interesting aspect of Boaistuau's story, for it appears to indicate that a divine force willed the child's death.

At first, the attendants turn to God for assistance in delivering Margareta of her deceased offspring. After the women had "imployed all their labour and arte in vaine," they left the poor woman, in hopes that the "helpe and mercie of almightie God" would save her (110). Finally, when God's help did not seem imminent, a number of skilled physicians and surgeons were called, but "were not able to deliver hir from this miserie, or otherwise comfort hir" (110). Boaistuau's account asserts that Margareta suffered for four years, and finally, having had enough of the pain and torment, "she resolved in hir self that it was most expedient to expose some ready death, rather than to suffer hir selfe to pine continually by the crueltie of that torment," for surgery at this time often resulted in the death of the patient (110). Finally, she called the surgeons to cut her belly open, and they removed the child "half rotten," and amazingly (and rather unbelievably to the modern reader) "they restored hir by the ayde of God to suche perfect health, that she remayneth at this day a live, and so whole, that she may yet conceive and bring forth children" (110). This account, while we can assume its embellishments, is an assertion of the triumph of empirical means of defying death itself. This child's death does not demonstrate the power of God's grace, but is rather an opportunity for man to assert his own over power destiny. As the surgeon literally "cuts out" death from the physical form,

previous boundaries of death and life are reestablished and humankind emerges victorious over the unknown.

The hubris of such modes of thinking is characteristic of the emerging empiricism of Spenser's time, marked by the institutionalization of medicine in France and the increasing fascination or *wonder*[21] with and for objects of the natural world. Elizabethans sought to make sense of the anomalies of the world around them, and natural philosophy increasingly provided them with means of doing so. What Boaistuau's account gives us is a metaphor (the extraction of death from the feminine body) for thinking about the female body as a signifier for two antitheses: the womb and the tomb. In Boaistuau's account, the symbolic female genitalia is transformed by an "accident" of nature into a grave. Thus, the feminine becomes symbolic for both the giving of life and the taking of it. As Boaistuau recounts the success of the surgeons, he de-monsters the female body and returns it to its previous and singular definition as generative and life-giving. Thus, the feminine is de-mystified and robbed of its power to entrap and destroy.

Kristeva writes that "those who fear decay and death at the touch of the feminine" was a concern of Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis, the subject of Céline's doctoral dissertation. Kristeva suggests that Céline's study of Semmelweis, the inventor of obstetric hygiene, was a preparation for *Journey to the End of the Night*, "in that it discusses in nearly explicit fashion, although within the constraint of "scientific" repression, the enigma constituted, for reason, by the feminine" (160). Thus, Céline's writings are riddled with "distracting moments when opposites (life / death, feminine / masculine) join in order to constitute what is probably more than a defense fantasy

[21] See Daston and Park for the evolution of *wonder* among circles of the learned elite from the 16th through the late 18th century.

against the persecuting power of the mother: a panic hallucination of the inside's destruction, of an interiorization of death following the abolishment of limits and differences. The remedy? – Once more it involves separating, not touching, dividing, washing" (160). These simultaneous and contradictory significations of the female genitalia (life / death) are what renders the feminine form capable of inciting horror. Thus, accounts such as Boaistuau's that insist on man's ability to cut out or cleanse death from the womb return the feminine form to its singular signification as life-giving.

Conversely Spenser amplifies the monstrosity of the female genitalia in the figure of Duessa, although his assertion of the witch's coupling with her victims is veiled in allusion. As Redcrosse is "pour'd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd, / Both careless of his health, and of his fame," his lust is unleashed in the form of Orgoglio, "growen great through arrogant delight" (I.vii.10). Spenser dances around a number of metaphors to provide the reader with the impression that Duessa and Redcrosse are doing more than "[bathing] in the pleasaunce of the ioyous shade" next to the fountain (I.vii.4). Besides the appearance of Orgoglio at this moment, a creature that Lauren Silberman calls "an ambulatory erection, image of the hero's own sensuality," the allusions to Ovid's myth of the hermaphrodite suggest that this encounter between the knight and the witch is concerned with "making sense of the sensual experience" (Silberman 156). As Redcrosse's lustful pride is unleashed, he is rendered helpless by the waters of the fountain, which here stand in for the feminine body:

> This Nymph, quite tyr'd with heat of scorching ayre
> Sat down to rest in middest of the race:
> The goddesse wroth gan fowly her disgrace,

> And bad the waters, *which from her did flowe*,[22]
>
> Be such as she her selfe was then in place
>
> Thenceforth her waters waxed dull and slow,
>
> And all that drunke thereof, did faint and feeble grow. (I.vii.5)

In addition to the similarities between the witch who lies in the shade next to Redcrosse and the nymph who is "quite tyr'd with heat of scorching ayre," we identify Duessa with the nymph Salmacis because of her predatory characteristics. Conversely, as she entices Redcrosse, she assumes the role of nymph in the pastoral tradition: lover of the shepherd, inhabitant of a patriarchal paradise. Silberman identifies two mythographic traditions that Spenser is drawing from at this moment:

> The cause [of the enfeebling properties of the fountain] that Spenser here provides derives from a mythographic tradition that interprets the nymph Salmacis as an emblem of moral laziness. No reference to the erotic aspect of the myth occurs until Redcrosse actually drinks from the stream; his reaction recalls, in part, another mythographic tradition, which holds that the fountain of Salmacis is aphrodisiac, promoting impotence through sexual overindulgence. (157)

Silberman's suggestion that the waters of the fountain both promote moral laziness and sexual overindulgence help us to pinpoint the moment when Redcrosse drinks from the fountain as the precise intersection between human and monster. This moment, which signifies the coupling of Redcrosse and Duessa, is the subject's "death of self." Here the horror occurs when Redcrosse realizes that the vice Duessa represents is actually his own. When he becomes entangled with the witch, he experiences both an inability to identify

[22] I've inserted emphasis here to show how the fountain's waters are generated by the female form.

himself as “virtuous,” and a loss of agency, manifested in a moment of post-coital weakness:

> Hereof this gentle knight vnweeting was,
>
> And lying down vpon the sandie graile,
>
> Dronke of the streame, as cleare as christall glas;
>
> Eftstoones his manly forces gan to fayle,
>
> And migtie strong was turnd to feeble frayle:
>
> His chaunged powres at first them selues not felt,
>
> Till crudled cold his corage gan assayle,
>
> And chearefull blood in fayntnes chill did melt,
>
> Which like a feuer fit through all his body swelt. (I.vii.6).

Here is the moment of simultaneous abjection and emasculation. The drinking of the waters of the fountain (which stand in for the feminine body) symbolizes the intercourse between human and monster. Redcrosse’s “corage” is “crudled cold” and his “blood in fayntnes chill did melt.” The emotion conjured by the chilled blood described in this encounter is one of horror. At the same time, “like a feuer fit through all his body swelt.” He has become lascivious and duplicitious, momentarily abandoning the works of holiness (although merely perceived by him as such at this point) to perform sinful acts. As Redcosse is “disarmd, disgraste, and inwardly dismayede, / And eke so faint in euery ioynt and vayne,” (I.vii.11), he is reduced to a “slombred, senceless corse,” an image of death. Orgoglio easily overcomes him and carries him away to be imprisoned (I.vii.15).

The subsequent image of Redcrosse in Orgoglio’s dungeon displays the danger of spiritual death that Redcrosse has embraced. In a state of literal despair, Redcrosse

becomes aware of his own depravity. He realizes that he is not, as he has formerly misrecognized, a "virtuous knight." Instead, he is a corpse-like figure that is neither living (in a spiritual sense) nor dead (in a corporeal sense). Arthur has trouble reviving him: "his pined corse, him scarce to light could beare, / A ruefull spectacle of death and ghastly drere" (I.viii.40). Redcrosse is more than emaciated and starved of spiritual guidance, he is the figure of a walking death who shuns the light:

> His sad dull eies deepe sunck in hollow pits,
>
> Could not endure th'vnwonted sunne to view;
>
> His bare thin cheekes for want of better bits,
>
> And empty sides deceiued of their dew,
>
> Could make a stony hart his hap to rew,
>
> His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawned bowrs
>
> Were wont to riue steele plates, and helmets hew,
>
> Were clean consum'd and all his vitall powres
>
> Decayd, and all his flesh shronk vp like withered flowres. (I.viii.41)

He has become the speaking corpse that inhabits Kristeva's liminal space between death and life. His physical state can also be interpreted as a deferred death, an amplification of the spiritual death that is to follow. Kristeva explains that the corpse is not merely abject because it embodies contradictory significations (life / death), but it is thought to be unclean in the Judeo-Christina schema. She writes,

> A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejections, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is indistinguishable from the symbolic – the corpse

> represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God's *territory* as it is from speech. Without always being impure, the corpse is 'accursed of God' (Deuteronomy 21:23): it must not be displayed and immediately buried so as not to pollute the divine earth. (109)

The language of death used to describe Redcrosse's fallen state demonstrates the ultimate collapse of his misrecognized identity. He no longer bears a trace of virtue as he construes it. He has fallen to a state in which only God's grace can be his remedy.

This moment in the text is the ultimate collapse of structures of meaning for the virtuous knight. Redcrosse's death-like state opens the door for Despair – for the temptation to turn the "living death" into a final end. This collapse is a necessary prelude to the reconstruction of meaning that occurs in the House of Holinesse. As Redcrosse is infected by his encounter with Duessa, he spirals downward towards a spiritual death that culminates, as we shall see, in his encounter with Despair. Duplicity plays a particular role in Redcrosse's quest to become a knight of true holiness, to fulfill his name and gather the strength to slay the dragon. Duessa represents this duplicity as well as the fallen nature that Redcrosse must acknowledge, this merging of seeming virtue and inward filth. The abject image that is formed in the moments when Redcrosse encounters monstrosity makes use of the tropes and conventions of early modern natural philosophical texts. While these texts attempt to further delineate the line between virtue and vice by concerning themselves with the moral health of society, Spenser seeks the *affect* of horror in order to show a collapse in meaning that is a necessary prelude to its reconstruction.

Chapter III

"Die soone, O faries sonne"

A something full of horror, O my God, a deep and boundless manifold; and this is the mind, and this is myself.

Augustine, *Confessions* 10.17[23]

Pierre Boaistuau includes in *Certaine secrete wonders of nature* a chapter entitled "A wonderfull Historie of Crueltie." In it, he tells the story of a torture devised by Maximilian, Emperor of Rome, who "caused the dead to kil the liuing, by tying the bodies of liuing men to the bodies of the deade, face to face, and mouth to mouthe, leauing them so, till that those which were dead, by their putrification had killed the living" (128) This reference in Boaistuau not only highlights the fascination of such atrocities for the Renaissance imagination, it offers a model of infection that matches the infection of the Spenserian subject by vice. As I turn to Redcrosse Knight's encounter with Despair, I want to focus on death's infection, and in particular, on conflicting notions of death. As I plot the moment when the virtuous knight and the monster Despair intersect, I will show how the knight's fear of death and the longing for it become intertwined.

Boaistuau's chief intention in compiling stories that ranged from retellings of biblical events to accounts of difficult and monstrous births to horrific accidents and "Wonders of Dogges which did eate Christians," often seems to the reader like a shameful attempt at sensationalism, similar in nature to the modern day horror film. Undoubtedly, Boaistuau was drawing on the collective emotion of *wonder* that historians

[23] Harold Skulsky's translation from the edition of Pius Knöll (Prague, 1896).

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park assert was the driving force behind such widespread interest in physical anomalies and natural curiosities during the Renaissance. While Boaistuau's work indeed relies on emotion for its impact, its *affect* extends beyond mere wonder or curiosity to frequent repulsion, for the author's accounts of infant corpses rotting for years within a mother's belly, strange methods of torture, and Senecanesque cannibalism invite revulsion or horror. However, in Boaistuau's time these effects would have been considered "true" history. Thus, his "historie" must be taken as such: an account of the dark underbelly of early modern England and the inheritance of a classical past that extends beyond a model of erudition to include a preoccupation with monstrosities of the human mind. The aforementioned chapter on cruelty reveals much about the climate of violence and the fascination with atrocity during the Renaissance, as well as the attempt to explain such events as driven by Providential design. In my reading of the Despair episode in Book I, I want to suggest that these stories moved the Renaissance imagination to conceive a Judeo-Christian hell according to the cruelties human experience. This conception of hell defined according to the "unnatural" aspects of human history is useful in explicating the Despair episode in Canto ix of Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, as it is my assertion that Redcrosse's acceptance of the kind of death Despair offers him is due in part to his inability to reconcile the God of grace with the God of wrath.

In the previous chapters, I have sought to trace a distinctive moment in Spenser's text in which the subject appears overcome by the monster, in which we see (and experience) the *horror* of the instant when the monstrous infects what has until that time been identified as virtuous. In this moment, the subject realizes that the monster is not an

Other but a part of his very being. This identification is horrifying because it expresses the collapse of the imaginary, of all previous modes of defining the self in relation to the Other. The feeling of helplessness that characterizes this moment recalls the psycho-linguistic state that precedes signification (or the law of the father), taking us back beyond primary narcissism, to a kind of "crisis in narcissism" in which the self covets the contented complacency of the narcissistic infant. In this moment the subject flounders, helpless. Kristeva's notion of *abjection* is useful in tracing these moments in Spenser's text, for the explication of the affect of this moment points to Spenser's distinctive theory of vice, a theory that posits sin as something within our very being that resists our own efforts to externalize it. If the subject, and thus the reader, can learn to recognize that vice is not something apart from ourselves but an intrinsic infection that defines us and subsequently "taints" our efforts to do good, perhaps we can begin to relinquish our own agency to faith, and thus fashion true holiness.

As Redcrosse's battle with Errour has shown, spiritual error is not something with which we consciously choose to entangle ourselves, but rather an internal tendency encountered in the *selva obscura* of human existence. In portraying monstrosity, Spenser manipulates tropes of early modern natural philosophy in order to disrupt boundaries, borders and methods of categorization. In this way, he unleashes the monster's potential to be dangerous, unknowable, *horrifying.* Part of this horror, as seen in the effusion of Errour's monstrous brood, is the fear of the monster's generative qualities, its ability to not only disrupt boundaries of gender and order but to invade all aspects of human existence. Redcrosse's encounter with Duessa further reveals that Spenser's monsters

have the ability to catalyze a "death of self" or a loss of human agency that serves as a necessary prelude to sanctification for the believer.

In an examination of Redcrosse's encounter with Despair, Kristeva's notion of *abjection* continues to be useful in explicating the infection of the Spenserian subject by vice. In this episode, Spenser indeed provides us with a moment when Redcrosse succumbs to Despair, a moment when the two become intertwined and interconnected, a moment of significant loss which we can identify as abjection. However, in this episode, this moment is marked by the knight's wavering between two simultaneous and contradictory notions of death. My reading looks beyond the traditional allegorical interpretation of Despair in order to show that what the monster represents is not merely death itself but a desire for a particular type of death. The writings of Pierre Boaistuau will show how, in the Renaissance, monstrosity is a metaphor for something monstrous in human experience. In my reading of the Despair episode, this metaphor estranges natural death (death as annihilation) and monstrous death (Judeo-Christian hell) by providing the appearance of logic to a fundamentally illogical orthodoxy. While Boaistuau struggles to make sense of a natural history of humankind that is marked by the unnatural, Spenser seizes on the contradictory notions of natural and unnatural and amplifies their incongruity in order to fully represent the power of Redcrosse's moment of despair.

Falling under the definition of *monster* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice, etc." Examples of early modern usage include "1508 R. Henryson *Orpheus & Eurydice* 13 A ryall renk for to be rusticate Is bot a monster in comparison, Had in despyte and foule derision**.** 1556 J.

Heywood *Spider & Flie* liv. 22 Which deede: if we do, wheare are our like monsturs? 1608 Shakespeare *King Lear* I.ii.95 He cannot be such a monster" (*OED*). For a human being to be called a *monster*, he or she must exhibit a particular state of mind ("unnatural character") as well as cruel deeds ("exhibiting . . . extreme cruelty"). Similarly, the adjective *monstrous*, when used to describe a person, means both "strange or unnatural in conduct or disposition" as well as "inhumanly wicked or depraved; atrocious, horrible." A person who is *monstrous* is one who commits atrocity. Examples of the word's usage during the Renaissance link the adjective with a cruel action: "1567 in J. Cranstoun *Satirical Poems Reformation* (1891) I.iii.18 His cruell murther ȝe will call monsterous. 1594 Shakespeare *Titus Andronicus* IV.iv.51 Shall I endure this monstrous villanie?" (*OED*). Furthermore, it is significant that both "unnatural character" and "unnatural conduct" are equated with "evil." A *monster,* this definition tells us, is "a monstrous example of evil," or "a vice." "Extreme cruelty" or "wickedness" not only defies humanity but is in itself "evil." Thus, persons who exhibit such characteristics are monstrous, and such monstrosity or cruelty surpasses the limits of the natural world and is the work of supernatural "evil." The connotation of evil here can hardly be extracted from the biblical notion of evil. Evil is undoubtedly the work of Satan, although what constitutes "evil" is subjectively determined according to theology. Ambroise Paré writes extensively of human intercourse (both literal and figurative) with demons in *Des monstres et prodiges.*[24] Just as monstrous births were often thought to be a result of demonology or the intervention of satanic forces in the natural world, psychological monstrosity, or human cruelty, is similarly associated with devilish forces, as the etymology of the word suggests.

[24] See Chapter 2's discussion of incubi and succubi.

This notion that evil or satanic forces are manifested in cruel human acts shaped a decidedly fearful conception of hell during Spenser's time, undoubtedly bolstered by the visceral *contrapasso*[25] represented in Dante's *Inferno*. The *Inferno* molded the Western conception of the Judeo-Christian hell from the late fourteenth century onwards. There is evidence that Spenser was "acquainted with Dante's reputation and, in all probability, with the text of the *Divine Comedy* itself [for] texts of the *Comedy* were readily available, and both Sidney and Harvey knew Dante's work" (Kirkpatrick *SE* 205). Indeed, critics suggest that both Spenser and Dante "attribute to the human mind a capacity for perversion as great and subtle as its capacity for good" (Kirkpatrick *SE* 208).

Such a Hell looms over the figure of Redcrosse Knight in canto ix, as his missteps have led him to the edge of a precipice. He indeed arrives at the Cave of Despair having sinned. He has abandoned God's one truth, relied on his own prowess rather than God's guidance, committed adultery with the equivalent of the Whore of Babylon and allowed his own inflated Pride (literally) to overtake him. The days and nights spent in Orgoglio's dungeon have assured him of his mistakes and convinced him that retribution is at hand. His human resources have failed him; he is weak, emaciated, out of faith and hope, and he foresees death approaching. However, he is still Redcrosse Knight the Christian warrior, the guardian and deliverer of God's one truth, and although at this moment he has strayed from his true purpose, what his very being heralds, what we must accept he truly believes in (for his name tells us as much) is a life that conquers death – the life of

[25] From the Latin *contrapassum*, a version of the Greek *tò antipeponthón* in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* 5.5.1132b, a discussion of retaliation as a form of justice. Thomas Aquinas defines the term as the biblical law of retribution (*lex talionis*): "I answer that the counter-suffering [*contrapassum*] denotes equal suffering repaid for previous action . . . this kind of justice is laid down in the Law (Ex. 21.23, 24)z; 'He shall render life for life, eye for eye.'" (*Summa theol.* 2a 2ae, q.61, a. 4). From Durling's translation of the *Inferno*. Notes to Canto 28.

New Jerusalem that is offered to the saved. As a Christian warrior, his task has been to not only uphold this belief in a spiritual life, but to bring justifiable death to God's enemies. In this way, his very being proclaims both the life offered by salvation, and a death which, in the schema of Judeo-Christian theology, sentences the sinner, the one who embraces vice, to the biblical "lake of fire" (Revelations 20:15). As he loses his way, as he loses *himself*, he begins to see life according to the flesh rather than the spirit and thus similarly envisions death according to the earthly experience. Still a believer, Redcrosse becomes consumed by an earthly vision of divine justice. He has fallen from the higher plane of being in which he is a warrior led by God's grace, to the fleshly realm in which he is the subject, the everyman, who is consumed by the flesh and sees himself as not only a sinner, but an inevitable victim of God's wrath.

Once assured of his sins, the only alternative to Redcrosse is the horror of hell, a death that he imagines in the light of the violence of the fleshly experience. Boaistuau recounts in the chapter immediately following his "Wonderfull Historie of Crueltie" that adultery, a sin that Redcrosse has committed in abandoning God's one truth and having "sold thy self to serve *Duessa* vild," was a sin that was punishable by death, or worse than death, among the Romans. In "A wonderfull Historie of a monster brought forth into the world aliue, who from the nauell upwardes, had the shape of a man, and the rest like a dogge," amidst stories of monstrous births which evidenced the bestial practices of the parents, Boaistuau recounts that penalties for adultery included plucking out the eyes of the "whoremongers," cutting off the woman's nose, and giving "libertie to the husbande, of his owne proper authorietie, to kil the whoremoger (sic) and his wife, if he toke them comitting to that abhominable vice" (129). The Emperor Macrim of Rome devised a

bizarre torture as a punishment for sexual crimes, and "being informed, that divers souldioures had violated their hostesse chamber maide . . . caused the bellies of two great Beefes to be opened aliue, and made the souldioures to be sowed and inclosed therein, having their heads which appeared out, to the end that all men might see them, the one talke with the othere" (130). The Emperor Aurelius was similarly inventive: "being made to understand a souldiour of his armie had defloured the wife of his host . . . caused two great trees by force to be bowed and plied, whereunto the souldioure was tied, to the end that the trees returneing to their place, might tear and plucke him in pieces" (129). A comparable story of this "tree torture" is told in "A Wonderfull Historie of Crueltie" and the frontispiece to that chapter portrays a muscular man bound to four separate trees with a pained visage and hanging head (see figure III.i). While Boistuau emphasizes the atrocity of these punishments and the cruel or monstrous intention behind them, he notes that adultery or 'whoremongering' was a sin that violated God's law, and thus such punishments were biblically justified, for "by [the] law of Moses [adulterers] were smothered , murdered and stoned to death. S. Paule . . . crieth that God will condemn fornicators and adulterers. [In Corinthians] he writeth thus: Do not disceiue your selevs, for neither fornicatour, idolatour, shal not possesse at all the kingdom of God" (130). Furthermore, Boaistuau attributes the crimes of the Roman emperor Tiberius to the intervention of Satan. Tiberius forbid, on pain of death, any weeping or lamenting for the innocent people he had murdered. He even appointed a special guard to seek out mourners who exhibited these emotions and bring them to be executed "in a rare and straunge fashion." Boaistuau calls him the "butcher of Sathan," thus yoking his monstrous deeds with the forces of hell (128).

Figure III.i

The “tree torture” in Boaistuau’s text.

Boistuau's chapter on human cruelty distinctly identifies that the cruelty evidenced among the Romans was not simply a pagan practice:

> but also (the more to be lamented) amongst us Christians, which be all issued out of one vine, formed of like elements, incorporate in one church, hauing one head Lord Jesus Christ, being the children of one father celestiall, of one spirite, raunsomed by one bloud, regenerate of one baptisme, norished of like Sacraments, participating of one Chalice, and fightyng under the crosse and banner of Jesus Christ, hauing one commone enimie Sathan, being called a like to one heritage, and yet notwithstanding we be not shamed to dismember and teare in peces one an other, with suche horrour and confusion, that it seemeth we would fighte against nature, and drenche the earth of humain bloud, leauyng it besides as a deserte or place inhabitable (125-126).

While Christians were guilty of fighting "against nature" in instances of excessive bloodshed, their cruelty is relegated by Boaistuau to examples of extreme warfare. Although he includes the slaying of the Scots by "Edwarde the.iiij. king of *England* . . . where he killed [and] murdred three score thousand men," and Charles Martell, King of France, and Abidaran, "where in one conflict was killed and murdred three hundreth and fifte thousande," the author reserves his descriptions of horrific and peculiar torture to the ancient Romans, as if he considers Christians above such practices, especially considering their privileged birthright ("children of one father celestiall, of one spirite, etc.). Boaistuau seems much more concerned with representing pagan atrocity and the persecution of Christians by non-believers, in particular Dioclesian, "who seing that the Christians whiche raigned in hys tyme, would not renounce the name of God, and

worshypp hys ydoles, was not contente to cut of theyr noses, and their eares, causing spelles of woode to be put under theyr nayles, [and] pouryng hote leade upon theyr priuie partes" (126). Such cruelty was a significantly pagan practice restricted to enemies of God, as this kind of monstrosity was thought to be the work of evil forces, and such monsters, like Tiberius, the servants of "Sathan."

Boaistuau's account of monstrous cruelty asserts the necessity of representing evidence of the unnatural within the discourse of natural philosophy. In writing a "natural" history of humankind, he struggles to account for the fact that the unnatural is such a prominent portion of human experience. Here his attempt to exclude Christians from the category of the "unnatural" fails. Boaistuau makes use of the vocabulary of monstrosity to lend the appearance of logic to a vision of human history that is innately illogical. Boaistuau's history cannot *live* without the category of the monstrous, the dumping ground for what does not belong in orthodoxy. His yoking of the monstrous with the forces of hell represents the cultural compulsion to classify the norms of nature in orthodox terms. As the "unnatural" aspect of human behavior must be seen as the norm but cannot be severed from the category of the "monstrous," it must be relegated to the forces of hell. As the servants of "Sathan" are represented as monstrous, Boaistuau thus classifies the "unnatural" portion of human history in a way that underscores Judeo-Christian ideology. In this light, hell is imagined as a place where the monstrosities of human experience are unleashed.

So if the Renaissance imagination conceived such atrocities as the work of the devil, and envisioned Judeo-Christian hell according to the manifestation of earthly monstrosity, of humans turned to monsters by the evils of Satan, how then did Spenser

conceive hell in *The Faerie Queene*, or more generally, death itself? Death is elusive in Spenser's text. Critics have aptly identified that "the map of Spenser's Faerie land is traversed by deaths that will not die, deaths aborted, deaths-in-life, life-in-death – as if Spenser prefers a metaphysical suspension 'eterne in mutabilite' (3.6.47) to the heavy aesthetic and philosophical charge of representing the meaning of death" (Bellamy 9). It is true that in Spenser the "finality of death is often deferred indefinitely" and "Spenser confers distinction not on the dying but on the saving, not on interior but exterior power, not on humankind but on the deity" (Bellamy 5). By making death a promise of the future, Spenser draws attention to both its meaning and its threat. Redcrosse of course cannot corporeally taste death in this narrative, because he *must* continue in order to fulfill his purpose. Faerie lond is a "living" space in which the poet infuses his subjects with life. However, the *promise of death* is amplified as death is deferred. Similarly, the monsters in Faerie lond, in order to continue to fulfill their allegorical intention, must persist, and the fear that this instills in the subject only underscores death's promise, and feeds on the subject's theologically driven fear.

The Faerie Queene is punctuated by creatures that experience "deaths that will not die," such as Errour's breeding corpse, her "scattred brood," and Malegar's life in death, his re-invigoration by the earth, his seeming inability to be killed (Bellamy 7). This resistance to death is characteristic of literary monsters; it is what makes them frightening. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that "'Monster theory' must . . . concern itself with strings of cultural moments, connected by a logic that always threatens to shift; invigorated by change and escape, by the impossibility of achieving what Susan Stewart calls the desired 'fall or death, the stopping' of its gigantic subject" (6). Indeed, it is *our*

fear, and the fear within Spenser's subject that is the monster's raison d'être. The fear of death is the reason the subject either flees from the monster or struggles to vanquish it. Our desire to slay the monster is our desire to avoid being slain. The true horror lies in the discovery that he stubbornly refuses to die. Cohen has noted the monster's curious persistence in his *Seven Theses*:

> No matter how many times King Arthur killed the ogre of Mount Saint Michael, the monster reappeared in another heroic chronicle, bequeathing the Middle Ages an abundance of *morte d'Arthurs*. Regardless of how many times Sigourney Weaver's beleaguered Ripley destroys the ambiguous Alien that stalks her, its monstrous progeny return, ready to stalk again in another bigger-than-ever sequel. No monster tastes of death but once. The anxiety that condenses like green vapor into the form of the vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. (5)

Monsters are indeed infused with life by a fear that is culturally distinct. The monster defers death in allegory because he is a projection of the fear within the subject. Spenserian monsters seize upon and amplify this fear. Thus, the monster very being comes to signify the rapidly approaching death of the subject.

Gordon Teskey has written that allegory resists an accurate representation of death. He writes,

> Death [in allegory] leads not to the feeling of loss but rather to a feeling of clarity gained. In an oddly paradoxical way an allegorical character's death is the moment when that character is most alive in meaning, since meaning is supposed

> to be that character's essence. Considered as pure meaning, the allegorical character lives most in death (65).

Certainly this is true to an extent when Redcrosse's enemies are slain – when Sans Foy is killed, for example, we know that he dies because he is "without faith." But when death is deferred, how can we locate allegorical meaning? Teskey goes on to explain that when death is deferred, it is only the corporeal or literal death that is postponed. While "true death" for the subject is absent or deferred, *figurative*, or in the case of Redcrosse knight, *spiritual* death is noticeably present. The paradox of life and death existing simultaneously is one that occurs often in Spenser. Indeed, at the moment when Redcrosse meets Despair, he "looks like" death. Teskey explicates that factual and figurative death are difficult to distinguish in Spenser, "or when the factual and the figurative can be distinguished they are opposed to each other wherever we find adjacent intensities of meaning. We know from the narrative that [the character] is alive, but the language keeps speaking of his death" (72).

Indeed, Redcrosse does seem to be physically "dying" at this point in Spenser's story, and this marks the beginning of Despair's infection, an illness that begins long before Redcrosse comes face to face with the monster. Although Redcrosse has been liberated by Arthur from Orgoglio's dungeon, his death-like frame is gnawingly present. Una is apprehensive about his physical condition, and

> weighing the decayed plight,
> And shrunken synewes of her chosen knight,
> Would not a while her forward course persew,
> Ne bring him forth in face of dreadfull fight,

Till he recouered had his former hew" (I.ix.20).

Redcrosse and Despair's emaciation is remarkably similar. Despair mimics the knight with his outward appearance, just as Redcrosse's outward appearance mimics his inward spiritual sickness. In this liminal space between living and dying, Redcrosse begins to recognize his approaching spiritual death, enough so that he sees his own death sitting before him – a creature who resembles him – what he has become and what he will become eternally if he fails in his quest. However, while Despair is a representation of death, he does not singularly herald the death of Judeo-Christian ideology, what can be referred to as "spiritual death" for the knight. Despair's very being yokes spiritual death with organic death, as his appearance is a corporeal performance of an organic death. This organic death becomes an offering to the subject as a remedy for his pain. This is the monster's deception: that a death apart from his belief is available to Redcrosse – death as an end of consciousness. This notion of death as an end of being is particularly tempting to Redcrosse, as he is increasingly overcome by the knowledge of his depravity and his fear of God's impending judgment. The monster feeds on this fear as he shows Redcrosse his failings, literally taking him back to the moment of his sin as he reminds him of his fallen nature and the inevitable wrath that awaits him. Despair both acknowledges and denies the orthodoxy that so frightens Redcrosse knight.

Implicit in the manifestation of corporeal death is a desire for organic death. This is represented in terms of "hunger." Despair reminds Redcrosse that his spiritual death is approaching, and takes advantage of this fear of the promise of death to offer him an alternative, to replace the hunger for God's word with the hunger for things of the flesh. A vocabulary of hunger underscores the emaciated figures that both Redcrosse and his

mirror-monster present. Redcrosse's lack of nourishment is a symptom of the absence of spiritual "food" in his life: John 6:35 "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"; Matthew 4:4 "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (KJV). Despair, conversely, epitomizes emptiness itself, as he attempts to feed his own hunger with death, a death that, ironically, he cannot work on himself: "But death he could not work himself thereby; / For thousand times he so him selfe had drest, / Yet nathelesse it could not do him die" (I.ix.54) Despair's hunger is amplified by his gaunt and emaciated form, his "raw-bone cheekes through penurie and pine, / Were shronke into his iawes, as he did neuer dyne." Hunger creates a kind of atmosphere in the scene, and the "dreary corse," which "him beside there lay vpon the gras" seems to feed his craving (I.ix.36). Indeed, the main topographic feature of Despair's cave is the corpse, the monster's food that fails to provide him sustenance. The remnants of his victims litter the surrounding landscape: "carcases were scattred on the greene, / And throwne about the cliffs" (I.ix.34).

Other descriptions which yoke the desire for death with hunger appear in Spenser. If we recall Irenius' eyewitness description of the Munster famine, we are given a vivid and pitiable portrait of the Irish as they are reduced to "carrion" by starvation, as their desire for death seems to become synonymous with their desire for the sustenance of life:

> Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eate the dead carrions, happy where they could find them, yea, and one another soone after, insomuch as

> the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves. . . (Spenser *A View of the State of Ireland* 101-102). (Gregerson 95)

While these "anatomies of death," these monstrous (because of their horrible cannibalistic deeds) casualties of Her Majesty's cause in Ireland, still *live*, they are "anatomies" of a horrific "living death," exempt from the privilege (physical, and arguably spiritual) afforded their English conquerors. Their emaciated forms linger on the border between living and dying, just as Redcrosse lingers in this ontological doorway, suspended between death and life but ever more seduced by the rhetoric of death's speaking mirror. The forward movement of the narrative in this canto depends on the way Despair draws his victims towards death. This is represented both as a hunger within the monster's very being and a characteristic of the landscape he claims. Trevisan calls the Cave a "Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a *greedy graue*" (I.ix.33). Just as Despair seduces with his rhetoric, the canto's setting seems to "craue" corpses, to draw death, or a similar yearning for death, out of its victims.

Freud has written that "the attitude of our unconscious towards the problem of death [remains] almost exactly the same as that of primeval man," and that the mythological task of evading this notion of death as annihilation was in all likelihood conjoined with the very first human recognition of death (294-296). The anxiety about death and the possible alternatives to the ideological formulation by which Christians sought to overcome death's very threat was a concern in the Renaissance. In fact, the Reformation itself arose in part from "a recognition that the fear of death was being manipulated by churchmen for material advantage – specifically, the selling of indulgences" (Watson 5). Robert N. Watson, in his provocative book *The Rest is Silence:*

Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance, suggests that anxieties about death in the early modern period result from the familiar laws of supply and demand:

> Assurance about personal salvation was declining while attachment to both the external properties and the internal subjectivities of the human individual were increasing. The resulting demands on the promise of afterlife became so great that the Christian denial of death threatened to become visible as a mere ideology, a manipulative illusion rather than an absolute truth. (2)

Watson argues that from the theological schism of the Reformation arose a profound doubt in the orthodox view of the afterlife. While Greenblatt argues, in *Invisible Bullets*, that while charges of atheism were common, "Few if any of these investigations turned up what we would call atheists, even muddled or shallow ones; the stance that seems to come naturally to the greenest college freshman in late 20th century America seems to have been almost unthinkable to the most daring philosophical minds of late sixteenth-century England" (329). Watson counters by asserting that "annihilationist terror" was far more prevalent than Greenblatt acknowledges, and that "even in the hands of one of the most brilliant and fair-minded practitioners, New Historicism characteristically risks overrating the ability of a centralized cultural consensus to manipulate not only the consciousness, but also the subconsciousness, of an entire population" (22). Watson aptly asserts that what we can take from our knowledge of the prevalent anxiety about death in the Renaissance is the recognition that we cannot discount the personal experience in favor of sweeping generalizations about cultural consciousness nor can we deny the validity or usefulness of a psychoanalytic reading of human behavior (21).

Certainly we see in early modern literature a concern with making meaning out of death and the relation of the self to its end. Watson writes that such literature "often reverts from its surface narrative to repressed anxieties about death as eternal annihilation, especially during moments of silence, eclipses of light [and] collapses of identity" (3). Calvinists in particular seemed to affirm an effacement of self that borders on self-hatred. Giles Firmin writes in 1670, that "'anyone who useth diligently all means whereby he may be saved' is admonished by Calvinists that "this is but a way of self-love, and a way to Hell; *self* must be hated'" (Watson 6). Concern with one's salvation under the umbrella of Calvinist theology must be relinquished to the deity. Thus, Watson writes, "The annihilationist fear – losing the interior affective self into an infinity that does not care for it – was a Calvinist fact" (6).

The loss of self, or "death of self" that we see in the experience of abjection can be thought of as an internalization of this idea of death as annihilation. In the moment of abjection, at the precise instant when the subject "imagines nothingness," the borders between subject and object (set up by signification, or the law of the father) disintegrate. The object is no longer Othered, no longer something thrust outside of the subject's internalized self. Kristeva asserts that the experience of abjection pushes the subject towards a rupture in symbolic boundaries, a loss of clear parameters of self. This moment is termed by Kristeva, a "hallucination of nothing" (42). We can call this nothing "deprivation, frustration, want" or "the maternal phallus," but it ultimately points to an experience of lack (42). Freud has identified that the phobic object is frightening in that it incites the fear of castration. If we think of abjection as an interiorization of what the object represents, or what the phobic object represents, then what is interiorized is the

"nothing" of lack. This is useful in relation to my assertion that Despair is the object in this schema, in Redcrosse's experience of abjection. The fear that the monster's signification incites can be aligned with the fear of the phobic object whose lack is the lack of phallic agency, or in death as annihilation, a lack of the consciousness (the agency) of the self. The kind of death that Despair offers is a death marked by lack – an end of consciousness, an end of being, an end of the very *drives* that further and sustain the self.

We see Redcrosse's internalization of this object as the knight and the monster begin to fuse together as the canto progresses. Not only do the knight and the monster seem similar in appearance, but as Redcrosse begins to accept his rhetoric, they begin to *sound* alike. Linda Gregerson has written that "a notable feature of Spenser's ten stanza excursis on the subject of self-murder is that lengthy portions of it might be spoken by either Redcrosse or Despair: not only is the latter's eloquence infectious, but it also mimics the vocabularies of Christian conscience" (100). Despair's infection into Redcrosse's conscience relies on a distortion of the knight's beliefs, representing his damnation (or salvation) as something beyond his control, a seductive inference for the exhausted knight, whose extensive labors have left him physically and morally vanquished. Harold Skulsky aptly identifies that Despair's rhetoric presents the subject as a victim of an "almightie doome," and asserts that "all deeds are apparently done by creatures (including Redcrosse's desertion, if he carries it out) are really done by the Creator, to whose omnipotence all things yield" (229). In order to entice Redcrosse to embrace the vice that he represents, Despair suggests that all his knightly strivings are in vain:

The lenger life, I wote the greater sin,

The greater sin, the greater punishment:

All those great battels, which thou boasts to win,

Through strife, and bloud-shed, and auengement,

Now praysed, hereafter deare thou shalt repent:

For life must life, and bloud must bloud repay.

Is not enought thy euill life forespent?

For he, that once hath missed the right way,

The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray (I.ix.43)

In this light, Redcrosse's actions, which he has misguidedly relied on to save him (and this is ironically the heart of his mistake – his reliance on his own worldly prowess rather than God's grace) are useless, as his sin overshadows his good works. What is offered the knight at this point is a deceptive choice – God's wrath or a death that is the "end of woes." When, in Orgoglio's dungeon, Redcrosse "for death so oft did call," it was for the kind of death Despair presents, a "true death" rather than a spiritual death, which is rather a continued life-in-death existence of pain and suffering. God's justice, as Redcrosse well knows, is inevitable. However, the monster misrepresents the choice of suicide, for what Despair offers is not a headlong flinging of oneself into the depths of hell (which is what suicide would mean for Redcrosse), but an end of existence, a fleshly death:

Is not he iust, that all this doth behold

From highest heuen, and beares an equall eie?

Shall he thy sins vp in his knowledge fold,

And guilty be of thine impietie?

Is not his lawe, Let euery sinner die:

Die shall all flesh? what then must needs be donne,

Is it not better to die willinglie,

Then linger, till the glas be all out ronne?

Death is the end of woes; die soone, O faries sonne (I.ix.47)

Despair is warping God's law in this passage, for he is ignoring the grace of salvation. The law is not "let every sinner die," for only those sinners who turn from God's grace and fail to seek repentance will suffer damnation. When the monster purports that God says "die shall all flesh," his meaning is not the flesh of sin, but the flesh of the body. The death he offers is an organic death, a "true death" of the flesh that ends consciousness and therefore the "woes" of the knight's failures.

As his own theology and the rhetoric of the monster begin to overlap, the knight realizes his moment of despair. Curiously, as Redcrosse find the monster within him, as he succumbs to despair, he also succumbs to the horrors of an imagined hell. As the "Miscreaunt / Perceiued him to wauer weake and fraile, / Whiles trembling horror did his conscience daunt" Despair presents him with a vision of the "damned ghosts, that doe in torments waile, / And thousand feends that doe them endlesse paine / With fire and brimstone, which for ever shall remaine" (I.xi.49). Death as the "end of woes" has been transformed into a divine justice that fulfills Redcrosse's very fear, the punishments of earthly monstrosity. As his beliefs fuse with the distorted vision of the monster, as he begins to see his God as one who administers justice according to earthly monstrosity rather than one who offers grace, he experiences the moment of what Kristeva calls *abjection*; he finds the "impossible" within his very being. He *is* despair, a creature who

feeds himself with death but is never filled, whose fear of death drives him forward towards it. The organic death that Despair offers becomes assimilated with the fearful death of Hell, and what the knight desires becomes the very thing that he fears. As "nought but death before his eies he saw," death becomes both everything (a living death, a continuance of earthly suffering that encompasses both world and otherworld) and nothing (an end of consciousness).

Kristeva speaks of the literature of abjection, literature "rooted . . . on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject / object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject," as a literature where suffering is the immediate sphere of the subject (207). She writes that in such literature, "everything is already contained in the *Journey*: suffering, horror, death, complicitous sarcasm, abjection, fear. And the pit where what speaks is a strange rent between an ego and an other – between *nothing* and *all"* (141). Suffering and horror are not merely themes in narratives of abjection, but the entire narrative stance is driven by the necessity of the experience of abjection, an experience that inflicts internal suffering and projects external horror (140). For Spenser, the monsters of his narrative are both the ministers of this suffering (at the moment when the subject is overcome) and the objects which, when assimilated, cause a rent in the subject's very being. This being, in allegory, is prescribed by the larger project of the poet. Redcrosse Knight must suffer because the everyman suffers as he refines virtue. As readers, we must share the horror of the subject at this moment in order to be warned (in the true spirit of *monstrum*, that which warns) of the repercussions of vice. When we to the monstrous world of the flesh, we become monsters ourselves.

Conclusion

There is no escape from the monster. As history has shown, human beings are bound to the compulsion to revise and recreate the monsters that have come before. Our desire to seek out or "hunt" the monster is driven by our need to know ourselves. The monster is necessary in that it shows us what *we are not*, although one soon finds that what the monster represents is not distinct from our identity, but what society tells us must be distinct. Thus, it lurks on the borders of the unconscious, vicariously demonstrating our most primal desires. The slaying of the monster is the task of expulsion, rejection, *abjection*. To fully experience the *I* that we desire to manifest, the monster must be returned to the Outside from where we so desperately want to believe he has arisen. However, the monster persists, it keeps coming back, it resists our efforts to vanquish it as it overturns known means of interpretation. The monster refuses to be "Other," for it defies the systems of order that function to expel it from the normative center:

> The horizon where the monsters dwell might well be imagined as the visible edge of the hermeneutic circle itself: the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world. In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its order and rationality crumble. The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system; the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure; like the giants of *Mandeville's Travels*, it threatens to devour 'all raw & quyk' any thinker who insists otherwise. (Cohen 7)

We encounter the monster again and again because it is unknowable, unmanageable; it resists containment. Writers like Ambroise Paré and Pierre Boaistuau seek to banish the monster in this way, to make sense of its unknowability, to force it into the ideological schema of natural human existence. While Paré's method is classification and empirical explication, Boaistuau rhetorically manipulates the monstrous to present a natural history of humankind that inevitably underscores Judeo-Christian ideology.

Inherent in the fear of the monster is the anxiety that the monstrous form can infect our very being. The monster disrupts antithetical, "pure" categories that we need to negotiate our relation the world. Literature and culture continually strive to re-establish the boundary that separates self and Other:

> Narratives of the West perform the strangest dance around that fire in which miscegenation and its practitioners have been condemned to burn. Among the flames we see the old women of Salem hanging, accused of sexual relations with the black devil . . . The flames devour the Jews of thirteenth century England, who stole children from proper families and baked sedar matzo with their blood . . . [a] story submerged in a horrifying fable of cultural purity and threat to Christian continuance. As the American frontier expanded beneath the banner of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, tales circulated about how "Indians" routinely kidnapped white women to furnish wives for themselves. . . The monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed. The repressed, however, like Freud himself, always seems to return. (16).

Spenser's text is distinct from these Western narratives that seek to castigate the human becomes entangled with the monster. Although the poet acknowledges the Otherness of the monster vis-à-vis aesthetic representation, he does not claim the monstrous as distinct from the nature of human existence. Spenser's monsters are indeed a persistent breed. They disrupt and dismay the heroic subject again and again. Although Redcrosse Knight slays the monster Errour, she sends the knight down a path that diverges sharply from the one truth. Although Duessa is stripped and her foulness revealed, she returns with deceitful accusations at the wedding of Redcrosse and Una. Although Redcrosse escapes Despair, he does not defeat him, and for all we know the monster still lurks in his cave, feeding his craving for death and enticing fallen knights to work their own demise. Spenser's portrayal of these persistent creatures are unique because the poet acknowledges the role that monstrous vice plays in the formation of virtue. As the monster "infects" the heroic subject, we begin to see our vulnerability as fleshly beings. This vulnerability is what the might of the monster reveals in juxtaposition. It is not only vice that brings us low, it is *our* vice. Spenser's text teaches this – we must acknowledge not only the existence of the monster but the extent of our relationship with it. We cannot untangle ourselves from Errour's coils unless we admit that we are part of the reproduction of her depravity.

This moment of vulnerability is what I have asserted can be identified in Kristevan terms as *abjection.* It is a moment of horror in which the subject acknowledges the loss of all previous means of identifying the self in relation to the Other. It is the moment when the subject "finds the impossible within." This moment can be called 1) an experience of the commingling of antithetical categories; 2) a collapse of the boundaries

of signification; 3) a "death" of the self as it has been previously conceived; 4)a castration of illusions of "power" or agency over the psyche, or 5) the infection that results from entanglement with vice.

Kristeva asserts that this moment of horror arises out of the crisis of trauma. She admits that the inspiration for her theory of abjection comes from her experiences as an analyst, "amidst a throng of forsaken bodies beset with no longing but to last against all odds and for nothing; on a page where I plotted out the convolutions of those who, in transference, presented me with the gift of their void" (207). Moreover, the theory became even more clear to her in literature, in a "fiction without scientific objective but attentive to religious imagination," for in religion, she asserts, is the abundance of signs and signifiers most significantly damaging to the human psyche (207). Her aim, then, the function of such an understanding of the place where meaning collapses, might be realized if the "analyst . . . [could] begin hearing, actually to listen to himself build up a discourse around the braided horror and fascination that bespeaks the incompleteness of the speaking being but, because it is heard as a narcissistic crisis on the outskirts of the feminine, shows up with a comic gleam the religious and political pretensions that attempt to give meaning to the human adventure" (209). Kristeva's view sharply differs than Spenser's in that she foresees abjection as a vision of "a laughing apocalypse [or] an apocalypse without God," for the greatest Law of the Father, is of course, ideological (206).

Spenser's text indeed calls attention to these moments of horror within the subject, moments when meaning collapses. In Spenser, this meaning is, in a sense, ideologically constructed. However, Spenser's concern (oddly like Kristeva's in this

way) is with the collapse of *false* ideology – with what is duplicitous, with what leads one down the wrong spiritual path, with the doubt and lack of faith that is born of false theology and inevitably drives one to despair. While Kristeva asserts that the individual is continually in a state of crisis and flux in regards to the formation of self – that the very ways of constructing identity that ideology gives us will always fail, Spenser foresees a more hopeful end. The Spenserian subject experiences abjection as preparation for the true and proper reconstruction of meaning – the inscription of true virtue, the outward manifestation of holiness only possible for the sanctified believer. Literature, for him, is not a mere expression of crisis, but a tool for reform.

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