CHAPTER FOUR

Example

The last two chapters map limits of the Elizabethan pedagogical imagination. On the one hand, instruction by moral maxim, installing in the student’s memory a set of sententiae that can be read out into good conduct. (Action, if you like, as reading aloud.) On the other hand, the idea of an education by experience, a growing-up-in-the-world that has no use for school—tantalizing as a prospect, more palpable, especially for the likes of Roger Ascham, as a threat. Romance narrative affords a literary space for testing these limits against each other. Its generic habit of subjecting settled ideas to the disruptions of error and marvel makes it something like a mimesis of empiricism, full of the “proving” and “testing” that are already native to the chivalric vocabulary. Among the things Lyly and Sidney test are the techniques of reading brought to their books by their educated peers.

To define the test this way is to see it mainly as a rivalry between poets and schoolmasters, a rivalry that is the principal concern of this book. That said, a version of the same contest is also played out within the humanist schoolroom. To regard the schoolroom as simply “instilling... barren hearts with a conscientious slavery,” as Milton puts it, slight the variety of instruction in the best classrooms, classrooms like Richard Mulcaster’s at Merchant Taylors’. 1 Humanism as a reform movement widely proclaimed its interest in preparing students for the challenges of experience, even for providing some version of experience on the premises (albeit in the form of historical writing). If the schoolmasters were unwilling simply to commit the young to the hazards of the world, neither, of course, are we. They

were looking for ways to make school a useful preparation for a specific set of practical challenges. And if the definition of those challenges, even of "action" itself, carried ideological freight with which Lyly and Sidney took issue, nonetheless the dilemma of perilous experience and empty sentence was the schoolmasters' dilemma, too.

There was a characteristically humanist answer to that dilemma: example. This workaday piece of pedagogical furniture—a compromise between experience and maxim—was treated with exceptional reverence by education writers. We might provisionally think about it as a piece of experience, a sample cut from the world's cloth in such a way that it somehow bears a lesson. An example has a boundedness that raw experience lacks, and a point, and it excludes or at least circumscribes whatever might be harmful in the context from which it is drawn. In all these ways it is a middle category between the pedagogical limits this study has so far surveyed. We have seen that each limit had its critics: men suspicious of the vain proliferation of *sententiae* on the one hand, of experience and its correlates (the Grand Tour; the old, aristocratic education) on the other. But example, the middle ground, knew no reproach. Admiration runs high among the rhetoricians: "No kinde of argument in all the Oratorie craft, doth better persuade and more universally satisfie than example," writes Puttenham. It runs higher still among schoolmasters like Ascham, who was prepared to bet almost everything on the middle way: "I demand a volume of examples, a page of rules," he wrote to his friend Johannes Sturm, the Strasbourg schoolmaster. Ascham never drafted that volume, a successor to his *Schoolmaster*, but his ambition can stand for the romance of his class with its projected contents.

Of the three poets who are my own examples here, none was as profoundly and variously interested in teaching and learning as Edmund Spenser, none as skeptical of how his audience was trained to read (and not only in school). Example—or as Spenser spells it, "ensample"—is a peculiarly intense focus for that skepticism. One could very roughly map the major terms of the last two chapters (experience and maxim) onto the


3. "I want something else [than books of rules], I require more. We need an artisan and an architect who knows how by an artful method to bring the parts together, to polish the rough spots, and to build up the entire structure... And I will not be content with one or two examples, but I am looking for many of them, varied in kind... I allow my *Schoolmaster* to be sparing in laying down rules: provided that he shows himself liberal and generous... with offering examples" (Ascham, *Letters*, 270–71).

4. By way of the Old French *ensample*, "ensample" may be traced back to the Latin root, *exemplum*, the OED proclaims that, along with "sample," "example" and "ensample" are "ultimately
cardinal opposition in Spenser’s polymodal poem between romance narrative and personification allegory. His six-and-some books are a kind of perpetual contest between the two, unfolding, reforming, and corroding one another, the allegory tending toward an abstract, axiomatic order, the erring course of the narrative toward unstructured experience. Example—example as a piece of experience—is a fragile middle category, and it tends to come into play when the relation between those larger forces is most troubled. The poem’s self-scrutiny is at its most intense when it shows examples being made.

We know far more about Spenser’s teacher, Richard Mulcaster, than about any of Sidney’s teachers, or Lyly’s. Mulcaster is in many ways the most interesting of the schoolmasters who left a record of his method, as he did in two treatises from the early 1580s (Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children, 1581, and The First Part of the Elementarie, 1582). There are reasons to think that Spenser owed him a substantial intellectual debt. Nonetheless, this chapter will not be about that relationship. Spenser had left school far behind by the time he finished the first installment of his romance, in Ireland, three hundred miles and twenty-one years from the precincts of Merchant Taylors’. The knights of his fiction set out from the court of the Faerie Queene, not from the university at Athens or home schooling in Thessaly. This chapter must instead consider the stubborn authority of humanist habits of mind and ideas of teaching long after school; the function of the schoolroom here, and from here on out, will be more heuristic. Spenser does sometimes compose scenes of instruction that look like how a young gentleman in his own England might have been taught. But generally speaking his pedagogical inquiries are translated more completely than Lyly’s or Sidney’s into the language of romance. The tests he posed

the same word.” “Sample” in its modern sense can serve to remind the reader of examplum’s derivation from the verb exemplare, to take out or excerpt.

5. See Tetsky, Allegory and Violence, esp. 23. In The Choice of Achilles Susanne Wofford conceives this opposition in terms of figure and action in epic more generally: her reading of The Faerie Queene “consistently opposes the apocalyptic and hierarchical structure of allegorical imagery with an anti-apocalyptic, metonymical narrative” (228–29). Both critics have had a substantial influence on my argument in this chapter and elsewhere.

6. I have discussed the sophistication of Mulcaster’s attitude toward time in teaching in chapter 1. He is also the most flexible-minded of the schoolmasters in thinking about the competing claims of authority and experience; his confidence in the latter makes a strong contrast with Ascham. For example: “It is not enough to rule the world, to alleadge authorities, but to raunge authorities, which be not above the world, by the rule of the world, is the wisemans line” (Positions, 22). See also DeMolen, Richard Mulcaster and Educational Reform in the Renaissance, and by the same author, “Richard Mulcaster and the Profession of Teaching in the Sixteenth Century,” where he calls Mulcaster “an ebullient and choleric reformer” (129).
for his Elizabethan readers would not always have recalled them to their classroom days; still, they bring that classroom's legacy under the closest scrutiny.

**What Can Redcrosse Read?**

As with experience and *sententia* in previous chapters, one objective here will be to construct a wide-ranging account of how school-trained readers thought both about and with example. But the project of assessing what that cherished piece of didactic technology means to *The Faerie Queene* confronts a distinctive obstacle, the presumption that the allegorical agents that populate it cannot learn, or even cannot change. They are fixed ideas; what happens in the poem is a matter of their interaction, or perhaps their unfolding, but not their transformation. So far I have focused on scenes of instruction that operate simultaneously inside and outside the text, in representations of learning among characters and designs on the reader. Can we expect a representation of the “inside” in the landscape of personification allegory? Susanne Wofford offers a strong and valuable caution: "characters do not know they are in an allegory, and cannot and do not ‘read’ the signs of their world as figurative pointers to another arena of understanding. . . . The ‘heroic ignorance’ of the characters is absolute." 7

I will return to Wofford’s claim repeatedly, sometimes to reinforce it, sometimes to point out how hard—how significantly hard—it is to swallow. There is a useful, preliminary test case in Book I’s conveniently named Ignaro. He is the porter who greets Arthur, most unhelpfully, when the Prince enters Orgoglio’s dungeon: old and blind, with his head on backward, “His name Ignaro did his nature read aright” (1.8.31). He makes for an especially pure instance of what Angus Fletcher calls the “daemonism” of the allegorical agent, the tyranny, almost like demonic possession, of a single idea over his aspect and actions. 8 His ignorant name and his ignorant nature are one and the same. Arthur’s belated and half-comic recognition of this limit reminds us that there are different orders of character in the poem:

---

7. Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles*, 220. See also her chapter on *FQ I-III* in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, esp. 116-19. Isabel MacCaffrey offers a slightly softer version of this claim: “The fact that a character’s experience occurs in a particular setting and a particular pattern that is allusive need not (and ordinarily does not) signify its dramatic ‘meaning’ in the character’s consciousness” (*Spenser’s Allegory*, 101–2). For a counterargument, see Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser*, 51–52.

the prince's mounting frustration is checked when, after several fruitless requests for directions, "Heighest his nature by his countenance" (34). This guess would seem to be a very modest sort of allegorical reading of one character by another, contra Wofford. But Ignaro himself, without doubt, is incapable of such self-transcendence or self-knowledge. His name reads his nature, and we read his name; he means without intending. He cannot change without becoming unintelligible. (What would we make of a knowledgeable Ignaro? The whole allegorical edifice would come tumbling down.)

If Ignaro is paradigmatic of character in The Faerie Queene, then whatever is didactic about this poem must be played out in another register. And indeed, he has a clear value for the reader, as a definition of what ignorance is—even a kind of icon for thinking with, a means of holding and moving the concept "ignorance" within the mind. This last view entails an idea of allegory as a mimesis of thinking, an approach to the poem that has been important to many of its critics: "a model of the mind's life in the world," as Isabel MacCaffrey puts it. The characters are concepts, and the poem thinks by combining and recombining them in the logic, or the stream of consciousness, of its narrative. The poem advertises this idea of itself with particular clarity in such moments as the progression of the seven deadly sins, the centerpiece of the House of Pride (1.4.16–36). The sins each have Ignaro's emblematic fixity, and successive stanzas place them in a significant order, so that Idleness leads to Gluttony leads to Lechery and on to other, grosser villainies. Their arrangement in fictional space is meaningful, too: the first six draw the cart in teams of two, and its axle makes the distinction between the forward or active vices (Gluttony, Lechery, Wrath) and the froward or passive (Idleness, Avarice, Envy). Allegory serves as a method of analysis, and narrative is its handmaiden, obediently moving from case to case without troubling the exposition with any reversals. The mind of the poem is free to think its thoughts in the most schematic, universal terms.

Such a concept of allegory has affinities with the models of mind available in the ordinary pedagogy of the classroom. It depends on such operations as analysis and epitome; like the synchronic inscape of the commonplaces, it establishes relations of place at the expense of relations of time. If we accept this account of allegory as adequate to the poem, then it is


10. Allegory is rarely a presence in the classroom, probably because it would have seemed medieval to humanist temperaments. Sir Thomas Elyot's allegory of dancing, discussed in chapter 2, is a notable exception.
apparent how beside the point it is to ask what Ignaro knows or doesn’t know, let alone whether or what he might learn. His mode is being, or perhaps meaning, but certainly not knowing. He doesn’t need to know himself any more than a thought or an idea needs to know itself. (The *reductio* of a thought knowing itself, particularly if it must know itself by another thought, quickly becomes absurd.) *The Faerie Queene* thinks with these characters, or agents, or emblems, and it proposes that very thinking to its readers, as though we could adopt it as our own cognitive dialect. We can not only think the same thing as the poem, but think it the same way. If this is the poem’s grand project, then we can simply stop worrying about what the characters learn or do not learn, and concentrate, as the “Letter to Raleigh” would have us do, on the thoughts it makes us think—one way to let it fashion us.  

But *The Faerie Queene* is also a story, a romance. Over the three books of 1590 the analytic self-confidence of such set pieces as the procession of sins is shaken again and again. The poem is more profoundly dedicated than any work considered here, perhaps than any work of literature, period, to exploring the tensions between paradigmatic and narrative modes of understanding. Moreover—and the more central a character is, the more telling this concern—the narrative is attended by the stubborn expectation that it will represent something we might as well call Bildung. Redcrosse is a “clownishe younge man” who will eventually slay a dragon.  

To do that, he has to change; to grow up and grow wise, not just to unfold; and the story has to make that happen. I mean Bildung in no stronger, and no weaker, sense than this.

So let us for a moment make the opposite assumption, that Spenser’s characters can in fact learn. This book has been preoccupied with how learning can be made visible: what might it look like in the fictional environment of *The Faerie Queene*? One answer—and the terms will hardly be surprising at this point in the study—is paradigmatic, a change to the appearance or the characteristic actions of the agent-as-emblem. So Ignaro’s head

11. Angus Fletcher’s study of poetic thinking, *Colors of the Mind*, describes such accounts of mind as a “simplistic but complicated allegorical structure... becoming the preferred image of the mind’s complete workings” (50), a tendency he takes novels to resist. He observes: “Thinking the poem implies such things as taking the poem as an occasion for thought; thinking through the poem: being aware of one’s thoughts as one reads the poem; looking for some logic in the poem; allowing a poem to trigger certain lines of thought; looking in the poem for what Coleridge called its ‘implicit metaphysic’” (111–12). Spenser’s poem proposes all these possibilities, but over and against the narrower authority of the allegory itself as that preferred image.

might be turned right way round again; he might remember the key that
Arthur needs; he might even be rechristened Sapiento, to account for his new
nature. He could be seen under the aspect of a new paradigm. The problem
here is that such changes amount to a new character, while what we think
of as learning—certainly, as Bildung—requires a continuity of self, the per-
sistence of some things while others change. (This is Lyly's problem, how
to knit his two Euphueses together.) Another possibility, still under the aus-
pices of paradigmatic understanding, is the gradual resolution of the em-
blem out of more mixed and ambivalent narrative materials. So Redcrosse
or Guyon might be seen gradually to take on more and more of the qual-
ities of their virtues as the story proceeds, until at the end they are consti-
tuted as adequate allegorical representations: Redcrosse can finally stand
for Holiness, Guyon for Temperance. The sign of having learned is the con-
solidation of the emblem. This is a relatively common view of the matter in
the criticism, one that might be said to synchronize the character's learning
with the reader's, the one becoming and the other deriving a satisfying final
image from the end of the story.13

The alternative is learning as narrative, learning that cannot be separated
from the story in which it is told, that is that story, for the character who lives
it—who is portrayed by its means and medium—and for the reader. I have
mostly approached that idea by the via negativa, glimpsing it, for example,
in the reversing mirror of Euphues's tragic rigorism. The Faerie Queene, with
its plot of error, makes it possible to be more specific about the antagonisms
between narrative understanding and conventions of formal instruction. So
much of what happens in school, and what happens in so many everyday
instances of teaching, is underwritten by that fundamental idea of learning
as repetition. So much comes down to being able to say it back, do it again:
*do you understand? Say it back to me.* In the landscape of Spenserian romance,
where error is the norm, the opposite is the case: repetition is precisely the
sign of the failure to learn. It is to their continual cost that characters pursue
their daemonic compulsions, in spite of changing circumstances; time and
again, they take their armor off, or fall asleep at unproitious moments, or
kindle in irascibility, and suffer for it. Success—scarce as it is in the poem—
would seem to depend on a flexible adaptation to events as they happen.
Such adaptability is what it would mean to be, in Arthur's words, "ware

13. See, for example, Donald Cheney's account in *Spenser's Image of Nature*; characters in
The Faerie Queene may appear to be embodiments of the virtues in their dealings with others—
showing the operation of Holiness or Justice on those who supplicate or challenge them—and
at the same time they are human figures struggling to realize their own identities in terms of
these virtues" (6).
of like agein" (1.8.44), wary not least of the seductions of likeness itself. Learning is figured in variety, and change, and it is not so much a discreet preparatory phase as it is an ongoing bearing toward the world.

These are two now-familiar models. Does Redcrosse learn anything according to either of them? Does either entail reading the allegory from the inside? I will put these questions to two episodes, first the end of Book I—a natural place to look for signs of learning—and then the House of Pride. In the latter, the matter of example will begin to move to the foreground.

The story of Redcrosse’s decline is just that, a story. There is the overconfidence of the defeat of Errour, the all-too-human loss of faith in Una, the defensive pride that makes him so vulnerable to Duessa’s seductions and to everything that ensues. These events follow one another in a chain of causation, bringing him, over time, to his nearly fatal encounter with Despaire. Still he goes on to defeat the dragon, a victory that argues some kind of change in his character, the kind of change that we are tempted to call learning. (Certainly many of the poem’s critics call it that.14) Moreover, before he goes to fight the dragon, he undergoes the disciplinary rigors of the poem’s most concerted didactic edifice, the “schoolhouse” (1.10.18) of the House of Holiness. Some instruction must be going on.

The structure of that schoolhouse has been much discussed, in its three stages: a severe purgation with Fidelia and Speranza, the more benign tuition of Charissa and the Seven Beadsmen, and finally the vision of the New Jerusalem vouchsafed him by the hermit Contemplation. A variety of different kinds of teaching is implicated in this sequence, but I want to concentrate on a pattern of pedagogical closure that has been pointed out by Darryl Gless. Gless observes that despite the apparently progressive structure of the house, Redcrosse’s tuition is repeatedly described as though it were already complete. Fidelia, for example, “unto him disclosed every whitt,” and she is able “with her wordes to kill. / And rayse againe to life the hart, that she did thrill” (1.10.19). This power brings the reborn knight “To such perfection of all hevenly grace” (21) that he is overcome again by suicidal despair. Later he is whipped and scourged by Penaunce until “no one corrupted jott” (26) remains; again it sounds as though his reform is fully accomplished. Then the seven beadsmen instruct him in charity until

14. For a recent example of this reflex, see Hester Lees-Jeffries, “From the Fountain to the Well: Redcrosse Learns to Read.”
so perfect he became, / That from the first unto the last degree, / His mortall life he learned had to frame / In holy righteousness, without rebuke or blame” (45). Gless accounts for this proliferation of finalities as a rebuke to the idea that works might make a difference to the status of our souls.  

Salvation, too, is not a story, in the sense that its end is not caused by the worldly events of the meantime spent on earth.

Something similar happens in the dragon fight. It is a pitched battle of three days, the first two of which end the same way, with the knight overwhelmed by a blast from the “infernall fournace” (1.11.44) of the dragon’s fiery breath. The first time, Redcrosse stumbles backward, seared by his own armor, into the “well of life” (29), the waters of which have the power to restore the dead and “guilt of sinfull crimes cleane wash away” (30). He arises the next morning as a new man, with emphasis on the “new”: “So new this new-borne knight to battell new did rise” (34). On that second day, it is a “trickling streame of Balme” that receives his fall, a stream that issues from the base of the Tree of Life (for the battle is fought on the ancient site of Eden) and that can “reare againe / The senselessse corse appointed for the grave” (48). Reborn from this second death, Redcrosse is finally fit to dispatch the dragon, which he does without particular difficulty on the third day. Scholars have associated the first of these revivifying waters with baptism, the second with communion; certainly they are sacramental.  

What I want to emphasize is that preparing this knight for his final victory, both in his instruction at the House of Holiness and in the fight itself, is a matter of killing and reviving him, again and again. He is subsumed into a transfiguring, ritual pattern, a sacramental structure, and this is how the poem imagines the change that enables his victory. What is sacrificed is any

---

15. Gless, Interpretation and Theology, 154–63. “Nothing prevents readers of Catholic or unselfconscious Pelagian leanings from reading merit into the knight’s actions in L.5, or readers of humanistic biases from remaining puzzled by the canto’s apparent contradictions,” he writes. “If the House of Holiness is viewed as a metaphorical representation of Protestant doctrines of holiness, however, The Faerie Queene L.5 will be found to embody the overall implication that works in this world are important, admirable, eagerly to be pursued, and yet contribute nothing to justification” (150).


17. King offers a sterner, Protestant account of Redcrosse’s career as the recognition of his own election: “The overall movement of Redcrosse’s experience traces the trajectory of Protestant spiritual life from the initial conviction of sin to confidence that one is the chosen recipient of divine grace” (Spenser’s Poetry, 60).
idea of education, indeed any idea of a subject of education. The newborn knight succeeds because he is new. Change is not learning, but rebirth.  

I have held tight through this account to the expectation of a narrative of education, as though Redcrosse’s assumption into the rituals of Holiness could only be a default, like Euphues’s retreat into the schoolroom at the end of the Anatomy. The poem is brought to the expedient of changing modes in order to represent the knight’s prophesied success. His fall may be a story, but his redemption is willfully stripped of narrative syntax. (His redemption has no middle, just a succession of beginnings and a sudden end.) But there is something perverse about reading this as a failure of the poem. Isn’t the very point of the Book of Holiness to strip Redcrosse of self-hood in order to perfect his supernallyr virtue? Perhaps the narrative language of romance is suited only for describing the dismantling sadness of experience. If so, then what actually happens to the knight gives an account of learning—of knowing—to which experience not only makes no difference, but to which experience is anathema. You have learned when you have been purged of its corruptions, when you have become an exemplar. (Perhaps this is a version of Wofford’s “heroic ignorance.”) The repetition of Redcrosse’s ritual rebirths—how he is new each time—is a way of insisting that his story (if not the story) has been broken. The paradigm of Holiness is instituted in its place.

If you stop reading for the night at the end of the battle with the dragon, you will likely go to sleep thinking that a career of fruitless error has been resolved into ritual knowledge—that what you have witnessed is the purging of experience and the consolidation of an exemplar, and that the proper question now is not what Redcrosse knows, but what he is, or better, what he stands for. So much for Bildung. But if that is the poem’s orthodox doctrine, or at least the first book’s, reading a little further inevitably raises some trouble, with Redcrosse’s disquietingly selective narration of his own adventures (if experience does not matter, why rewrite it?), the return of Archimago, and the open-endedness of the very end. There are episodes along the way, too, that offer proleptic cautions about what it would mean to abstract the knight from his story. Most important among them is the

18. Michael McKeon’s Origin of the English Novel describes such a pattern as characteristic of romance in its difference from the novel: “romance character development tends to proceed by discontinuous leaps between states of being—by ‘rebirths’—and to be signified by the successive divulgence or alteration of name” (39).
House of Pride, the home of those deadly sins, where Spenser meditates at least as intensely on instruction as he does in Charissa’s schoolhouse. It is there that example first appears as a serious instrument for thinking about learning. The episode begins with the declaration, “For unto knight there is no greater shame / Then lightnesse and inconstancie in love, / That doth this Redcrosse knights ensample plainly prove” (1.4.1); it ends when Redcrosse’s dwarf “ma[kes] ensample” (1.5.52) of the house’s victims; and, in a kind of coda, the next canto starts off with the simile of a sailor whose ship has narrowly avoided a “hidden rocke,” and who looks back “halfe amazed . . . Having escapd so sad ensamples in his sight” (1.6.1). These “ensamples” are a kind of frame for everything that happens in between.

Framing will be much to the point in what follows. If an example is a piece of the world, then it must have a boundary that marks its difference; it must be possible to tell it apart from miscellaneous experience, to say where it begins and ends, as a preliminary to saying what it means. That said, surveying the hundred or so stanzas between those signposts does not make it immediately obvious what the example is. First, there is simply a great deal of material to be found there: the story of Redcrosse’s seduction by the chivalric ethos of Lucifera’s house, and his combat with the knight Sans Joy; also the allegorical pageantry that seems to define the life of the place. Is all of this the example? Can a narrative be an example? There is the complex, emblematic tableau of the sins, too. Are they examples? Can an allegory be an example? We might think of these questions as turning on the preposition in the phrase example of, and they are compounded, in this case, by questions entailed by the preposition in the phrase example for. At the beginning of the episode, it looks like Redcrosse himself is the intended audience for what will follow: “Young knight, what ever that dost armes professe, / And through long labours huntest after fame, / Beware of fraud, beware of ficklenesse” (1.4.1). By the end of the same stanza, however, this expectation is less secure: “That doth this Redcrosse knights ensample plainly prove” (1). It could be that the possessive “knights” tells us this example is his to interpret. It is more idiomatic, however, then and now, to read it as saying that he himself is the example. We are back to the question of what Redcrosse can read—especially, whether he can read himself.

The final stanzas of the episode—the far side of the frame—show one way that an answer can be made to all these questions. Redcrosse has won his victory over Sans Joy, and his wounds are soothed with flattering balms of wine and oil. Una’s dwarf, meanwhile, goes snooping around the foundations of the place, and there he finds a dungeon stocked with the victims
of Pride. The next six stanzas present the fruits of *invenio* on the topic; a catalogue of the overflowing from the Bible (Antiochus, Nimrod, Ninus) and Rome (Tarquin, Caesar, Pompey), to proud women (Semiramis, Sthenoboea, Cleopatra), and finally nameless routs of overspending courtiers. When the catalogue is finished the dungeon becomes a scene of instruction for the knight: "Whose case whenas the carefull Dwarf had tould, / And made ensample of their mournfull sight / Unto his maister, he no lenger would / There dwell in perill of like painefull plight" (1.5.52). As when Arthur makes his sermon after Duessa's capture, there is a good deal of didactic technology in play here, a "case" which is "told," then an example "made... of their mournfull sight." Does Redcrosse actually see the translated spectacle for himself? That doesn't seem like quite the right question: the lesson is of the sort that most estranges us from the poem's capacities for realism, from our sense that it portrays persons in places. There is little liveness in Nimrod or Tarquin here. Nevertheless—or therefore?—its warning is clear, and Redcrosse leaves posthaste. (It may not even occur to the reader that Pride's victims go unrescued; that is a question that will not be so easily escaped in Book II.)

If this dungeon tableau counts as an example, then example is difficult to distinguish from emblem. There is no particular sense that the victims of Pride are cut from the cloth of experience. But Redcrosse's sojourn is not quite over yet. The young knight flees under cover of darkness by way of a "privy Posterne" (1.5.52), scrambling along a "fowle way" that is "like a great Lay-stall," littered with a "Donghill of dead carcasses" that have come "to shamefull end" (53). The scenery is surprisingly scatological, his exit alimentary: it is as though Redcrosse were being shot out of the shameful end of the House of Pride. This indigestion goes directly to the question of what the knight has learned, for digestion is the favorite humanist trope for assimilating new knowledge. Here, that trope is willfully inverted. Not only does Redcrosse not digest what has been shown to him in this space, but the promise of his understanding is turned inside out, and he is discharged from his own experience as matter that is inassimilable, untransformable, and above all, oblivious. The scene is a perfect opposite, a perfect travesty of learning.

Perhaps this is the example, then; and perhaps this is how example gets made. If Redcrosse's "ensample" was supposed to "plainly prove" that "there is no greater shame / Then lightnesse and inconstancie in love"

19. As Mark Rose observes: "the knight sneaks away through what is in effect the fundament of the House of Pride" (Spenser's *Art*, 73).
(1.4.1), certainly that shame, or shaming, has been realized. Which is not to say that the knight is represented as experiencing shame. Indeed, the peculiar possibility that this scene raises, and on which I want to continue to dwell, is that making an example—making an example of someone—comes and even must come specifically at the example’s expense. The example’s instructive potential is directed outward, toward some audience, but it is unintelligible from the inside. There would therefore have to be something almost deliberately mocking about hanging a sign at the end of the episode—the alexandrine identifying “that sad house of Pynde” (1.5.53)—that characters cannot read. Recall that the episode begins as though it were addressing the young knight himself. It ends by satirically, humiliatingly expelling him, while denying (or sparing) him any sense of his own humiliation.

Such a sampling of Redcrosse’s career—in the House of Holiness, in the dragon fight, in the House of Pride—shows how many kinds of reading *The Faerie Queene* solicits, playing them off against one another, flattering and then unsettling the expectations that we bring to the work. We get caught up in the story, and find ourselves confuted by a sacramental allegory; we square up our emblem of Holiness, then find that the story has swallowed him again. Examples get made at the seams of this project, and their doubleness promises to bridge the differences. But Spenser has concerns about examples, too. They raise for him the question, who gets to read them? How are they made? And out of what, out of whom? The expulsion of Redcrosse from the House of Pride may not be so different from the heroic ignorance of the perfected hero in the last canto. That uncomfortable equation recalls us to Wofford’s claim that characters “cannot and do not ‘read’ the signs of their world,” a claim it seems both to confirm and to color more darkly.

I want to register that confirmation, while still holding open the possibility of exceptions—or at least acknowledging again how strong the temptation is to make a reader of Redcrosse, and how indispensable that temptation is to the poem’s design. And at the same time I want to venture a step further along the path Wofford marks, by way of suggesting that *The Faerie Queene* may unsettle us with the possibility, not only that characters cannot read the allegory, but that we must *read it at their expense*: not only do they never know what we know, but they suffer for our enlightenment. That is what it is to make an example of someone.

---

**The Boundaries of Example**

Book I puts a few questions about examples into play: how they are framed; whom they are for, what they are made of. These questions become central
to the education Guyon receives in Book II. It will sharpen our sense of Spenser’s motives for scrutinizing the figure; however, if we first look more closely at what the schoolmasters made of it. Example was humanism’s longed-for bridge from precept to praxis. John Colet, founder of St. Paul’s School, saw in it an antidote to the aridity of rote rules in language teaching: “if any man will know, and by that knowledge attain to understand Latin books . . . let him above all busily learn and read good Latin authors of chosen poets and orators . . . desiring none other rules but their examples.”20 Examples might replace rules altogether, so long as they are cut from the true cloth of the classics. Roger Ascham, meditating his book of examples, waves the same banner forty years later: “surely one example is more valuable, both to good and ill, than twenty precepts written in books.”21 Sometimes educators speak as though the importance of example were such that the principal work of the schoolmaster might simply be the gathering of fit specimens. “The master, like a diligent bee, must fly round through all the garden plots of knowledge,” writes Juan Luis Vives, “and, particularly for his pupils’ sake, gather and collect examples which he has observed.”22 The example—properly chosen? properly excerpted? properly shaped?—can do the rest by itself.

So what is the source of this high regard; what exactly would these men have understood by an example? For it is the peculiar sanctity of example that I want to explain, and that troubles Spenser most. Two main accounts come down to the sixteenth century from antiquity, one from Plato, one from Aristotle. In keeping with his doctrine of the forms, Plato’s principal legacy is example as paradigm, a model or standard. Present-day theorists often speak of this sort of example as vertical, an instance that embodies and points to an ideal.23 Aristotle’s concept is more rhetorically oriented. He treats example as a mode of proof, or more properly, of evidence. It functions by providing the instance or instances from which a general principle may be inferred: “When we base the proof of a proposition

23. The distinction between vertical and horizontal example is summarized by Alexander Gelley in his introduction to his collection Unruly Examples: “Whereas the Platonic model displays a vertical directionality, from a primary exemplar down to multiple instantiations, for Aristotle example involves something like a lateral movement” (1). See also John D. Lyons, “Greeke’s Drink” and Sorbonnicke Wine: Montaigne’s Paradox of Experience,” 88–89 in the same volume.
on a number of similar cases, this is induction in dialectic, example in rhetoric."24 The Roman rhetoricians take up this line, a kind of horizontal example: Cicero declares that it "involves a certain principle of similarity running through diverse material"; Quintilian agrees.25

These two kinds—vertical and horizontal—correspond roughly to two basic accounts of what example is used for. Horizontal example persuades: it makes cases in politics or law by providing parallel instances that confirm a proposition. (It may also be understood to instruct, if the student’s task is to derive the rule from the instance or instances.) Vertical example is more characteristically pedagogical, offered up as a model for imitation, an exemplar. The exemplar does not so much prove a case as it embodies qualities after which we can pattern ourselves; it solicits imitation. On the side of persuasion, we have already heard Puttenham declare that no "argument... doth better perswade and more universally satisfie then example." He uses "argument" in something like Cicero’s sense of a "plausible device [inventum] to obtain belief," which is to say, anything—example or maxim or perhaps even scheme or trope—that may be invented (in the technical sense) to argue with.26 An example is one of the things you can put in a commonplace book, and by virtue of having been put there in one category or another it is already an example of something. (Under the heading "courage," it is an example of courage, and so on.) It is set to work by likening "one case to another," as Puttenham says, fitting it either to another case under discussion or to a proposition.27 It has the power to convince because it is more obvious in its meaning than the doubtful case it serves. The most effective examples will therefore be the most familiar, the subjects of the greatest cultural consensus; they will function best as evidence if they are self-evident.28

Where can you find such examples: concise, forceful, above all obvious in their meaning? The favorite humanist answer is history. The best examples, says Puttenham, are "the lively image of our deare forefathers"; they allow us to "draw the judgements precedent and authorized by antiquitie as veritable... into similitude or dissimilitude with our present actions and affaires."28 Sir Thomas Elyot takes them to be nothing less than the useful form of the past: "The knowlege of this Experience is called Example, and is expressed by Historie, whiche of Tulli is called the life of memorie."29

25. Cicero, De Inventione, 1.30.49; Quintilian, Orator’s Education, 5:11.
27. Puttenham, Ance, 245.
28. Ibid., 39, 245.
29. Elyot, Governor, 246.
History is example—that is, example is the form by which we can know about times before our own. Enthusiasm for the “liveliness” of such examples—lively images, the life of memory, and so on—has a twofold importance. First is the vitality attributed to the trope, as a way of accounting both for its power to move us and also for its meaning. (An example is not just an inert piece of experience; it has a point, almost an intention.) Second is the conviction that examples can capture real life, what really happened. Their persuasive force may be traced to their historical origins and authority. That appeal to historicity arouses a companion anxiety about fictional examples, a worry Peacham articulates in his Garden of Eloquence: “Fained examples and Apologies, ought to be used verie seldom,” he writes, and “regard ought to be had, that they be not alledged in the forme and countenance of true histories, whereby the truth is violated, and the simple and silly hearer seduced.” Example is the real thing. Tampering with it is accordingly discouraged.

The paradigm of humanist example, then—at least the forensic, horizontal kind—is a little self-evident story from history. Puttenham again: “as if one should say thus, Alexander the great in his expedition to Asia did thus, so did Hanniball comming into Spaine, so did Caesar in Egypt, therfore all great Captains and Generals ought to doe it.” Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar are the life of memory: lively, again, because they are taken from life; also because their conquests are stories, because they move, and can tell us something about a world in motion around us. For just this reason, however, humanist examples always contain within themselves a miniature version of this study’s animating conflict between paradigmatic and narrative understandings. Karlheinz Stierle is among the present-day theorists who make such a diagnosis, treating the example as a “minimal narrative unit” that is ideally compound with precept but never perfectly subject to its control. Timothy Hampton associates humanist pedagogy in particular

30. See also Peacham, who combines both aspects: “they [examples] present to the view and contemplation of our minde, the true and lively Image of time past, for by them it is that we know and see what was done long before our birth” (Garden, 187).
31. Ibid., 189.
32. Puttenham, Arie, 245.
33. “The exemplum as a minimal narrative unit relates to the minimal systematic unit of the moral-philosophical precept in such a way that they virtually form a compound”; on premodern history generally, he observes, “Whenever history takes on a concrete form, it does so in a manner related to its subsumption under categories of the moral system” (Stierle, “Story as Exemplum—Exemplum as Story,” 400). See also Nichols: “Reducing narrative mode almost to a zero state, or attempting to do so, the example offers itself as a temporally neutral or else proleptic descriptor of human behavior”; that is, it aspires to the atemporal universality that
with the ambition to reduce example to the minimum of a bare name.\textsuperscript{34} Puttenham’s “Alexander . . . did thus, and so did Hanniball” works in that direction; that tendency is even more patent in Spenser’s \textit{inventio} of Pride’s victims. There is a pressure, in humanist examples, out of story; out of time, into universals; toward name but also toward maxim. It is even possible for Erasmus, at one moment in \textit{De Copia}, to classify maxim itself as an example.\textsuperscript{35}

All this suggests how precariously close to paradox this bridging figure comes. That is part of its pedagogical power, but also its vulnerability: horizontal example traffics in history for its force, and yet it tends to reduce history to a ringing name, a name we already know. As Montaigne says—Montaigne who is the most clear-sighted, if gimlet-eyed, Renaissance theorist of these questions—"example is lame."\textsuperscript{35} It cannot quite stand on its own. Its prized obviousness is always vulnerable to misconstruction, and the more it is focused toward its moral, the more stripped of story, the less it is distinctively an example—the less \textit{lively} it is. Brinsley among the educators registers this problem with particular directness. He insists on communicating what he repeatedly calls the "force of the examples," even their "life," identifying something that is meant to be both essential and obvious yet must still be pointed out, as it were separately. (In cases where a particular grammatical point is at issue, he suggests that "the words wherein the force of the examples doth lie, [be] printed in differing letters."\textsuperscript{37}) Here is the example, he says, that piece of the real thing. And \textit{here} is its force, its life.

The need for persuasive example to be both lively and obvious—and above all, to be self-sufficient—generates this tension between the stability of its meaning and its authenticity as an excerpt, a piece of experience. A similar

\textsuperscript{34} Hampton, \textit{Writing from History}. "On the one hand, the humanist veneration of antiquity sanctions a model of reading in which the reader actualizes tradition by opening the exemplar up, by calling to mind the great deeds as they are stored in the name, by replaying the entire narrative of the heroic life. On the other hand, at the same time, the moralism of humanist pedagogy favors a gesture of closure that fixes the name’s ideological significance" (27).

\textsuperscript{35} Erasmus’s most expansive list of examples in \textit{De Copia} includes "stories, fables, proverbs, opinions, parallels or comparisons, similitudes, analogies" (\textit{Works}, 24:607).

\textsuperscript{36} "[I]tout exemple cloche" (\textit{The Complete Essays of Montaigne}, 819).

\textsuperscript{37} Brinsley, \textit{Ludus}, M1v; see also M3r, R4r, X3r.
problem arises when the example is considered as an object of imitation. Writing about education is full of historical figures and even fictional heroes who are forwarded as models for the student: be like this. Identifying such models for imitation was part of how students were taught to read, and framing them was part of teaching. Erasmus, in his Institutio, offers a limit case, proposing an ideal for the young prince’s contemplation: “Then let him [the master] paint as it were a picture... Let the teacher therefore depict a sort of celestial creature, more like a divinity than a mortal: complete with every single virtue.” 38 The Institutio is laden with precept, as we have seen in chapter 3, but here the point is to construct a model—to paint a picture—that will be a comprehensive object of imitation, including every virtue, leaving out no grace or strength that the prince should cultivate. Such examples, or exemplars, are preeminently vertical, in the sense that the student’s likeness to the exemplar corresponds to the exemplar’s likeness to the virtue itself, in a kind of Platonic hierarchy. Sidney draws up a conventional list of the candidates for such a model in his Defence—Cyrus, Alexander, Aeneas—and praises their ability to propagate themselves by inciting readers to imitation: “so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses.” 39 

In the fashioning of these vertical exemplars, however, there is once again inevitably a swerve away from the idea of example as a piece of the real thing, whether or not it is acknowledged. As Timothy Hampton writes, “[e]very moment in the life of the exemplar... becomes a kind of synecdoche of the ‘complete life,’” which is another way of saying that exemplarity tends to disintegrate the narrative of its subjects’ lives to produce a series of emblematic actions, or even poses. 40 This kind of exemplarity tends to attract the language of visual description—“the true and lively Image of time past,” says Peacham—and hence to remove itself still further from our life in time. 41 As the example is purified—by stringent exception,

39. Sidney, Miscellaneous Prose, 79. Sidney’s “it” is the fore-conceit (discussed in chapter 3), which might be identified here with the “force” of the example.
41. Peacham, Garden, 187.
by rewriting, by transposition toward painting—it becomes more and more like fiction, or a certain kind of fiction. As Erasmus writes:

poetry also offers passages which no one would deny are fictional, but since it is generally accepted that they were invented precisely for the purpose of functioning as examples, and what is more were invented by great writers, they have all the weight of examples; I mean things like the goddess Envy, Rumor, Discord.\footnote{Erasmus, \textit{De Copia}, in \textit{Works}, 24:614.}

By the end of this description what Erasmus has arrived at is personification allegory. He has gotten there by degrees, but the kind of reading involved has changed qualitatively: for allegory is a mode better suited for analysis than for imitation; our response to the likes of Envy, Rumor, and Discord is properly more detached, neither viscerally imitative nor viscerally aversive. Certainly what liveliness these emblems have no longer comes from their being simply cut from real life.

To this imitation of exemplars—\textit{be like this}—must be added one more variety of pedagogical example. The injunction most distinctive to humanist teaching is \textit{write like this}. Schoolboys were encouraged to master the style of classical authors, in particular Cicero’s, and in many classrooms to assimilate a much broader range of voices. That project demanded an encounter with extended passages of those authors’ works: not just \textit{sententiae}, or the teacher’s epitomes, but the contiguous pages of text necessary to the recognition of a style.\footnote{Hence not only Ascham’s book of examples, but the extended passages of Terence or Horace to be found in \textit{The Schoolmaster} itself, Kempe likewise introduces extended passages of Cicero into his manual (see chapter 1).} This is a different kind of example again, and it tacks back against the drift toward allegory. Since the great project of humanism, after teaching (and perhaps the dream of counsel), was textual editing, there was an ethic of accuracy pervading the enterprise. If students are to be given something to imitate, it should be as close to its original, historical form as possible, Colet’s “good Latin authors” in the best possible texts. The schoolmaster was free, that is, to cut and to frame, but less free to rewrite. An impressive instance of this scruple is to be found in Erasmus’s \textit{De Ratione Studii}, where he provides elaborate, prophylactic instructions for reading the homoerotic elements of Virgil’s second eclogue—rather than simply censoring bits of it, or skipping it altogether.\footnote{\textit{Works}, 24:683–87.}
Such compunctions about textual accuracy contribute further to that peculiarly strong sense of the example's sanctity. Example is not only forceful, not only lively, but it has a kind of integrity in relation to its source. That account persists even when the example is pressed furthest toward allegory, and away from exception, so long as it is still understood as an example. (And this is equally true of negative examples.) The text of the example itself may still be understood according to the usual routines of humanist reading, parsing and epitome and so on. But it is a piece of the original, and the concept of example, not least on this account, retains a principled association with the word-for-word of the past. Reverence for the figure—as humanism's signal, practical difference from scholastic teaching—is central to the propaganda for the new pedagogy. It is this learned habit of deference to its boundaries that will most arouse Spenser's suspicions in Book II.

Making Examples

"[W]e have not the wit to pick out and put to use what happens before our eyes, and to judge it keenly enough to make it an example," complains Montaigne. Making examples—picking them out and hewing them from their surround so we or others can learn from them—is the preoccupation of Book II. For this reason, among others, it is a book about boundaries and limits, and so of course it begins with the hero Guyon's dangerously inchoate and unbounded encounter with a dying woman, an encounter that first delineates what will be the ethical challenge of his education over the rest of the book.

When the knight discovers Amavia in a forest clearing, she makes a "Pitifull spectacle" (2.1.40), her husband Mortdant dead at her side, her own knife in her breast, and their infant child playfully bloodying his hands at the wound. Guyon's immediate reaction is a kind of mirror of her suffering: "His hart gan wexe as starke, as marble stone, / And his fresh blood did frieze with feareful cold, / That all his sences seemd bereffe attone" (42). This is only the first time that Guyon, faced with a spectacle of pain, is paralyzed with—well, with what? Perhaps he suffers the existential assault of a circumstance he cannot redeem, as a knight errant whose role it is to save the damsel. "[H]elp never comes too late" (44), he assures her two stanzas later, and he is patently wrong. Or perhaps there is a sudden contagion of affect, a moment of sympathy across the protective boundaries

45. Montaigne, Essays, 828.
of the allegory, across the characters' different meanings: an outbreak of compassion, which comes near to annihilating the knight.

Such compassion is a peculiar vulnerability of the Spenserian character. Human solidarity has everything to do with the ability to convince ourselves that we feel the same things. We regard a spectacle of suffering together, and are touched with the same pity; we argue with one another, and share feelings of strained love and anger. At least we like to think so. Within a strict system of personification allegory, however—a system invoked, if never fully realized, by Spenser's poem—that sense of feeling—with is a threat to identity. If Anger storms into a room, followed somewhat later by scuffling Regret, we have a little allegory of the costs of losing your temper. But Anger cannot feel regret, nor can Regret feel anger, without the risk that the system of argument they inhabit together will lapse into incoherence. There is a structural prohibition against such commonalities. It is not strictly enforced, for Spenser's poem does not altogether play by its own rules, but the undersong of loneliness derives not least from the burden of these laws.

Let us say then that Guyon is paralyzed by compassion, by the existential threat of Amavia's claims on his emotions. He recovers himself by action: he snatches the knife from the wound and stops the bleeding, ministering to Amavia until she begins to breathe again. The rescue is a virtuous deed. As the passage proceeds, however, an emerging pattern of imagery discovers how transgressive it is—transgressive in the etymological sense of a crossing of boundaries or borders. The narrator calls the scene a "sad pourtraict / Of death and dolour" (2.1.39), a "Pitifull spectacle" (40); Guyon describes it as an "ymage ... Of ruefull pitty, and impatient smart" (44). This language is formal, compositional, kin to the emblem books. The pictorial boundaries that these words erect are reinforced (as Susanne Wofford has shown) by hints that the structure of the scene borrows something from drama—from spectacle, "Tragedie" (2.2.1), and pageant (Amavia imagines her death as staged for an audience of gods who "take delight / To see sad pageaunts of mens miseries" [2.1.36]). The boundary resembles the one between players and audience as well as between image and looker. The effect of this juxtaposition of emblem and stage is to frame the prospect doubly, setting it off from the rest of the poem's action even more emphatically than Spenser's usual allegorical tableau-making would do. When he first sees

Amavia, Guyon stands on one side of a strongly marked threshold, whether the threshold is the edge of a stage or of a picture. Standing there, he is a reader, or an audience member. When he crosses that line, he becomes something else.

The theatrical analogy suggests one problem with Guyon’s strongly taken action. If he is the audience, then his intervention is like leaping on stage in the middle of the play, as though to save Desdemona or remind Albany to look after Cordelia. But it is also possible to imagine that so long as he stands on the safer or cooler side of that line his position is that of a student, and in that case the frame marks off something he is supposed to study. Altering its contents will spoil the lesson just as surely as wresting away Othello’s pillow will spoil the play. To learn from such an image, such a spectacle—such an example?—it is necessary to recognize that it belongs to a different order of experience, or even that it is outside experience, and to stand back.

Guyon does not recognize these signals at first; he just hurls himself forward, as chivalric script and “inward paine” (2.1.42) dictate. But Amavia dies despite his efforts, and he is plunged back into a debilitating grief, wreathing his head in his arms to block out “so heavie sight” (56). This time he rescues himself by a contrary strategy: “Then turning to his Palmer said, Old syre / Behold the ymage of mortalitie” (57). He retrenches, that is, behind the dotted lines that the narrator has drawn around the scene, and in so doing identifies another way of overcoming the double threat of impotence and compassion presented by Amavia’s violent despair. There is both framing and pointing in that exhortation, “Behold the ymage”: it is a teaching gesture. By these means he makes of this scene a didactic occasion, one that can now be ground through the mill of the stanza to yield a sententious motto: “The strong through pleasure soonest falles, the weake through smart” (57). Amavia has become a lesson. She has been cut out of the world of experience, with its ambiguous and continual moral claims, and repositioned in an ad hoc schoolroom that Guyon has built hastily in the little clearing. It is this act of instruction—a kind of example-making—that allows the knight to move on.

Spenser is working out some ideas about the formal structure of the scene of instruction here, ideas bound up, as we will shortly see, with the book’s cardinal virtue of temperance. He is also thinking about the psychology of such scenes, and from that vantage it is worth registering the unexpectedness of Guyon’s teacherly pose. For most of the book, the knight is obviously
the student, and the figure to whom he directs his lesson, the Palmer, is his black-robed tutor. The relationship between the two will turn out to be marked throughout by such subtle jostling for authority. The Palmer has always particularly puzzled critics, not least because he is a presumptively Catholic pilgrim in a presumptively Protestant poem. It helps to recognize the pedagogue in him, with his robes and a staff that he carries to “point his way” (2.1.34; italics mine). Among his roles is that of the gray and sober tutor who is a topos of the education literature from Plutarch to Mulcaster, a figure—not quite a schoolmaster himself, but endowed with a schoolmasterly authority—who not only takes charge of the young aristocrat in his chamber, but also accompanies him through the world. He is plentiful in the literature of the late century: we will see him again, for example, on the battlefields of Arcadia, where he is still advising his grown-up ward Amphialus.47

But this pilgrim-tutor, compounded of his social roles, is also often taken to be a figure of Reason, the sort of practical reason that makes the calculations of temperance. If he is Reason, too—if he is both a companion and a faculty of mind—then he is both outside and inside the hero. This doubleness, a symptom of the poem’s endless, productive indecision between psychomachia and social mimesis, is particularly useful for its thinking about the dynamics of instruction. It allows Spenser to consider how our teachers are always both outside and inside us. The problem is like that of the catechism as I described it in chapter 1: can the student appropriate, own, or author the catechist’s words, or do they remain forever another man’s question ringing in his head, a question he must nonetheless answer in word or in deed? Does learning a lesson consist in preserving that alien voice within himself in its strangeness, or in eventually assimilating it, absorbing it, or even, in the language of imitation, digesting it? (The same problem haunts sententia in Arcadia.) For such questions psychoanalysis has the language of introjection and the formation of the superego. The Faerie Queene is in its way a still more flexible instrument, for it never lets us rest

47. For this tradition see Plutarch (Education, trans. Elyot, in Four Tudor Books, ed. Pepper, 12–17), Elyot (Governor, 33), Mulcaster (Positions, 245). Amphialus is still ruled by his “old governor” in the new Arcadia (New Arcadia, 495). Nohrenberg recognizes the teacher in him: “the Palmer’s powers derive from his wisdom, the kind of developed foresight and expertise that a pupil finds in a preceptor or mentor” (The Anatomy of the Faerie Queene, 290). Paul Cefalu gives an account of the Palmer as a kind of mis-educator (as well as a survey of accounts of his identification with reason and prudence) in Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature, 56–64. Anne Prescott discusses an illuminating parallel (to Redcrosse as well as Caymon and the Palmer) in “Spenser’s Chivalric Restoration: From Bateman’s Traveyled Pygotime to the Redcrosse Knight.”
easy knowing whether a given encounter is with a real person or an aspect of ourselves that we misrecognize as a real person. (And when, in what we call real life, can we ever be sure about that?) The plot of Book II is set up to experiment with this puzzle in the register of instruction, separating and recombining the two characters, knight and palmer, with an almost clinical curiosity.

So when Guyon turns to the Palmer to say, "Old syre / Behold the ymage of mortalitie" (2.1.57), it is a complicated moment. Perhaps he is speaking Reasonably. Proper detachment is the good of having the Palmer by his side, and keeping that company is the sign of his rationality, a sign that teaches us as readers to interpret what he says as good counsel. But there may be just a hint of condescension in "Old syre," a provocation to another kind of psychological reading. Pretending to teach your teacher is a way of proving that you understand, but it is hardly the most evolved; it cannot but be touched with resentment, even sycophancy. Spenser hints at a kind of adolescent rivalry in Guyon, one that continues in the ensuing debate about whether or not Amavia should be given her burial rites. The question of who speaks which lines here is difficult to sort out, as editors attest—difficult in a way that at first flatters the assumption that there is a kind of conceptual unison developing between them. But the sides of an argument do emerge, with some work, and the result seems more than a little gratuitous. Amavia should be given proper burial because she acted in anguish, says the Palmer; but no! says Guyon, she should be buried because we are not fit to judge. This is the narcissism of minor differences. Guyon tests his independence, but not so far as to disagree, or disappoint.

All of this—the careful boundaries of the lesson, the boundary testing of teacher and student—is a way of containing the debilitating horror of Amavia's death. The lesson-making allows Guyon to leave the scene and continue the quest set for him back in Cleopolis by the Palmer. The episodes that follow have the character of intermediate exercises in this new discipline of boundary-making. There is the house of Medina, a schematic

48. Wofford again is the critic who pursues this question most directly: "To learn to read Spenser's poem is to learn that everything—a person in the story, a place, a house, a tree or a giant—can represent an aspect of the hero's own psyche" (The Cambridge Companion to Spenser, 116). I have tried to develop the ethical and psychological issues at stake in cases where there is a strategic confusion between these two possibilities, social mimesis and psychomachia; that confusion is itself mimetic of our daily difficulty telling the difference.

49. See Hamilton's notes in his edition of The Faerie Queene, 169.
representation of temperance as an ethical mean, where Guyon intervenes between two contrary knights "and rare ensample made" (2.2.25) of his own good conduct. Then there is the brief, turbulent operetta played out among Pyrocles, Furor, and Occasion, which ends with Guyon smiling at the defeated fiery knight and preaching, "henceforth by this daies ensample trow, / That hasty wroth, and heedlesse hazardry / Doe breede repentance late, and lasting infamy" (2.5.13). Guyon's lines echo Arthur's outside Orrogoglio's castle, the "daies ensample" that will inscribe "this lesson deare" (1.8.44). He is studying to make—or just to recognize?—examples. He is also learning temperance, and Lauren Silberman's account of the workings of that virtue in Book II suggests how the two lessons may conspire with each other. She is interested in the calculating aspect of temperance, its detached specification of the mean between extremes. "The use of Temperance as a design for ethical living," she writes, "becomes a series of exegetical defenses against experience." She emphasizes how mechanical (and in that respect un-Aristotelian) temperance in Book II typically is, and how its version of reason enforces, or licenses, distance from the immediate claims of an ethical situation. In this detachment, temperance is like allegory. One must stand back to calculate, just as, with allegory, one stands back to read.

Or to teach, or to learn. Every scene of domination or subordination, seduction or abstinence, mercy or punishment, is also a scene of instruction in this book, and in every scene the degree of proper detachment is at stake. Example is Spenser's subtlest instrument for investigating this problem, and it comes most to the fore when Guyon and the Palmer are separated—the test of whether Guyon as a character has incorporated, or could incorporate, the meaning of his guide. Two episodes unfold before they are reunited, the first of them taking place on the lovely island in the midst of the Idle Lake. Here the island's giddy spiritus loci, Phaedria, advertises its virtues to Cymochles before Guyon arrives:

It was a chosen plott of fertile land,
Eromgst wide waves sett, like a little nest,
As if it had by Nature's cunning hand,
Bene choycely picked out from all the rest,
And laid forth for ensample of the best:

No dainty flower or herbe, that growes on ground,

No arboret with painted blossomes drest,
And smelling sweete, but there it might be found
To bud out faire, and though her sweete smel al arownd. (2.6.12)

The island is a gilded vitrine, but the account of example is subtly tenden-
tious. These flowers are choicely picked out, and grow on a chosen plot; they
are the fruit of labors perhaps more like the schoolmaster’s than like the
gardener’s, blooms culled rather than cultivated. The rhetoric sounds a lot
like the fulsome prefaces of the period’s printed florielgia, which promised
the choicest bits of the best authors, a “garden of wysdome conteynynge
pleasauntae flowres, that is to saye, propre and quicke saynges of pri[n]ces,
ph[i]losophers and other sorte[s] of men,” as Richard Taverner puts it; flow-
ers “truely collected and diligently gathered together” to make a “very
necesarie and profitable” anthology, in the words of John Northbrooke.51
Phaedria is something of a saleswoman, and one can almost imagine her
hawking such a book among the stalls at St. Paul’s.

And that’s not all: not only is the perilous work of choosing already
done, and done by nature’s own hand, but two stanzas later it appears
that these “ensamples of the best” have actually chosen themselves. “Be-
hold, O man, that toilesome paines doest take / The flowrs, the fields,
and all that pleasaunt growes, / How they them selves doe thine ensample
make” (2.6.15). These lines are themselves flowers from Scripture, adapt-
ing Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, and the ideal they express is what we
might call a natural example: the example that needs no special trimming
or shaping, but that grows in the wild for us to recognize and be instructed
by.52 It points itself out, points to itself. The particular merit of such a natu-
ral example is that it allows us to forget that example might be, or must be, a
made thing. It is choice—choice in the sense of select, ideal, perfect—without
having to have had a chooser, let alone a maker.

When Guyon arrives on the island he proves impervious to Phaedria’s
seduction and her “ensample of the best.” Why? Perhaps because they
come with such clearly inscribed boundaries about them—because Guyon’s
instruction in example is a kind of progressively acquired immunity, a way
of recognizing the parts of the poem that he should not touch. What could
be easier to resist than the items in this display case? His detachment is becoming almost natural.

Guyon faces one more test alone before he is reunited with the Palmer: the temptations of wealth and power in the Cave of Mammon. The knight does have company, however, if not guidance, for he is led through the cave's three chambers by the solicitous money god himself. Once again the scene has its pedagogical dimension. Mammon is not a teacher so much as a father (or father-in-law), calling the young knight "Sonne" (2.7.18) and ultimately offering him his daughter's hand in marriage. The byplay between them—Mammon's cajoling, Guyon's rectitude—might just glance at another *topos* of education writing, the interfering attentions of parents. Spenser's teacher Mulcaster complained how "parentes et freindes, wilbe medlers somtime, to further their young impe," and he had a long tradition of irritated educators behind him.53 Here father Mammon tries to sidetrack Guyon by interrupting his discipline with all manner of worldly goods and favors.54 Guyon's resistance takes the form of a blank and uninclining wonder (of a kind that there will be occasion to think about again, with Britomart). No schoolmaster needs to intervene now. And indeed, here as on Phaedria's island, Guyon exhibits considerably less evidence of temptation than he does in any other part of the poem. The quality of the temptation is one difference, for Guyon turns out to be far more vulnerable to the appeals of suffering women than to the promise of riches. But Spenser is also continuing to think about the dynamics of teacher and student: it appears to be easier for the knight to indulge his temptations to desire and violence alike when his teacher is near to check him. Alone, he is much more abstemious, more conservative, more timid.

53. Mulcaster, *Positions*. 29. He puts this renunciation in a nationalist key later in the book: "But though everie parent be thus affected toward his owne child, as nature leads him to wishe his owne best, yet for all that everie parent must beare in memorie that he is more bound to his country, then to his child, as his child must renounce him in countermatch with his countrie" (141–42). It should be said that there is another strain in education writing that emphasizes how teachers should be like fathers in their authority; see for example Vives in *De Tractanda, He [the master] will be of a fatherly disposition towards his pupils, so they may be so him in the place of sons" (Education, 56). And while the Palmer has no daughter for Guyon to marry, he does once call his charge "sonne" (2.5.24).

54. Mammon's ambitions for the young man are interesting. Notwithstanding his own appearance as an "uncivill wight" (2.7.3), he seems to have civilizing designs: "Sonne... leave the rudenesse of that antique age... Thou that dost live in later times, must wage Thy workes for wealth, and life for gold engage" (18). Money is the means by which both human society and one of its scions can grow up, and also the sign of that maturity.
Which might be a way of saying that he has, after all, learned something. The shape of the lesson is clearest when he enters the third of Mammon’s chambers, the Garden of Proserpine. The garden is a kind of photographic negative of Eden, decked in poisonous, black foliage and stocked with the usual roster of sinners, one of whom is thrashing energetically in the dark river. Ever-curious Guyon climbs up on the bank to get a look. What he sees is a man half-submerged, groping after fruits that recoil from his grasp, stooping to drink from waters that recede before he can taste. “The knight him seeing labour so in vaine, / Askt who he was, and what he ment thereby” (2.7.59). The answer, of course, is that this is Tantalus, who begs his questioner for food or drink—begs him, once again, to cross the distance between them, the frame of that riverbank, to minister to his conspicuous needs. That boundary could be just as permeable as the open space between any two bodies. But Guyon knows better now:

Nay, nay, thou greedy Tantalus (quoth he)
Abide the fortune of thy present fate,
And unto all that live in high degree,
Ensample be of mind more temperate,
To teach them how to use their present state.
Then gan the cursed wretch allowd to cry,
Accusing highest Love and gods ingrate,
And eke blaspheming heaven bitterly,
As author of injustice, there to let him dye. (2.7.60)

Guyon has already asked “who he was, and what he ment thereby” (59; italics mine); he begins the encounter as a reader, inquiring after meaning.\(^5\) He seems to recognize that he is moving through an allegory, if not perhaps to recognize his implication in it, or to read it with much comprehensiveness or skill. And having so constituted the encounter, he neither freezes in horror behind the boundary of the riverbank, nor lunges across it. The “en- sample” of Tantalus would seem already to be an emblem, already an allegory, the opposite of Amavia’s sympathetic claims—safely incommensurate and altogether beyond care. Or almost. For Guyon’s act of motto-making, “Ensample be of mind more temperate,” is also an exhortation to reform. Here is the moral distinctiveness of example, its tenaciously equivocal.

---

55. Compare a comic version of the same question, posed by an uneasy Archimago when, disguised as Redcrosse, he takes up with Una: “all the way they spent / Discoursing of her dreadful late distresse, / In which he askt her, what the Lyon ment” (1.3.32).
middle position, partaking both of experience and precept. Tantalus might yet change; this example is unstable enough, poised between two worlds, that Guyon might yet allow—might yet hope?—that they could share the same world.

Or at least, he might circa 1590. The line is different in the edition of 1596, and again in 1609: “And unto all that live in high degree, / Ensample be of mind intemperate, / To teach them how to use their present state.” 56 There is no reform in this version: the example just consolidates the punishment. Tantalus may serve to teach others, but he is condemned to mean without intending, to teach without learning. His fate is the fate of a sign.

In the first chapter, I described two large-scale models of an educational career that humanism cultivated in default of (or against) narrative. The first was the careful preservation of an original innocence; the second, the constant, corrective chastising of an original corruption. Guyon’s progress through Book II looks a lot like the second, and it seems as though he learns something by the process: the rash boundary-breaking of the first cantos gives way to perfect abstemiousness. 57 His paralysis before Amavia is repeated with the bloody-handed babe Rudymane, but after that it is transformed, and his escape from repetition is the kind of learning romance knows best. What he learns in particular—what springs him from that cycle of destructive sympathy—is how to recognize examples, how to frame and excerpt the world like a text, to recognize the natural boundaries around its lessons and treat them with the proper respect. Or perhaps, how to make examples, how to defuse the claims of moral commensurability by a particular attitude of study. This last account makes him something like an agent within the poem of what Gordon Teskey calls “allegorical capture”: “the moments in which the materials of narrative are shown being actively subduced for the purpose of raising a structure of meaning.” 58 The “ensample” is Spenser’s way of examining that capture at the specifically

56. Italics mine; see the textual notes in Hamilton’s edition of The Faerie Queene, 742.
57. Prominent accounts of Book II have evolved from Woodhouse’s famous argument about its “order of nature,” compared to Book I’s “order of grace.” Harry Berger is among the critics who finds both orders within Book II, with Guyon personifying a specifically Christian temperance after his faint and revival in canto viii. I am more inclined to see these patterns governed by a steady development of his skills as maker and reader of examples. See Woodhouse, “Nature and Grace in The Faerie Queene”, Berger, The Allegorical Temper, 62.
58. Teskey, Allegory and Violence, 23.
pedagogical point of its origin, when its mode is still unsettled, when the possibility of a middle way is open. These are all, again, scenes of teaching.

For Guyon it might be said that the boundary of the example is more important than anything it contains; one might even think of that boundary as drawn more surely around the student than around the object of study, a kind of quarantine expressed as a necessary condition of learning. It defines what it is to learn, the standing back, the pointing out. And perhaps this is what the reader of The Faerie Queene in turn is meant to do, treating the allegory as a cordon sanitaire (to return to Silberman’s argument). But then again, there is another vantage from which the claim that this instruction in boundaries is learning—or that it is fashioning, institution, education—is much harder to defend. Many critics have remarked upon the infantile character of Guyon’s final outburst in the Bower of Bliss, the intemperate “tempest of his wrathfulness” when he tears the place down.59 At that moment of violent impulse one might be excused for thinking of Guyon as entirely inexperienced, capable of no measured response, of nothing between self-surrendering desire (from which the Palmer must repeatedly restrain him) and destructive wrath. Perhaps—we might now speculate—the outcome of Guyon’s instruction in example is paradoxically to have inexperienced him, uneducated him, by saving him again and again from exposure, involvement, entanglement. We are back to that first account of humanist training, as the preservation of original innocence. But original innocence and original corruption have become surprisingly hard to separate, or perhaps the difference just doesn’t matter much. Now it looks as though Guyon’s ultimate success as a student—his ability to complete his quest and bring down the bower—lies precisely in his failure to change, his failure to grow up.

What kind of teaching is this? And who should get credit for it? There have always been readers suspicious of the Palmer, how he steers Guyon toward the completion of a mission whose warrant is so much less clear than the apocalyptic stakes of the previous book’s dragon fight.60 The sophisticated back-and-forth between the two, Spenser’s most concerted

59. Stephen Greenblatt’s argument that Guyon’s spasm of regenerative violence is both an act of desublimation and a restitution of civilizing norms has become a touchstone: see Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 173.

60. Paul Lefalk is the most recent and among the most severe of these skeptics: he sees Book II moving through orders of nature and grace but ending finally in an order of law: “Guyon’s education in the Bower is not a step-wise progress in pagan or Christian virtue, but rather an ‘education’ in the virtue of obedience to the Palmer’s unassailable commands” (Moral Identity, 75).
anatomy of instruction as an interpersonal project, suggests how a certain kind of training can unfit a young man for experience. Guyon in the last cantos is made perfectly manipulable. One might wonder, after the Palmer and the knight separate, why they are brought back together at all, given that Guyon has been shown to have learned so well his lesson of detachment: “Behold the ymage.” Perhaps it is because, having learned restraint well and too well from that teacher, he also needs that teacher to let him loose.

Irrelevance

If we look back from this vantage to Redcrosse in the House of Pride, his tuition, or antituition, will appear as a kind of complement to the instruction Guyon has undergone over the course of Book II. Guyon’s apprenticeship is in proper respect for examples. He has learned to frame and to point, to recognize and to make lessons out of what he encounters (part of his new art being the blurring of the distinction between recognizing and making, the case of the natural example). He perfects the humanist deference to example into a perfectly studious abstemiousness. Redcrosse gives us the same problem from the other side, the inside. He is himself the example around whom the boundary has been drawn, and that boundary seems to forbid his understanding the object lesson (in a strong sense of that phrase) that he has become. The transaction of the example is under scrutiny from both points of view. At the heart of that double critique is the idea that such instruction interrupts ordinary moral commensurability, suspending the moral claims that might otherwise obtain between the two parties: in Guyon’s case, between the knight and another character like Amavia or Tantalus, and in Redcrosse’s case, more weirdly and unsettlingly, between the knight and the reader of the poem. Example makes a boundary that care cannot cross. To speak of such an interruption may seem peculiar in the context of a poem whose allegorical poetics enforces the incommensurability of its agents as a condition of its meaning. (To say nothing of an incommensurability between character and reader.) But as I have already suggested, there are pressures of narrative, even of what we might call psychological realism, that resist this atomism, and those pressures mount against the example’s boundary.61 What Spenser’s treatment of the figure suggests in the largest

61. I adopt here the sense of “realism” developed by Alastair Fowler in Renaissance Realism, where he treats early fiction not as incapable of what he calls “observational realism” (63), but as combining such mimesis with a variety of other modes, including allegory. The origins of novelistic mimesis seem to lie in a slow succession of distinct narrative modes, until gradually non-realistic features were eliminated. This fluctuating process occupied more than three
sense is that this atomism itself is a side effect, or even an objective, of a
certain kind of instruction.

And indeed, of course it is. Example works that way, by exception and
estrangement. And that is how the teaching machine of an allegory works
too: analysis, separating things out, is its opening move. But again, my chief
objective here is to suggest how Spenser finds ways of expressing both the
general costs and the more particular abuses to which such instruction is
liable. This he does principally by the fantastic modal flexibility of his poem,
how it alternately flatters and rebukes any kind of reading at all that may be
brought to it. Example itself is a hybrid of his modes, half experience, half
precept, both narrative and not. That doubleneness is its great service to its
humanist champions—the classroom’s self-justifying bridge to praxis—but
it also makes example a kind of fault line in Spenser’s project. His scrutiny
of its workings is bound to make the reader feel a little queasy, above all
for that uncanny question, must all of our lessons be borne as ignorant
suffering by the characters that body them forth? Is that the only way for
us to learn? And does the poem offer no alternatives to this vision of its
own instruction? Is there no way to read it innocently, from the inside or
the outside?62

The three books of 1596 brood upon this question again, and they will
return us to it in chapter 6. There is, however, something of a provisional
answer at the end of Book III, or at least a remedy for the uneasy reader.
The hero of that book is the knight Britomart, and her virtue is chastity.
Spenser’s chastity is a flexible concept, and he is interested in it not least
because its purity is contested in his culture between abstinence on the one
hand, and continence (chastity in marriage) on the other. This is a prob-
lem of sexuality, but it is also a problem of knowledge. There is a kind
of chastity of the understanding that comes in for particular scrutiny
over the course of Britomart’s career, and Book III poses the question of
whether innocence is necessarily also a state of ignorance. Are we obliged to

62. Dennis Kezar makes a book—Guilty Creatures—of a similarly uncanny question, ask-
ing, do Renaissance writers ever conceive of themselves as responsible for the violence they
represent, and should we as readers feel complicit in what he calls “killing poems” (7):
understand evil in order better to resist it, or is any kind of understanding a concession, an apology, and a risk to our purity? Does understanding necessarily contaminate? Because it is Britomart’s understanding that is at stake here, we are back to the question of allegorical agents as readers of the allegory, and as exemplars for the readers outside the poem. Her own powers as a reader come to the fore in the House of Busirane.

What is Britomart to the House of Busirane, or the House of Busirane to her? Houses (or what Angus Fletcher calls “temples”) and the characters who transgress them pose another problem of insides and outsides in Spenser’s poem. Does the space diagnose the state of the visitor, as Redcrosse in the House of Pride, or is it a properly external challenge or temptation that the visitor must confront? In the most neutral, narrative terms, the Knight of Chastity ends up on Busirane’s property because she pledges to help the hapless Scudamour recover his beloved Amoret from the wizard’s inner sanctum. The house has three parts: a room lined with Ovidian tapestries, depicting mostly mortals raped by gods, at the far end of which stands an idol of Cupid; a room of “monstrous formes” (3.11.51) in metal frieze, festooned with the arms of warriors felled by Cupid; and finally the chamber where Busirane tortures Amoret, from which once a day Cupid’s procession issues forth. Thomas Roche’s reading of the episode has been generative for many subsequent critics; he takes the varieties of antietoric propaganda Britomart encounters to be “an objectification of Amoret’s fear of sexual love in marriage,” all seen “through the eyes” of the heroine. Such anxieties are just the thing to derail the knight of chastity from a quest that can only be fulfilled by marriage and procreation. Harry Berger emphasizes Busirane’s role as the spectacle’s architect: “in showing Britomart what and how Amoret suffers, Busirane tries to dissuade both from their promised futures.” This sense of the house as a particularly apt test for the knight—or apt manifestation of her virtue—is an assumption that has become widespread, and indeed it is the assumption most native to the poem. The two, house and guest, are made for each other.

63. Fletcher, The Prophetic Moment, 14–23.
64. Roche, The Kindly Flame, 77, 75. He departs from Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 343–45.
66. See, for example, MacCaffrey, Spenser’s Allegory (112), and Watkins, The Specter of Dido (171–74). For a nearly opposite reading see Lauren Silberman’s Transforming Desire, where she treats the house as an interpretive contest between the authority of poet (Busirane) and reader.
But it might at least give us pause to point out that Britomart seems to recognize nothing of this attunement. If we do in fact see the tapestries through her eyes, her reaction is not once described over nineteen stanzas: the mix of moralizing and delection in the narrator's tone seems to be independent of the character whose progress from one tapestry to the next presumably strings the images together. This tacit disengagement becomes explicit when she comes to the idol of Cupid at the chamber's far end. She pays attention, but to no obvious effect:

That wondrous sight faire Britomart amaz'd,
Ne seeing could her wonder satisfie,
But evenmore and more upon it gaz'd,
The whiles the passing brightnes her frail sences daz'd. (3.11.49)

This combination of avid spectatorship and incomprehension is repeated several times, with the "be bold" legends ("she oft and oft it over-red, / Yet could not find what sence it figured" [3.11.50]; "That much she muz'd, yet could not construe it"; "whereto though she did bend / Her earnest minde, yet wist not what it might intend" [3.11.54]) and again with the spectacle of the next room ("beholding earnestly" she "Did greatly wonder, ne could satisfy / Her greedy eyes with gazing a long space" [3.11.53]). There is not a little Virgil in these lines, the famous scene of Aeneas before the Carthaginians' murals of Troy.67 Spenser's metaphors of feeding and his language of wonder both originate with Aeneas "feast[ing] his soul on the unsubstantial picture [animum pictura pascit inani]" and its "wonderful things [miranda]."68 The Faerie Queen recombines the two to define the kind of reading taking place, or not taking place, in Busirane's house.

Wonder, as Aristotle's Rhetoric tells us, is the beginning of understanding.69 It is the open-mouthed, exhilarating blankness of confronting something for which we have no categories. It becomes understanding (and ceases to be marvelous) as we assimilate its novelty to our existing, and ideally adapting, structures of knowledge—when we figure out, that is, where

(Britomart): "By imprisoning Amoret in the Masque of Cupid, Busirane attempts to assert the power of the poet to be supreme arbiter of meaning. By thwarting his attempt, Britomart reaffirms the view of allegory as a shared enterprise figured by the hermaphroditic embrace" (66). I am more inclined to think of Britomart as opting out of the enterprise.

68. Virgil, Aeneid, 1.464, 1.494.
it fits in our commonplace books. In the meantime, it is an affective sign of failure to learn something, or to have learned something yet, even if its very intensity may suggest that an unexpected understanding awaits when it is overcome. The problem for Britomart is that she seems to idle at that threshold, feeding herself continuously without digesting anything. There is something of Guyon’s respect for boundaries here, but now its occasion is a kind of spectatorial self-pleasuring (rather than study or moral-making). She is a hedonist of what ought to be a merely propaedeutic thrill. This posture may be exhibited as a mode of misreading the poem: wonder is among the terms most argued over by the Italian theorists of romance, and its critics disparage the idle self-sufficiency of its marvelous pleasures.\(^{70}\)

Then again, perhaps it is an ideal mode of reading the poem; certainly it is one that subsequent generations of readers have recommended. (For example, Hazlitt’s famous remark, “If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them.”\(^{71}\) That is a possibility I want to take seriously—but one more observation about Britomart’s mis- (or non-) understanding first. The tapestries she may or may not scrutinize depict the monstrous, painful, and debasing shapes the gods take in their pursuit of mortal women. There is some attention to the subjectivity of these women early on, especially an enigmatic Leda, who seems to share a smile with the onrushing swan.\(^{72}\) But the emphasis in everything that follows falls on Cupid’s triumphs over the gods, all of them male (save Venus—"Ne did he spare...His owne deare mother" [3.11.45]—with whom no particular story is associated). The second chamber’s bearing on Britomart is even more tenuous, filled as it is with the spoils of Cupid’s victories over “mightie Conquerours and Captaines strong” (3.11.52). One might argue that insofar as she has adopted masculine armor for her quest—a metamorphosis of sorts—she is the proper audience for an ekphrastic lecture on the violence and humiliations of male desire. But the rhetorical focus seems misplaced, for the room’s ironies are pointed at leaders of men and conquerors of land rather than at solitary questers like the Knight of Chastity.\(^{73}\)

\(^{70}\) See Biester; on the debate over wonder in Italian criticism of the romance (much better developed than in England), see Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance, 2:1050–55.

\(^{71}\) Hazlitt, “Chaucer and Spenser,” Works, 5:38.

\(^{72}\) “Shee slept, yet twixt her eie lids closely spyde, / How towards her he nusht, and smiled at his pryde” (3.11.32). Does love smile? Does Leda? Do both, in a conspiracy of unrefused ravishment?

\(^{73}\) This argument is developed at somewhat greater length in my article, “How to Stop Reading The Faerie Queene,” which goes on to treat the procession that emerges from the third
There is, that is to say, a kind of mis-fit between this knight and the space where she finds herself: she cannot read it, and what is more, it doesn’t seem spoken to her. They are mutually irrelevant. “Irrelevance” is a strange word to use in speaking of The Faerie Queene, for we tend to assume the overdetermined mattering of each of the poem’s parts to all the others. Angus Fletcher describes this assumption as general to allegory, its construction of a kosmos or “total figure.”74 Harry Berger’s “conspicuous irrelevance” neatly converts passages of apparent ornament to “nodal points of meaning, moments in which the larger significance of the narrative is compressed, illuminated, altered.”75 Almost all contemporary criticism inherits these assumptions: nothing about the poem, in short, is really irrelevant; where it seems most distracted, it is often thinking hardest. But Britomart may show us a place for an unreconstructed indifference—a moment when the habits of reading that allow us to fulfill the poem’s ambitions for totality and wholeness might properly be suspended. The chaste knight’s blankness is a caution to the reader that the contract of allegory is being broken, or at least that the poem is staging such a break, provoking us with the possibility. For a time it is as though the agent and the place mean nothing to each other.

In spite of this, Britomart is successful, however inarticulate and unarticulated with her surroundings she may be. Or might we even say, because of this? She accomplishes the immediate goal of liberating Amoret with uncommon dispatch and efficiency, and with none of the repeated self-overcomings that mark the last cantos of the previous two books (Redcrosse falling and rising again, Guyon resisting temptation after temptation). Her failure to understand is also a failure to be distracted or deterred. The barrier between her and the house is no longer a piece of didactic technology, and she is no longer a student; her wonder is a tendentious alternative to learning of any kind, an exemption from the persuasive machinery that is working with such hectic energy all around her (whether one considers it to be Busirane’s machinery, or the poem’s, or the first as a microcosm of the second). She has become the epitome of Wofford’s “heroic ignorance,” an ignorance that now almost seems to be a necessary condition of heroism. But it is essential to observe that her ignorance is meaningful because the poem holds out the stubborn possibility that she might become a reader of the allegory, a reader like us, as Guyon in his way was trained to be. It is not that characters can never be readers from the inside. It is rather that

chamber and to speculate that the intended audience for the spectacle is not Britomart but potential rivals to Busirane like Scudamour.

74. Fletcher, Allegory, 85.
75. Berger, The Allegorical Temper, 133.
it might be better for all parties not to read at all. The Faerie Queene momentarily figures itself as a bad teacher, an elaborate, often contradictory didactic engine, corrupt, entangling, a web of temptation and rebuke that forever undermines its own supposed work of fashioning.\textsuperscript{76} Faced with these designs, our own virtue, as readers, may be safest if we do not try to understand. For to read is to risk being taught.

Such a reading brings The Faerie Queene to the point of discrediting its own fundamental procedure, and warning us off. The unnerving relation of readerly learning to the suffering or humiliation of characters is canceled by Britomart’s exemplary detachment; she achieves Guyon’s distance without troubling to make an example of anyone. (That is, Guyon’s remove depends on assuming a posture either of teacher or student; wondering Britomart is neither, and cuts herself more radically free from the narrator, from Spenser, and from the teaching poem that hosts her.) But this solution comes at the cost of the poem’s authority. Such self-skepticism brings The Faerie Queene around to something like the predicament that concludes both Euphues and His England and the old Arcadia, books that likewise cast systematic doubt upon their own didactic purposes. All three of course make a great show of teaching. They are elaborated out of the materials of a didactic poetics; they could not be what they are, could not move on from page to page, without the assumption that poetry instructs and without the host of conventions that give that assumption substance. And yet they do not believe in the project, or are fantastically sensitive to its costs. The result is a group of fictions that by different means sacrifice themselves to their own pedagogical misgivings. It is hard to say in each case whether that sacrifice is strategic and polemical, or whether it is a kind of bitter, private irony, without particular hope for an audience. Both Sidney and Spenser, however, returned to the problem (as did Lyly, in his way, sending his hero to England). Sidney revised the Arcadia, Spenser added three books to The Faerie Queene in 1596, and both poets use their sequels to explore alternatives to the nearly private jokes they had told against their teachers and their teacherly selves. The next two chapters take up these second thoughts, and with them, the possibility of escaping teaching altogether.

\textsuperscript{76} In this the House of Busirane (like many of the other temples in Spenser’s labyrinth) is like Atlante’s house in Orlando Furioso, where knights wander though an incomplete but telling microcosm of the poem, an interpretation of its structure embedded in the fiction. Citing Attilio Moniglino, Albert Ascoli draws out this analogy, comparing “the poem to the labyrinthine palaces of Atlante” (Bitter Harmony, 7, 37–38).