Eric Langley and Luke Prendergast

Knights-Destinerrant: Spenser with Jacques Derrida

This coauthored article approaches Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* via Derrida's *The Post Card*. Derrida's text, in which he sends out increasingly errant and ill-directed calls, signals, and communications with the frustrated expectation of response, provides an apposite framework by which to address the digressive and wandering narrative strategies of Spenser's comparably "destinerrant," aspirational yet abjectly apostrophizing text.

Introduction: The *Carte* of Adestination

*E*dmund Spenser's allegorical epic *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96) and Jacques Derrida's epistolary quasi-novel *The Post Card* (1980) both want, desperately, to get where they are going. "I would like to arrive to you, to arrive right up to you, my unique destiny," Derrida writes, while ceding inevitable failure: "I run I run and I fall all the time."[1] Derrida's text, however, does not merely posit the impossibility of arrival—arrival being this text's model for the metaphysics of presence, which is always the object of Derrida's deconstructive critique—but something altogether more radical and preposterously ambivalent: "the condition for [the post] to arrive," he writes, "is that it ends up and even that it begins by not arriving" (*PC*, 29).

Corrupting the distinction between arrival and nonarrival, Derrida elaborates this postal paradox—"there is no destination, my sweet destiny"—to reveal a new possibility, outside of oppositional metaphysics: "the *carte* of adestination" (*PC*, 29).

Spenser's poem seems similarly ambivalent about the possibility of destination-as-presence, slung between a fantasy of erotic arrival and the antiteleologic, "endlesse worke" of getting there. Arthur's quest for union with Gloriana, whom he has resolved "to seeke . . . out with labor and long tyne" (*FQ* I.ix.15.7), impels the poetic narrative, but the Prince never gets there.[2] And why not? Why such "labor" and "long tyne" (a Spenserian variant of "teen"—suffering—which punningly links hardship to temporal delay), especially when each of the knights Arthur meets, the Letter to Raleigh tells us, has come straight from Faery Court—surely they must be able to point him in the right direction?[3] This hiccup in narrative credibility has delay, or nonarrival, emerge unexpectedly as a function, not a failure, of the poem. This function is notoriously endemic: Redcrosse Knight, at the end of Book I, glimpses the New Jerusalem but must return to Faery; the poem's consummate moment of erotic arrival, in Amoret and Scudamour's hermaphroditic embrace at the end of the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, is deferred interminably upon the rewriting for the second installment; and the books of the 1590 installment are beset by temporary (Calidore) and total (Cambel and Telamond) disappearances of its patron knights, who are replaced by surrogates, "dispersed or multiplied" into a wider cast of exemplary characters (*PC*, 79). Rest, resolution, and arrival are everywhere deferred. Faerie Court is always somewhere else: the poem stages a poetics of adestination.

In keeping with Derrida's notion of pharmaceutical complementarity, whose dynamics will form a crucial model for this essay's readings, placing disparate things side by side inevitably reveals surprising resemblances between them. *The Faerie Queene* and *The Post Card* share a number of other characteristics suggesting the irresolvable tensions between arrival and nonarrival. Both are addressed to a woman—Spenser's to his monarch, "Great Ladie of the greatest Isle" (*FQ* I.proem.4.3), and Derrida's to a beloved, "You, my love" (*PC*, 8)—but neither woman is named (or else, as we shall see, is overnamed to the point of hyperglossic inscrutability). Rather, naming the addressee—"the quest for the proper word and the unique name"—is one of both texts' endlessly (and perhaps deliberately) frustrated goals.[4] As befits their intrinsically frustrating form, both texts are also fragmented, even fragments. Derrida begins *The Post Card* with the suggestion that "you

might read these *envois* as the preface to a book that I have not yet written," before identifying them as "the remainders of a previously destroyed correspondence," burnt to cinders by fire (*PC*, 3), part of a longer book that never appears (a deliberate omission, disturbing our understanding of the distinction between text and paratext, interiority and exteriority). Similarly, Spenser completes only six of the putative twelve books promised by the Letter to Raleigh, along with the *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* and one other, "unperfite" (Lt. *imperfectus*, incomplete) canto, which bear an "uncertain relationship" to the rest of the poem, composing perhaps a coda or a fragment of an alleged seventh legend on Constancy.[5] Incompleteness abets adestinal dynamics, and accordingly while both authors claim to want to "write [to] you so simply, so simply, so simply," they prove incapable of imagining arrival, of arriving home: both texts are written with the certainty only available to the perpetually ex-centric exile, the knight-destinerrant, that "a letter can always not arrive at its destination, and that therefore it never arrives. And this is really how it is, it is not a misfortune, that's life, living life" (*PC*, 11, 33).

   This essay takes up the paradoxical but promising possibility of adestination, that the condition for arrival is nonarrival. It suggests that adestination or destinerrance ("a wandering that is its own accord") is a quality peculiar to *The Faerie Queene*, which might take us somewhere farther than—even outside of—an understanding of allegory as oriented toward teleological consummation.[6] Self-division is characteristic of Spenser's complex poem: the poet's "Allegoricall deuises" (Gk. *allos-goria*, other-speaking; Lt. *dīvīdĕre*, to divide) communicate themselves across the "infinite distance" of signification, like postcards between subjects (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 716; *PC*, 19). Its divided other-speak has resulted in allegory's appearing with many faces. In one guise, delineated by Gordon Teskey, allegory solicits presence, exerting the "instrumental force" of interpretation to turn the matter of the "other" into a structure of transcendent meaning.[7] At its polar extreme, allegory is the poetry of absence, always receding from grasp or view, evading interpretation, and operating, in George Puttenham's words, "by long ambage and circumstance of words," the detours of labyrinthine pathways, the "fatal necessity of going astray" (*PC*, 66).[8] In practice, Spenserian allegory is irreducible to these two poles, which are oppositional but inseparable from each other, and therefore operates flexibly, tracking between these two polarized antitheses: like Derrida's "text of metaphysics," *The Faerie Queene* is "*all at once* the monument and the mirage of the trace."[9] What follows takes Derridean destinerrance as a way of reading

The Faerie Queene, an errant trajectory that touches on Spenser's intentions and ends, the instability of his addressees, and the unreliability of his postmen. Crucially, envisaging Spenserian nonarrival as Derridean destinerrance takes Spenser's signature motif of teleologic or hermeneutic frustration and revises that putative failure as formative, thereby countersigning an *inability* to conclude as a *commitment* to inconclusion, as resolute irresolution. This Derridean countersignature should not therefore be read as "contra" Spenser's mode, but in terms of shared intentions, "both opposition, contrariety, contradiction and proximity, near-contact," both "betrayal . . . and faithfulness."[10] Adopting Derrida's sensitivity to internal dissonances within texts, we argue that Spenser's is a poem that simultaneously constructs and deconstructs itself, that arrives at nonarrival.

I.i. Going Astray: Destinerrancy

Sir knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed . . . I have thought good . . . for auoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions . . . to discouer vnto you the general intention and meaning. . . . In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene.

> 23. Ianuary. 1589.
> Yours most humbly affectionate.

> Ed. Spenser (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 714–18)

Who is writing? To whom? . . . To what address? . . . I owe it to what remains of my honesty to say that I do not know. . . . Jacques Derrida

> 7 September 1979 (*PC*, 4–5)

As expressed in their (equally unreliable) preparatory remarks, *The Faerie Queene* and *The Post Card* have avowedly antithetical "intention[s]." Whereas Derrida defines the "*bad* [or] fearful reader" as one "in a hurry to be determined, . . . to know in advance what to expect" (*PC*, 4), concluding "it is always bad to foretell" (*PC*, 194), in Spenser's "letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke," his ideal reader—figured as "the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh"—is reassured

as to the "generall end . . . of all the booke" from its outset (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 714). Indeed, Spenser's allegoric text apologizes in advance for any "doubtful," "clowd[y]," or "darke conceit[s]," promising to "giue great light to the Reader" by stripping away any interpretive "by-accidents" to clarify an overarching structural, cartographic "Methode" (Gk. μετα- + ὁδός). Conversely, the letters that comprise Derrida's text—purportedly "the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence" (*PC*, 3), a "post card love" (*PC*, 43), or "secretariat erotomania" (*PC*, 90)—are, he admits, "*envois* without destination" (*PC*, 66), susceptible to "accidental interception" (*PC*, 51) and "indirection" (*PC*, 150). "In advance it is intercepted . . . poor post card," he admits; "the message no longer has any chance" if "everything is given over to the aleatory" (*PC*, 51, 161). This then seems a stark polarity: while the recipient of Derrida's epistolary text remains unidentified, Spenser's dedication openly acknowledges Raleigh (perhaps the period's most notorious traveler) to be *The Faerie Queene*'s initial but proxy recipient—its patron-postman or *envoi*—charged with overseeing the text's delivery to its purported destination, "the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene."

Perhaps then, these works are simply incomparable—the teleological imperatives of a sixteenth-century allegory operating in inherent contradistinction to the "adestina[lity]" of twentieth-century deconstructivism, where "destination is immediately multiple, [and] anonymous" (*PC*, 71, 79)—and yet both are arguably haunted by "the fatal necessity of going astray" (*PC*, 66) and equally beset (or, more complicatedly, compelled) by "a straying of the destination" (*PC*, 123), "straying . . . withouten . . . guide" (*FQ* III.x.36.5). Indeed, if Spenser's notoriously labyrinthine, "confused" trajectory will not deliver us "direct . . . to the wel-head" of regal presence (*telos*), then perhaps Derrida's text—similarly prone to "retracing [its] steps" (*PC*, 4), to going astray, to "*destinerrance*" (*PC*, 29)—could provide an antimethodic road map with which to mis-chart the "strange waies" (*FQ* VI.proem.2.8) of Spenser's "dispersed" narrative (*FQ* II.ix.50.3). As they "wand[er] . . . through the world [as] errant knight[s]" (*FQ* I.ix.9.6–10.1), *The Post Card* predicts how each of Spenser's characters "is immediately dispersed or multiplied, [becoming] a divided echo of itself" (*PC*, 79), their trajectories tracing "the descendance into which everything tumbles" (*PC*, 24) as their tales succumb to an "aphrodisiac overkill of discourse" (*PC*, 57). If the (repeatedly deferred) intention that "I will reach you" (*PC*, 55) impels the technologies of allegory and "*La poste*" (*PC*, 54)—similarly predicated on a promise of arrival or "correspondence"—it is

undercut by an acceptance that "I must lose you" (*PC*, 34), that along the way there will be Spenserian "intermedled . . . Accidents" (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 715) and Derridean "postal manoeuvring, relays, delay, . . . the fatal necessity of going astray" (*PC*, 66).
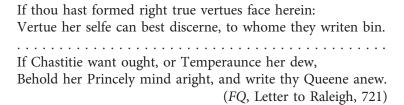
To suggest that both authors adopt a comparable adestinerrant *technê* is to overcome what may feel like their insurmountable differences *in approach* (i.e., in how each text makes its approach to presence, to meaning, to *telos*, to Virgin Queen or anonymous beloved). Derrida's unanswered missives are sent out in what is always acknowledged to be the frustrated hope of a response, accepting, firstly, that the postcard's sender is held in suspense, dependent on the expectation of a reply, an "affirmation to us . . . from you" (*PC*, 81), left hanging on an answer that never comes (counter to Lacan's formulation);[11] this is partly because idealizing, reifying, or logocentric belief in a "unique addressee [or teleological] destination" is itself "impossible" (*PC*, 81) in any Derridean writing. By contrast, notoriously, Spenser offers his twelve-step quest/romance as a road map, cumulatively "fashion[ing] a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," one virtue at a time (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 715). If Spenser's text at least claims to build toward the cumulative constitution of an ultimately unified subject, Derrida's skepticism concerning the epistolary "destining of Being" (*PC*, 65) sees his subject only ever "divid[ing] itself, put[ting] itself to pieces" (*PC*, 81), as we "los[e] ourselves in . . . the immense *carte* of communications . . . across the distance and . . . differences" (*PC*, 30–31). What he calls elsewhere "the extradition of subjectivity to the other" is the perilous precondition of postal-subjectivity, as the subject is always already in the post.[12] Were it to assume a "metaphysical . . . determination of the *envoi* [and] of the destinality . . . of Being" (*PC*, 192), Spenser's sense of ontological "profite" (*FQ* II.x.14.8)—a cumulative fashioning of self that reductively "rivet[s] destination to identity" (*PC*, 192)—would surely be dismissed by Derrida as "bad economics" (*PC*, 56).

Ultimately, both works take as read the unreliability of the post, embodied in Derrida's parasitic postman ("[I] would like to address myself, in a straight line, directly, without *courrier*, only to you, but I do not arrive"; *PC*, 23), while disclosing their preoccupation with the impossibility of address, particularly—as will be discussed in Section III—given the unreliability of *The Faerie Queene*'s postman, as Raleigh falls from favor (his disgrace reenacted in the travails of Timias in Book IV). "Now I begin / To tread an endlesse trace, withouten guyde, / Or good direction" (*FQ* VI.i.6.2): with one author admitting that "I would like to arrive to you, my unique destiny,

and I run I run I fall all the time" (*PC*, 23), and another accepting "O What an endlesse worke haue I in hand" (*FQ* IV.xii.1.1), both texts, feeling "defrauded [of their] intended destiny" (*FQ* VI.viii.8.8), are best understood as "traged[ies], my love, of destination" (*PC*, 23).[13] While, in its conception and dedication, *The Faerie Queene* may intend to work toward an idealized, localized, unified end, these texts both prove to be, in Derrida's term, destinerrant.[14]

I.ii. "I LOVE ALL MY APPELLATIONS FOR YOU": REGAL DISPERSAL

If Raleigh, as we have seen, figures not only as patron but also as the postman of Spenser's poem, the *courrier*-courtier, then nowhere is his "stamp" more visible than in the dedicatory sonnets penned by him and appended, surprisingly, to the end rather than beginning of the poem (just one of the poem's unexpected inversions; *PC*, 55–56). The second of these sonnets lays out the ambivalent problematic in Spenser's sovereign address:

> If thou hast formed right true vertues face herein:
> Vertue her selfe can best discerne, to whome they writen bin.
> ·
> If Chastitie want ought, or Temperaunce her dew,
> Behold her Princely mind aright, and write thy Queene anew.
> <div align="right">(FQ, Letter to Raleigh, 721)</div>

In each couplet, the conditional "if" acts as a pivot around which a subtle critique of either poet or Queen can be read. The first questions the poet's capacity to "form right true vertues face" but also—if he has—asks whether Elizabeth is indeed "Vertue her selfe," and so able to identify "to whom [the verses] written be," as "the only one able to decrypt it" (*PC*, 13). Similarly, the second asks if Spenser's verse—in his representation of Chastity or Temperance—is lacking, but alternatively, advanced through the pun on "want" as desire or privation, it implies that it is rather Elizabeth's virtue that is left "wanting," and that the poem represents Elizabeth not so much as she is but as she "ought" to be.[15] These pivoting couplets extend their implications to the representational dynamics of Spenser's allegory, suggesting that there is an ineluctable gap between virtue's "face" and "selfe"

and that, over this gap, Spenser does not simply reflect the Queen but rather "writes" her "anew," supplements and replaces her through the diffuse refractions of poetry.

Raleigh's subversive suggestion is, of course, correct: there is "no more unique addressee. . . . Who are you, my love? You are so numerous, so divided, all compartmented" (*PC*, 192–93). Like a "perfume" (*PC*, 192) drifting throughout Spenser's text, Elizabeth is not delivered up but is instead disseminated in many guises or simulacra—some overt (most obviously, Gloriana and Una), others covert (Mercilla), some flattering (Britomart and Belphoebe), and others condemnatory (Mirabella, who, like Elizabeth, too stringently employs her "soueraine might" [*FQ* VI.vii.31.6] to proudly punish her "noblest knight" [*FQ* VI.vii.29.9])—dispersing the singular monarch into multiple personifications in order that "in mirrours more then one her selfe [might] see," "camouflaging [her] by means of too much evidence" (*FQ* III.proem.5.6; *PC*, 175).[16] The metaphors of "shadow[ing]" and reflecting Elizabeth in mirrors suggest the murky and specular distortions attendant on such a strategy of regal dispersal, that they both fall short of and go beyond their mark (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 716). In Gloriana, Spenser figures "glory in my generall intention, but in the particular . . . our soueraine the Queene" (though the dictates of the allegoric general and the historical particular are by no means commensurate), but she, the poem's premier personification of the Queen, never appears, except as a "visitation . . . come to haunt": "a stranger, a phantom, or a myth" (*FQ*, Letter to Raleigh, 716; *PC*, 236). This visitation in Arthur's dream is not mere immaterial vision, for behind her she leaves "pressed gras where she had lyen" (*FQ* I.ix.15.2). Like Derrida's ghost, "neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive," Gloriana's absence shapes each stanza of the poem as a felt presence, like an imprint on the ground.[17] This quality is crucial for the "pricking" of the plot: to arrive at her would, like opening Schrodinger's box, end the experiment, to have the matter of Faery return to the ideal unity that Gloriana represents (*FQ* I.i.1.1).[18] "You no longer exist, you are dead," Derrida writes his beloved, "like the dead woman in my game, and my literature becomes possible" (*PC*, 29). Not arriving at the Faery Queen is the condition of *The Faerie Queene*. The "tragedy of destination" is supplanted, instead, by an erotics—even a romance—of adestination.

Instead, Spenser entertains moments of erotic arrival through other shadows of Elizabeth, most notably Britomart and Belphoebe. Britomart's pursuit of Arthur's equal, Artegall—the sight of whom in Merlin's "looking glasse" engenders a "wound" of love "written in her hart" (*FQ* III.ii.18.8,

26.8, 29.9)—is the specular image of Arthur pursuing Gloriana, an example of chaste matrimonial union fashioned, as Colin Burrow has argued, "to obliquely persuade a [virgin] queen . . . that there are times [even at this late stage] to breed."[19] Belphoebe, the "noble hunteresse," on the other hand, is the Queen as chaste Diana, committed to preserving her virginity (*FQ* III.v.27.6). When she appears in the Legend of Chastity as the emissary of the "great grace or fortune" of "Prouidence heuenly," she is following her own "trace," the "tract of blood" of "some wilde beast, which with her arrowes keene / She wounded had" (*FQ* III.v.27.1–3, 28.2–4). But Providence has other plans: the sprinkled blood she follows is not that of her prey but of the wounded Timias, and Belphoebe's intent to kill is replaced, through the "soft passion and vnwonted smart" of pity's "perc[ing]" dart, with the desire to cure, as she goes "into the woods . . . To seeke for hearbes, that mote him remedy" (*FQ* III.v.30.8–9, 32.1–2). Just as Belphoebe is converted from hunter to healer, however, the "soueraine weede" she administers to heal Timias's wound turns out to be "a poisoned gift," a "foolish physick, and vnfruitfull paine, / That heales up one and makes another wound" (*FQ* III.v.33.1; *PC*, 85; *FQ* III.v.42.1–2). While her "better salues" restore his wounded thigh, "her matchlesse beauty" causes his "hart," like Britomart's, to be "hurt" with "an unwary dart" of love (*FQ* III.v.41.4, 43.7, 42.4–5). Belphoebe is huntress once again, but not of the "hart" she intended: she meets her mark by missing it.

The "physick" Belphoebe offers is thus a *pharmakon*, the poison-masquerading-as-cure that Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, applies to the *techne* of writing, and which Derrida, in "Plato's Pharmacy," uses to deconstruct the binary it seems to erect (the *pharmakon* not as poison-or-cure, but as poison-and-cure). Both Belphoebe's *pharmakon*, which harms where it is meant to heal, and Timias's subsequent decline into the image of forlorn Petrarchan lover, "playn[ing]" of his "lucklesse lott and cruell love," interrogate the erotic politics of Elizabeth's court, in which the monarch regulated her power through pharmic vacillations of encouraging the love of her courtiers but denying its consummation, letting them come close but not letting them arrive, refusing them "that sweet Cordiall . . . that soueraine salue" that might restore their bitter "loue-sick hart[s]" (*FQ* III.v.44.9, 50.6–9).[20] One of the inevitable breakdowns of this strategy, as we shall see in Spenser's shadowing of Raleigh's elopement with Elizabeth Throckmorton in Amoret, is that courtiers will end up seeking the sweet cordial elsewhere. Seemingly praising "this faire virgin," who values above all else sustaining the "daintie Rose" of "her fresh flowring Maydenhead," Spenser nonetheless

acknowledges that her "faire ensample" is also "her ensample dead," in that militant virginity short-circuits the genealogical imperative of the epic (*FQ* III.v.54.2, 51.1, 54.1–9). Indeed, at this point the narrative is compelled to turn away from Belphoebe: in relating the details of her birth, the virgin huntress is promptly whisked away by Diana, "to be vpbrought in perfect Maydenhead," replaced for the rest of the legend with her sister, Amoret, brought up instead by Venus "in goodly womanhed" (*FQ* III.vi.28.4–7). Chastity advanced through marital union supplants, in the logic of the legend, the chastity of sexual abstinence.

Belphoebe's association with the *pharmakon*, however, extends beyond a commentary on the fickleness and shortcomings of Elizabethan court politics. It is not merely that her "spellbinding virtue," to appropriate Derrida's words for the *pharmakon*, is "simultaneously . . . beneficent [and] maleficent," but that as a personification of the Queen who entertains the possibility of erotic presence, she risks wounding not only Timias but also the telos of *The Faerie Queene* itself.[21] Derrida describes the *pharmakon* as "the going or leading astray," by which he means that, in the confounding of metaphysical hierarchies, it "makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths," disrupts conventional order ("PP," 71). Spenser, too, recognizes pharmic Belphoebe as a disordering force. In Book IV, Timias, with the help of an envoi in the form of a dove bearing a heart-shaped ruby, is returned to Belphoebe's "presence dread," "receiu'd againe to former fauours state" (*FQ* IV.viii.13.7, 17.9).[22] Yet the poetic cost of this moment of presence is betrayed in the following stanza, in which we find that Timias, while enjoying a "happie life with grace," has forgotten about "his owne dear Lord,"

> The noble Prince, who neuer heard one word
> Of tydings, what did vnto him betide
> . . . .
> But through the endlesse world did wander wide,
> Him seeking euermore, yet no where him describe.
> <div align="right">(FQ IV.viii.18.5–9)</div>

The squire has forgotten his master, and, in his absence, the "louely boy" has replaced Gloriana as the object of Arthur's search (*FQ* IV.vii.23.6). Timias's access to Belphoebe and Arthur's access to Gloriana are thus, according to the narrative, mutually exclusive. It is not until Book VI that, distracted from chasing the Blatant Beast, Timias is returned to Arthur,

who, "him embracing twixt armes entire," asks, "Where haue ye al this while bin wandring, where bene weft?" (*FQ* VI.v.23.4, 9). The duration of one "euermore" appears completed, and, one presumes, Arthur is able to recommence his original quest for the Faery Queen, but only at the expense of Timias's separation from Belphoebe. The dispersal of Elizabeth into "Allegoricall deuises," into figures more than one, institutes a poetics of adestination: one knight's arrival at the Queen is predicated on another's nonarrival.

II.i. GHOSTS IN THE POST: RALEIGH AS REVENANT

> There is nothing but parasites . . . and therefore the revenants have no chance.
>
> —Derrida, *PC*, 10

As we have seen, Spenser's project is written "under the dictation of [Elizabeth as] addressee" (*PC*, 143). While the mechanics of allegory and the "entire history of postal *tekhnê* tend . . . to rivet the destination to [unique] identity" (*PC*, 192)—"to her this song most fitly is addrest" (*FQ* IV.proem.4.8)—both Spenser's atypical allegory and Derrida's destinerrant postcards are revealed to be polysemous or plurally addressed in their operations. Not only is Elizabeth mediated through the text, but the text also approaches her through mediation—through a *facteur*, a parasitic postman. This intermediary figure is made manifest in Spenser's text in the various figures of roadside assailants, bandits and wayfarers, "craftie messenger[s] with letters vaine" (*FQ* I.xii.34.2). While the negative apotheoses of this type arrive in the final canto of Book V, as the "perplex[ing]," "slaunderous," "poyson[ous]" figures of Envie and Detraction—who can pharmaceutically convert "to ill the thing, that was ment" (*FQ* V.xii.34–36)—Spenser provides a far more ambivalent intermediary in the character whom we have just been discussing, Timias the Squire, one of several proxies for Sir Walter Raleigh.[23] To track *The Faerie Queene*'s treatment of this patron, guide, or "bulwarke" (*FQ* I.viii.12.9) is to trace Spenser's confidence in ever returning home, achieving presence, or being addressed: in short, in his being *re-called* by Elizabeth ("I am losing my voice calling you, speak to

me"; *PC*, 17) from his destinerrant "exile, / In wildernesse and wastfull de-
serts" (*FQ* I.iii.3.3–4).

Raleigh, then, is the emissary and "*envoi*" (*PC*, 12), the intermediary and
broker, the Oceanic go-between, figured as a conveyor or agent, mediating
between poet and Queen. In *Colin Clouts*, Spenser expresses his confidence
in Raleigh—"that shepheard strange" (B4r) or "straunge shepheard" (A4r)
whose temporary estrangement from presence is depicted as no more than
a momentary aberration into ex-centricity, "thither led by chaunce" (A4r)—
who can "great *Cynthiaes* sore displeasure breake," closing up the errant space
of exile by "mov[ing her] to take him to her grace againe" (B2r).[24] The
poem fantasizes that Raleigh, in Derrida's words, may facilitate "absolute
reconciliation" (*PC*, 196), in so doing "promis[ing] me that one day there
will be a world. And a body" (*PC*, 122), just as *The Faerie Queene* fanta-
sizes that Timias may be allowed into Belphoebe's "presence dread" for
reconciliation (*FQ* IV.viii.13.7) or even sex. This is an intimacy intimated
in Raleigh's own "cryptic, disjointed" poetic plea for reconciliation, "The
Ocean to Scinthia," in three astonishingly tantalizing and heavily effaced
manuscript lines:

> a Queen shee was to mee,—no more Belphebe . . .
> shee did untye the gentell chaynes of love
> . . . .
> Love was no more the love of hydinge.[25]

Intimacy, however, is held back from Timias as Belphoebe withholds her
full "sweet Cordiall, which can restore / A love-sick hart," that "souereigne
salue [kept in her] secret store," "that dainty rose . . . / whose flower" en-
folds her "honour," "lapped vp [in] silken leaues most chaire" (*FQ* III.v.50.6–
51.6). Raleigh is clearly associated with extraordinary access, titillatingly
almost available, but keeping each gentleman-caller in suspense (to post,
or to address, always involves negotiation "with a halt, a relay, or a sus-
pensive delay, the place of a mailman, the possibility of going astray";
PC, 65): "call me up," Derrida demands, "without delay" (*PC*, 114); "do
I call thee right?" Timias begs Belphoebe (*FQ* III.v.35.5); while "call me
back," Raleigh demands of his Queen ("OS," 86). Allegoric or sexual con-
summation—*callback*—is the flirt of consolation proffered by each text:
"I her gave, and she returned again, / As it was hers" ("OS," 544–45).

Yet what becomes clear is that Raleigh (like Timias, who oversteps his
textual function as guide and squire to become prime erotic adventurer) is

overinvolved; Spenser has not "abandoned [his cause, his address to] a neutral machinery that supposedly leads the message to its destination" (*PC*, 36) but to something more akin to Michel Serres's parasitic third man, who confuses the message even as he relays it, noises it among static.[26] By the time Book IV is published in 1596, Raleigh has become a "con-taminat[ion]" (*PC*, 191), a reputational liability by proxy, having fallen dramatically from favor after committing "that slip he dearely rewd" (*FQ* VI.vii.48.3) by clandestinely marrying Bess Throckmorton, one of Elizabeth's Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber—he has dared come too close. Consequently, "the gentle squire" Timias (*FQ* IV.vii.35.2), as a result of his "rash" actions (*FQ* IV.vii.35.9), finds himself similarly shamed and disgraced, violently debarred from Belphoebe's animating sweet presence: "When she saw" the sexual wound that Timias inflicts on another woman, "with sodaine glauncing eye, / Her noble heart with sight thereof was fild / With deep disdaine, and great indignity" (*FQ* IV.vii.36.1–3). Belphoebe and Elizabeth—infuriated by what they read as the sexual promiscuity of their respective paramours, both of whom had previously claimed such ardent fidelity—subject their abject subjects to "sharpe reproofe" (*FQ* IV.vii.37.2), "turn[ing their] face [seemingly] for euermore" (*FQ* IV.vii.36.9), leaving Timias/Raleigh in "dread of her displeasures":

> And euermore, when he did grace entreat,
> And framed speaches fit for his behoofe,
> Her mortal arrows she at him did threat,
> And forst him backe with fowle dishonor to retreat.
>   (*FQ* VI.vii.37.6–9)

And indeed Raleigh, feeling no "hope of grace" (*FQ* IV.vii.38.2), did retreat, not exactly "unto the woods" (*FQ* IV.vii.38.3) but to his country estate in Sherborne, "finding there fit solitary place / For wofull wight," displaced from courtly orbit, banished from presence, "And of the wicked world for-gotten quight" (*FQ* IV.vii.39.5–6). Spenser's text—his calling card, his pass-port—is abandoned, lost in the post: *The Faerie Queene*, "an envoi of [Spen-ser's] Being," looks doomed to never arrive, and the knock-on effect is a wholesale adoption of a destinerrant narratological and allegoric mode. It can no longer deliver/be delivered: "you abandon me to the perversion of . . . perjuries, you set all my letters on the wrong path, you permit infidelity" (*PC*, 120; "Is this the faith?" we might join Elizabeth/Belphoebe in demand-ing; *FQ* IV.vii.36.7).

No longer guide, squire, advocate, or oceanic traveler—deprived of his "knightlinesse" (*FQ* IV.vii.45.7)—the "[e]strange[d]" Timias is pushed into retirement at the textual margins in "the wandring wood" (*FQ* IV.vii.43.7, 42.4), becoming a spectral presence "outcast" from active narratological, motivational agency (*FQ* IV.vii.43.9). Via fictional proxy, the famous "faire lockes" of the once fashionable Walter are "let to grow . . . Vncomb'd, vncurl'd, and carelessly vnshed" until his famously handsome face becomes unrecognizable, illegible, "vneath . . . to be red" (*FQ* IV.vii.40.2–9), until "like a pined ghost he soone appears," "wast[ing]" away from the textual center (*FQ* IV.vii.21.4–8). As Derrida warned, epistolary communication—the sending of insubstantial substitute writing, to and fro—was always something of a ghastly enterprise, the "sending [of scripted] ghosts like ping-pong balls" (*PC*, 30) through the post, effectively "speculating with spirits, denuding oneself before them" (*PC*, 35). Franz Kafka—whose epistolary love affairs are fundamental influences on Derrida's text—goes further with the analogy: "How on earth did anyone get the idea that people can communicate with one another by letter! . . . Writing letters . . . means to denude oneself before the ghosts, something for which they greedily wait. Written kisses don't reach their destination, rather they are drunk on the way by ghosts." Desperate to "share my heart with people" but neurotic about the "phantoms that play with the words and read the letters with slavering tongue," Kafka sees epistolary exchange as "an intercourse with ghosts" (by which he means "not only . . . the ghost of the recipient but also one's own ghost which develops between the lines of the letter one is writing") and also as communication across a spooked interim, haunted by these ghastly postmen.[27] "Woxen pale and wan" (*FQ* IV.vii.43.3), at the end of canto vii, Timias hangs spectral in suspense, in limbo, waiting for forgiveness, metaphorically deferred, left

> in languor to remaine,
> Till time for him should remedy prouide,
> And him restore to former grace againe.
> Which for it is too long here to abide,
> I will deferre the end vntill another tide.
> (*FQ* IV.vii.47.5–9)

Left "vntill another tide" (note the choice of the ebbed Oceanic "another tide" over the standard collocation "another time")—like Kafka hanging on Milena's reply, Derrida waiting for the postman, Spenser in anticipation

in Ireland, and now Raleigh in the Tower—Timias's only consolatory hope is to write himself back to the lost center, engraving "B E L P H E B E" "on euery tree . . . For whom he now so sorely was bested" (*FQ* IV.vii.46.1–5). In fact, Timias's tale is not "deferre[d] vntill another time" but rather sees him restored to Belphoebe's "presence" only twelve stanzas into canto viii, as this "ghost late risen from his graue" (*FQ* IV.viii.13.7, 12.7) is allowed "redresse, and . . . restor[ation]" into her "former favours state" (*FQ* IV.viii.17.5–9). But for just this moment at the end of Book IV, canto vii, the once-licenced *revenant* (*revenir*, to return) is no more than an *esprit revenant* (*OED* n.1, a ghost). Again, we see how Spenser's apparently telos-impelled text, written in such seeming contradistinction to Derrida's destinerrant postcards, loses faith in the promise of arrival, and especially in the postman who failed to make good on his promise of special delivery.

II.ii. "They have *intercepted us*": Becoming Blatant

"Ipseity . . . is a hostage. The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and everyone": at his most confident, Derrida uses the post, and the passage of the postcard, to promote a positive conception of intersubjectivity and the ipseic rewards accrued via this Levinasian "extradition of subjectivity to the other"; "we are a crowd, you and I," he avers, adding, "this is good, an immense dispersed collection" (*PC*, 186).[28] And yet—indebted as he expressly is to Emmanuel Levinas's influential conception of "the subject as hostage" (which, for both thinkers, involves a sense that the self is *hosted* by the other but, in-so-being, subjected to *hostility*, to interpolation)—Derrida's postal subject must inevitably "answer . . . [to] everyone," is held hostage by the crowd, and is subject therefore to their persecution, their estimation, their praise, slander, and babble (Lt. *blatire*, hence Spenser's coinage "blatant").[29] Consequently, the postcard—as "a kind of open letter" (*PC*, 35)—is susceptible to intrusive scrutiny, and by extension the postal-subject cannot be defined in terms of autonomy, privacy, or self-encryption but rather exists *in the exchange*, publicly constituted for good or ill.[30] "There are the others, the others within us I grant you, and we can do nothing about it, that is the limit. There is a crowd, right, such is the truth" (*PC*, 44). Consequently, Raleigh's public disgrace—understood as a re-scription of his reputation, an erosion of private

integrity by corrosive Elizabethan court babble—forces Spenser to acknowl-
edge the double-edged dependency of the subject: an acknowledgment fig-
ured in the interminable interdependence of the perpetually hunting knights
and their respective quarries, exemplified by the ever-evasive, unappre-
hendable Blatant Beast.

　　Appearing one final time in Spenser's narrative, and once more "wand-
ring [and] weft" from the beloved presence of Belphoebe (*FQ* VI.v.23.9,
with "weft" suggesting that the Ocean Shepherd is once again adrift),
Timias returns to make his attempt—on behalf of the reputationally
dimmed Raleigh, who at this time was still beset by court gossip—to quell
the Blatant Beast, that embodiment of poisonous slander whose "tongue
doth whet / Gainst all, both good and bad, both most and least, / And
poures his poysnous gall forth to infest / The noblest wights with notable
defame," bringing "spotted . . . reproach [and] secret shame" even to Walter
and Bess, Elizabeth's former intimates (*FQ* VI.vi.12.3–9). Accordingly, de-
spite being ostensibly back in Belphoebe's favor, "of her grace . . . againe
assured" and restored to "her soueraine lyking," Timias—like his much-
traduced real-world counterpart—still finds himself at the mercy of "many
foes" who "maligne" him "with vniust detraction" (*FQ* VI.v.12.3–9); here,
perhaps Spenser offers Raleigh and Elizabeth an aspirational image of a rec-
onciliation as yet denied to the disgraced knight, while dramatizing the
precarity of any courtier's existence by showing the transience of fickle
"fauour" (*FQ* VI.v.12.2) in an Elizabethan court where reputation is under
continual, indeed Blatant, attack: "Oftimes their sundry powers they did
employ, / And seuerall deceipts, but all in vaine: / For neither they by force
could him destroy, / Ne yet entrap in treasons subtill traine" (*FQ* VI.v.14.1–
4). His reputation still hanging by a thread, the "hardy" (*FQ* VI.v.16.1) but
bruised Raleigh/Timias proves particularly susceptible to the Beast's am-
bush, which threatens to "worke his vtter shame, and thoroughly him con-
found" (*FQ* VI.v.14.8–9). "Assay[ed] / On euery side" by backstabbing pol-
itic assailants (*FQ* VI.v.19.3–4), Raleigh/Timias cannot avoid the Beast's
poisonous bite, suffering "the bitter anguish of [the] sharpe disease"
(*FQ* VI.v.32.5) of "infamy," which "infixeth in the name of noble wight"
(*FQ* VI.vi.1.3–4), leaving wounds that "fester . . . privily" (*FQ* VI.vi.5.2), just
as Bess Throckmorton still festered in the Tower, waiting "in vaine" for the
"remedie" of Elizabeth's forgiveness (*FQ* VI.vi.6.8). As Derrida warned, "the
secret police [will come] between us . . . everything is opened and read . . . in
advance, it is intercepted," as unique identity itself "falls into anyone's hands,
a poor post card" (*PC*, 50–51).

The "half-private half-public" (*PC*, 62) Raleigh—his public persona per-petually "pronounced across the parasites" (*PC*, 107)—receives one last re-buke from an increasingly censorious Spenser, who, a little late, offers his "best aduize . . . to auoide the occasion of the ill" and "abstaine from plea-sure, and bridle loose delight . . . Shun secresie, and talke in open sight: / So shall you soone repair your present euill plight" (*FQ* VI.v.14.1–9). It is un-clear how Raleigh received Spenser's rather public dressing-down, but he—like Timias—did indeed find that by 1597 the worst of his "malady was ceast, / And eke the biting of that harmefull Beast / Was throughly heal'd" (*FQ* VI.v.15.4–6), as he was partially restored to Elizabeth's favor; however, in what remains of the poem, it is clear that Raleigh's reputation requires perpetual attention, just as the Beast requires Timias's unceasing chivy. In-deed, both in Gloriana's Faerie and in Elizabeth's London, the Blatant Beast is never truly subdued and "raungeth through the world againe . . . Barking and biting all that him doe bate, / Albe they worthy blame, or cleare of crime" (*FQ* VI.xii.40.1–6); while here Spenser is presumably specifically thinking of his dispute with Lord Burghley, he is clearly sensitive to Raleigh's comparable situation, continually forced to navigate the turbulent oceans of Elizabeth's competitive and viciously insidious court. Recalling Kafka's mistrust of "words and letters," his frustration that "I want to share my heart with people but not with phantoms that play with the words and read the letters with slavering tongue," it seems that Raleigh, Spenser, and Derrida all would agree that they "do not trust letters, and [realize that] it is a strange belief that all one has to do is seal the envelope in order to have the letter reach the addressee safely." As Kafka sensed, and as Timias will surely eventually discover, "the ghosts won't starve, but we will perish."[31]

Returning to *Colin Clouts* a final time, we find that Spenser always knew that attracting praise would, conversely, also prompt, even license, "the malice of euill mouthes, which are always wide open to carpe at and mis-construe my simple meaning" (dedication), as his counterpart, Colin, be-moans how even in Cynthia's court "deceitfull wit, / . . . subtil shifts, and finest sleights" (D2r) undermine pastoral simplicity, tempting "yong shep-heards wandring wit" to "abandon quiet home . . . And leaue their lambes to losse misled amisse" (D2v). Indeed, in Cynthia's court, "single Truth and simple honestie / Do wander vp and downe despy'd of all" (D3r), displaced from the center, and circumscribed by hollow echoes "all full of loue, and loue, and loue my deare" (D4r). Slipping further from the kind of idealism only available to those kept at nostalgic distance, *Colin Clouts* concludes by accepting a pragmatic real-world disillusionment that admits the potential

dangers of living in Cynthia/Elizabeth's presence. While the male poets are "draw[n]" to the female monarch "through secret sence," magnetized with erotic attraction (E1r), she is as likely to keep them at a distance as she is to allow homecoming, leaving her suitors, "being hurt, [to] seeke to be med-icined / Of her that first did stir that mortall stownd" (E1r). Elizabeth—painfully disdainful or restoratively sympathetic to her courtiers' idealizing approaches—is cast as the unresolvable *pharmakon*, able to dispense "such grace [that] shall be some guerdon for the griefe" but simultaneously re-sponsible for "the long affliction which I haue endured" (E2r). As the home-coming deferred, the unattainable end, as both apostrophic presence and absence, Elizabeth could and should distribute "such grace [as] sometimes shall giue me some reliefe," but she offers only the promise of an "ease of paine which cannot be recured," leaving the undelivered, unanswered poet *in extremis*, caught in the space of deferred presence, of endings revoked, exiled homecoming, suspended destinerrance, feeling the "languours of my too long dying":

> Vnto the world for euer witnesse bee,
> That hers I die, nought to the world denying,
> This simple trophe of her great conquest.
>   So hauing ended, he from the ground did rise.
>
> <div align="right">(E2r)</div>

Having ended, Colin heads off to begin again, perpetually suspended by the painful promise of perfect perfection, presence deferred. And similarly, as his "Ocean to Scinthia" concludes, Raleigh—both acknowledging his "er-ror" ("OS," 371) and bemoaning the severity of the Queen's "Judgment [and] sentence" ("OS," 341–43)—depicts himself as one suspended, out of time, caught in pharmaceutical indeterminacy: "Shee is gonn, Shee is lost, shee is found, shee is ever faire" ("OS," 494). Coming keenly to appreciate that court life is a suspended sentence, Timias/Raleigh figures as the arche-typal Elizabethan courtier, the perpetually destinerrant subject, a postcard-knight, bittersweet-sick in the hostile, hospitable Tudor court-hospital, sent for remedy to Elizabeth's fickle pharmacy, feeling simultaneously "a lastinge gratfullness, for thos cumforts past / of which the cordiall sweetness cannot dye" and his present bitter loss now that "the hope, the cumfort, and the sweetness [has] ended" ("OS," 388–89, 412). Here, then, is the embit-tered nadir of our discussion, casting deferral only as disappointment, and ghastly court life as a suspended sentence.

Conclusion: Scruzing the Text

The historical facts of Raleigh's reputational downfall—and the nursery of
that downfall, the court-centered culture of gossip and slander represented
in the Legend of Courtesy as the promiscuous, indiscriminate, and inescap-
able teeth and tongues of the Blatant Beast—leave us with the poisonous
sense that hope of arrival of any kind is futile. The *callback* of allegoric
and erotic consummation, at the end of the poem as it stands, seems impos-
sible. In keeping, however, with Derrida's sense of pharmaceutical revolu-
tions and reversals, poisons are also medicines: as the *pharmakon* attests,
words pull both ways. Destinerrance permits arrival and nonarrival to
meet. What follows is both a conclusion and a coda that explores one of
the textural consequences of this adestinal poetics, taking as its orbital cen-
ter Belphoebe in the forest prescribing her own poisoned gift. In doing so, it
offers up a set-piece reading of how Derridean inconclusions might inform
Spenserian interpretations.

Derrida thinks of texts, according to the word's etymology (Lt. *texĕre*, to
weave), as tapestries that can be both woven and unwoven. *Différance*,
which captures both the differential nature of signs and the way in which
they endlessly defer meaning, bestows on texts "the complex structure of
a weaving, an interlacing which permits the different threads and different
lines of meaning—or of force—to go off again in different directions."[32] At
the outset of "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida identifies good, deconstructive
reading as "not a question of embroidering upon a text"—recalling the
"*bad*" reader from *The Post Card*, who "predestine[s]" their reading—but
rather as having "the ability to follow the given thread. That is, if you follow
me, the hidden thread" ("PP," 63). Derrida's "hidden thread" is a signal of
the trace, the "mark" of *différance* that undermines hierarchically ordered
metaphysical oppositions (inner/outer, presence/absence) by revealing that
they corrupt, infect, and secretly participate in each other.[33] In "Plato's
Pharmacy," the followed thread is the dizzying reticulation of the word
pharmakon in Plato's dialogues, "a little spot, a little stitch or mesh (*mac-
ula*) woven into the back of the canvas" that, as poison-and-cure, both
aide-mémoire and corruptor of memory, disturbs the very opposition that
it is invoked to establish ("PP," 70). Deconstruction's strategy is to tug at
such a thread and watch the tapestry unravel.

Spenser likewise knows the importance of following the hidden thread.
In Busirane's castle, Britomart discovers a "goodly arras of great maiesty,"

across which are depicted scenes of "*Cupids* warres . . . and cruell battailes," the routinely violent confrontations seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* between male gods and female mortals (*FQ* III.xi.28.2, 29.5–6). Before the extensive ekphrases, however, something catches the eye:

> Wouen with gold and silke so close and nere,
> That the rich metall lurked priuily,
> As faining to be hidd from enuious eye;
> Yet here, and there, and euery where vnwares
> It shewd it selfe, and shone vnwillingly.
> (*FQ* III.xi.28.3–7)

This golden thread has precedent in Ovid—during their tapestry competition, Minerva and Arachne "of glittring golde with silken threede . . . weaved there good store"—but its hiddenness, its privy lurking, is Spenser's own.[34] Via a recurrent Spenserian pun on fain/feign, the thread is both desirous to remain hidden and desirous to be identified, followed, and read. As the eye notices it "here," "there," and then quickly "euery where," the poetry performs how an almost-invisible mark, once seen, illuminates the entire text, shining forth unwillingly. Modeling an interpretive process, Spenser's golden thread suggestively solicits close reading, without which "great attention," as Kenelm Digby already observed in the seventeenth century, "rare and wonderful conceptions will vnperceived slide by him that readeth [Spenser's] works."[35]

Harry Berger Jr. describes—or redescribes, for there have been countless critical articulations of this phenomenon—two ways of reading Spenser's poetry as countertextual and textual. The first is "reading as if visualising," which, in "looking through the language at the referent," produces an eidetic scheme of interpretation that serves allegory's telic, transcendental ideals, "restor[ing] the transparency of the sign."[36] The second, on the other hand, redirects attention from "sign/referent relations to the various kinds of interplay between signifiers . . . the seditious particles bounding about and colliding crazily within the nucleus of the sign." This second, suspicious approach keeps us with the text, following its hidden threads.[37] These two kinds of reading suggest that the interpretive field that arises between text and reader is contested: the poetry licenses a spectrum of interpretive possibilities based on whether we choose to seek the order of visual allegorical ideas or scrutinize the text for the bumps, catches, and internal dissonances it exhibits. This is remarkably similar to the contest Derrida suggests lies at

the heart of Western metaphysics: the "old system . . . [of] oppositions," he writes (though we might just as easily make "allegory" the subject of the sentence), is not "a *given* system" but rather "a dissymmetric, hierarchically ordered space whose closure is constantly being traversed by the forces, and worked by the exteriority, that it represses: that is, expels and, which amounts to the same, internalizes as one of *its* moments."[38] In *The Faerie Queene*, these forces—this exteriority that the inside works to internalize but by which it always remains troubled—emerge from the play of language, authored or autopoetic, that resists interpretation, that does not allow us to leave it behind for an extractable image or idea. These are Spenser's hidden threads, refusing to *signify*; here we are invited to tug.

Returning to Belphoebe in the forest, giving herbal succor to a wounded swain, we find Spenser lingering on the manual delicacy of the huntress's medicinal ministrations, describing how the herb "betwixt two marbles plaine / Shee pownded small," before "into his wound the iuice thereof did scruze" (*FQ* III.v.33.1–4). The verb "scruze" is a Spenserian coinage, and this is its third and final appearance in *The Faerie Queene*. Its first describes a moment not of healing care but of purgative violence, as Arthur "twixt his puissant hands" takes up the melancholic Maleger, who must be expelled from the perfect body of Alma's castle, and, "hauing scruzd out of his carrion corse / The lothfull life," dispatches him in a lake (*FQ* II.xi.46.1–3). The second occurs in the following canto when Guyon comes across a woman at the perimeter of the Bower of Bliss bearing a "Cup of gold" into which the "sappy liquor" of "riper fruits . . . she scruzd, with daintie breach / Of her fine fingers" (*FQ* II.xii.56.1–4). As yet unnamed, this is Excess, whose allegorical designation seems incommensurate with the daintiness of her squeezing, especially since we are told that her action is "without fowle empeach" (*FQ* II.xii.56.5). But the collocation of scruzing between Excess and Belphoebe lights up a set of verbal and visual echoes like a constellation between these two episodes: when Timias awakes, he imagines Belphoebe an "Angell" sent from "her bowre of blis," and Jonathan Goldberg has noted an erotic link between Belphoebe's praise of sweat and the sweat on Acrasia's postcoital brow (*FQ* III.v.35.3).[39] The hidden thread of the Spenserian text puts Belphoebe in the Bower.

How are we to understand these resonances, across the stanzas, cantos, and books, between Belphoebe and Excess, the linguistic trace that links them? We might think of allegory's telic process as a kind of apocalyptic *krisis*, unfolding and separating the good from the bad until the moment of final judgment.[40] In this sense, we might be tempted to see the poem

as asking us to distinguish between two forms of scruzing, *in bono* and *in malo*, to condemn one and recognize the other as virtue.[41] Alternatively, the poem might be asking us to think about Belphoebe's treatment of Timias as somehow excessive, one more subtle blade in Spenser's critique of the Queen. Both of these readings, however, are guilty of trying to make this trace *signify*, to make it submit to the dictates of the countertextual allegory. We want to suggest, with Derrida, that this trace is asking us to do something different, is appealing to an understanding other than the *eidos* of allegory, of presence, of meaning—of arrival. Derrida writes that, in the classical understanding, "the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours . . . touch it."[42] In *The Post Card*, however, Derrida reimagines the possibility of touching *across* the "infinite distance" of the post: "she is not here but there. . . . She touches me, she takes me in her voice"; "she makes me swim, she engulfs me, you becloud me like a fish, I let myself be loved in the water" (*PC*, 56). Water, that most protean of elements but also one given to blending, is the medium not for arrival—since she is not "here"—but of love as a "beclouding" of self and other. This love is a touching that is not physical, but more like a feeling—*I am touched*—"a force of attraction that traverses the distances," touching "as spectral qualia," the transformations between subjects performed in and through language.[43] Across the water, between the "*Rich strond*" and Acrasia's "wandring Island," Belphoebe and Excess touch (*FQ* III.iv.34.2, II.i.51.5).[44]

This trace invites us, ultimately, to rethink the kinds of questions we ask when we approach Spenser's poem: not only "what does this mean?" but also "what other constellations of unexpected meaning are discernible in the umbra?" and "what ethical demands do these new fields of meaning produce?"[45] A Derridean reading of Spenser allows us to be alert to textual dissonance, to the poem's status as monument and mirage, to see how it might be doing contradictory things at once. This essay started with the observation that both Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Derrida's *Post Card* never arrive at their addressees, but that such adestinality is, unexpectedly, a function of the texts, necessary for their existence and continuance. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida describes how we witness the *pharmakon* "infinitely promise itself and endlessly vanish through concealed doors that shine like mirrors and open onto a labyrinth," a description uncannily appropriate to the Faery Queen herself, leaving behind her "this deep background" that Derrida calls "the *pharmacy*" and that Spenser calls *The Faerie Queene* ("PP," 127). We are not meant to arrive at Gloriana. Instead, the reader

arrives at her *supplement*, the text of the poem, "the medium in which opposites are opposed," where "differends" might "move" and touch, "play . . . among themselves" ("PP," 127). It is this ongoing play that alerts us that we are "in the back room, in the shadows of the pharmacy," and its motions ask us to remain there, to "dwell" in Gloriana's pharmacy as Digby does, destinerring without arriving, alive to the text's "rare and wonderful conceptions" ("PP," 129).

University College London, UK

Notes

This article—intended in the spirit of Derrida's correspondent text—has been written in dialogue, and therefore, while hopefully our overarching thesis coheres, there should remain some moments of allowed miscommunication or discord.

1.   Jacques Derrida, "Envois," in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 23 (hereafter cited parenthetically as *PC*).

2.   Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, rev. 2nd ed., ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Routledge, 2013). This edition is cited hereafter parenthetically by book, canto, stanza, and, where appropriate, line number.

3.   Troubling Patricia Parker's understanding that "delay and deferral . . . are in Spenser's poem almost uniformly bad"; see Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 62.

4.   Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27. For *The Faerie Queene* as, in Derridean terms, Spenser's failure to achieve the vocative, the successful naming of Elizabeth, see Elizabeth J. Bellamy, "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH* 54, no. 1 (1987): 1–30.

5.   Sheldon P. Zitner, "*The Faerie Queene*, Book VII," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: Routledge, 1990), 287.

6.   Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984): 29.

7.   Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 5–6.

8.   George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 155. On allegorical modes, see Paul Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in "The Faerie Queene"* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 20.

9.   Derrida, "Différance," 24.

10.   Jacques Derrida, "Countersignature," *Paragraph* 24, no. 2 (2004): 18, 30.

11.   "The sender . . . receives from the receiver his own message in an inverted form. This is why . . . a letter always arrives at its destination." Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 30.

12.   Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," trans. Ruben Berezdivin and Peggy Kamuf, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1:153.

13.   See Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

14.   See Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," 29.

15.   For the dynamic of mutual reshaping between Spenserian text and Elizabethan subject, see Louis Adrian Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 303–40.

16.   On Elizabeth's multiple roles, see Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 143.

17.   Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 373.

18.   On deferred arrival, see Gordon Teskey, "Edmund Spenser Meets Jacques Derrida: On the Travail of Systems," *Spenser Review* 43, no. 3 (Winter 2014); on Faery Court as the poem's "vanishing point," see David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 "Faerie Queene"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 139.

19.   Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 102.

20.   On Raleigh's positioning as one such Petrarchan courtier, see William Oram, "Spenser's Raleghs," *Studies in Philology* 87, no. 3 (1990): 353.

21.   Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 70 (hereafter cited parenthetically as "PP").

22.   On the dove episode, see Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993),

113–14; and David Hillman's discussion of the companionability at play in this part of the poem in the preface to this volume.

23.   On manifestations of Raleigh, see James Nohrnberg, "Raleigh in Ruins Raleigh on the Rocks . . . ," in *Literary and Visual Ralegh*, ed. Christopher M. Armitage (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 31–88, esp. 53–55.

24.   Edmund Spenser, *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (London: Thomas Creede, 1595). This edition is cited hereafter parenthetically by page number.

25.   "The 21th: and last booke of the Ocean to Scinthia," "Poem 26," in *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh: A Historical Edition*, ed. Michael Rudick (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 327–31. Hereafter cited parenthetically by line number as "OS."

26.   See Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

27.   Franz Kafka, letter of October 25, 1923, in *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Wilson (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 387–88.

28.   Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being; or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 114.

29.   Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 184. On "hostipitality," see Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

30.   On the Renaissance postal system and the dangers of interception, see Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

31.   Kafka, letter of October 25, 1923, in *Letters to Friends*, 387–88.

32.   Derrida, "Différance," 3.

33.   Ibid., 13.

34.   Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. Madeleine Forey, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Gardners Books, 2002), 6.83.

35.   Kenelm Digby, "A Discourse Concerning Edmund Spencer," in *Edmund Spenser: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. M. Cummings (London: Routledge, 1995), 150.

36.   Harry Berger Jr., *Resisting Allegory: Interpretive Delirium in Spenser's "Faerie Queene,"* ed. David Lee Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 7, 5.

37.   Ibid., 5.

38.   Derrida, *Dissemination*, 5.

39.   Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 90.

40.   On revelatory theology in Book I, see Harry Berger Jr., *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 52.

41.   For biblical foundation for such "concordantial" reading, see Carol V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1–21.

42.   Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 56.

43.   Hannah Markley, "*Philately* on the Telephone: Reading, Touching, Loving the 'Envois,'" in *Going Postcard: The Letters of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei (Goleta, CA: punctum books, 2017), 105.

44.   On this touch, see Joe Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137–39.

45.   See Berger's description of atomic collisions between signifiers and Teskey's recent work on a "field theory" of allegory; Gordon Teskey, *Spenserian Moments:* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), chap. 10.