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The Faerie Queene, II. i-ii: Amavia, Medina, and the Myth of Lucretia

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There is critical consensus that Medina, who appears in Book II, Canto 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, represents a mean between the errors of excess and deficiency, which are, in turn, embodied by her sisters, Elissa and Perissa. In these terms, the sisters' names indicate their characters; Elissa (Greek, 'too little'), is an emblem of deficiency; Perissa (Greek, 'too much') symbolizes excess; lastly, Medina ('the mean')—the middle sister, appropriately enough—is an emblem of the Aristotelian Golden Mean.[1] Medina's significance as a figure

1) Russell J. Meyer, *The Faerie Queene: Educating the Reader* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 53; Walter Davis, "Spenser and the History of Allegory", *English Literary Renaissance*, 32.1 (2002), 152-67 (156); *The Faerie Queene*, Ed. Roche, Endnote to II.ii.12ff, 1112; *The Faerie Queene*, Ed. Hamilton, Footnote to II.ii.14 (p. 174); *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. A.C. Hamilton. 2nd Edn. Rev. text by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, England: Pearson / Longman, 2001; rep. 2007), Footnote to II.ii.14 (p.174). Hamilton elaborates that Medina's "dynamic" role as "hostess", actively "seeking harmony rather than a mean ... is more Platonic than Aristotelian

of moderation is first illustrated when she restores the peace between her sisters' champions—Sansloy and Huddibras—and Guyon, the fight-breaker whom the two intemperate knights attack, like "a Beare and Tygre", who abandon their own "strife" to set upon a hapless "traueiler", whom "they in equall pray hope to deuide" (II.ii.22).

Medina's irruption and her appeal to the knights to cease fighting are stunning from a dramatic point of view, in part due to the visual manner in which she is presented by Spenser:

> Whilst thus they mingled were in furious armes,
> The faire *Medina* with her tresses torne,
> And naked brest, in pitty of their harmes,
> Emongst them ran, and falling them beforne,
> Besought them by the womb, which them had borne,
> And by the loues, which were to them most deare,
> And by the knighthood, which they sure had sworn,
> Their deadly cruell discord to forbeare,
> And to her iust conditions of faire peace to heare (II.ii. 27).

Daniel W. Doerksen has noted similarities between Medina and the portrayal of the Sabine women in Livy 1.13, in which the women, "Having been taken forcibly as wives by the Romans ... had double loyalties, to their new husbands and to their parents", causing them to intervene in the midst of battle, so that, "'with loosened hair and torn garments, their woman's timidity lost in a sense of their misfortune, [they] dared to go amongst the flying missiles, and rushing in from the side, to part the hostile forces and disarm them of their anger.'"[2)]

(Footnote to II.ii.38, p.178). Subsequent textual references, incorporated in the body of the essay, are to the Halmilton edition of *The Faerie Queene*.

2) Daniel W. Doerksen, '"Let There be Peace": Eve as Redemptive Peacemaker in

Doerksen's arguments are clearly, well-founded. However, Spenser's portrait of Medina as an impassioned, disheveled mediator also presents significant—and distinctly ironic—continuities with the figure of Lucretia, who was such a prominent subject, not only in literature, but also in Renaissance and Baroque painting.

This analogy is particularly significant, since Medina, of course, reverses the intent of her legendary counterpart. Thus, like the outraged woman of the artistic imagination—usually inspiring pathos, rather than presenting heroic resolution—Medina appears paradoxically as an impassioned portrait of pity and distress: 'with her tresses torne, / And naked brest, in pitty of their harmes' (II.ii.27. 2-3). In fact, the connections between Medina and Lucretia, highlighted through reversal, are at the heart of Spenser's commentary on true virtue in the opening two cantos of Book II, a dramatic commentary which also involves Amavia and Mortdant, and which concerns the issues of violence, destructiveness and suicide.

The maternal nature of Medina's appeal—highlighted when she implores the knights to cease fighting "by the womb, which them had born" (II.ii. 27. l. 5)—reinforces her life-asserting role as peacekeeper, or mediator. This will remind the reader of the previous canto, where Amavia, a new mother, committed suicide beside the body of her beloved Mortdant, and before the eyes of their own baby, thereby, forming a "sad portraict / Of death and dolour" (2.1.39). By these means, proceeding to the second canto, the reader is invited to contrast that destructive act by a maternal figure with the positive attributes

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Paradise Lost', *Milton Quarterly* 31.4 (1997): 124-30 (127), cites Livy, *Books I-II*, English trans. B.O. Foster, The Loeb Classical Library, 139 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann, 1919; repr. 1967): I.13 (47-49).

of Medina.

It would be pertinent, here, to examine classical accounts of Lucretia's actions, as recounted by Livy and Ovid, before proceeding to an analysis of Amavia and Medina, since, it will be argued, Spenser alluded to Lucretia—first through the suicide, Amavia, and, then, by way of contrast, with his portrait of Medina.

In Livy's *History of Rome*, Lucretia is raped by Tarquin, whom she has given a night's shelter, to which he was entitled as a kinsman; threatening her at sword-point, his threats of death give way to "protestations of love", and, lastly, dishonour, through the elaborate threat "that when she was dead he would kill his slave and lay him naked by her side, that she might be said to have been put to death in adultery with a man of base condition."[3] Summoning her father and her husband—who are accompanied by Brutus—Lucretia reveals what has happened, secures their oaths that they will avenge her honor, and, brushing aside their words of comfort, that she was without blame—since "it is the mind that sins, not the body"—she immediately commits suicide, setting herself—and other women—a ruthless standard above justice:

> It is for you to determine ... what is due to him, for my own part, though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia.[4]

Her death causes an outpouring of grief, as well as the renewed vow of Brutus,

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3) Livy, *History of* Rome, *Books I-II*, English trans. B. O. Foster, The Loeb Classical Library 139 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann, 1919; repr. 1967): I.58.

4) Livy, I.58.

who "drew out the knife from Lucretia's wound", to carry out her revenge:

> 'By this blood, most chaste until a prince wronged it, I swear, and I take you, gods, to witness, that pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and all his children, with sword, with fire, aye with whatsoever violence I may; and that I will suffer neither them nor any other to be king in Rome!'[5]

While Ovid's *Fasti* includes the same major details concerning Tarquin's crime, Ovid's grief-struck Lucretia is distinct from Livy's resolute heroine; appealing to our sense of pathos, Ovid's Lucretia provides an iconographic basis for many subsequent interpretations of the myth in art and literature. For example, the morning following Tarquin's attack, Lucretia "sits with her hair dishevelled, / Like a mother due to visit her son's pyre."[6] Ovid stresses Lucretia's sense of shame, so that, questioned by her male kinsmen about the cause of her grief: "She is silent a long time, and veils her face, in shame; / Her tears flow in a perennial stream."[7]

Similarly, Ovid's Lucretia reveals the outrage without formally demanding the men's pledges to avenge her—but, as in Livy, though her father and her husband accept that she had been blameless, she refuses to accept their "pardon", and commits suicide before their eyes.[8] So, too, in contrast to Livy, who only states, more decorously, that "Brutus drew out the knife" from Lucretia's body, "while the others were absorbed in grief"[9], Ovid stresses the

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5) Livy, I.59.
6) Ovid, *Fasti*. Ed. and Trans. A. J. Boyle and R. D. Woodard. Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2000; 2004): II. 813-14.
7) Ovid, II. 819-20.
8) Ovid, II. 827-32.
9) Livy, 59 (p. 203).

grief experienced by her husband and by her father, who, "mourning their common loss", and unmindful of appearances, throw themselves upon "her body."[10] This is, finally, followed by Brutus's vow to avenge her:

> 'By this courageous and chaste blood I swear to you,
> And by your spirit, which shall be my god,
> Tarquinius and his exiled line shall pay for this.
> I have cloaked my manhood long enough.'[11]

In *The Faerie Queene*, Amavia's suicide suggests that of Lucretia, while Guyon adopts the role of Brutus in vowing to avenge the dead woman. In fact, Guyon's role in response to Amavia's death—in contrast to that of the Palmer, who stands aside—provides an analogue, not only for the heroic Brutus, but also for Lucretia's grieving father and husband. There is, arguably, some implicit criticism of Guyon's display of grief in response to Amavia's death:

> That seeing good Sir *Guyon*, could vneath
> From teares abstayne, for griefe his hart did grate,
> And from so heauie sight his head did wreath,
> Accusing fortune, and too cruell fate,
> Which plonged had faire Ladie in so wretched state (II.i.56. 5-9).

The compassionate Guyon is forgiving of the actions of Amavia and Mortdant, as exemplars of "mortalitie, / And feeble nature cloth'd with fleshly tyre" (57.2-3), though it is implied that his sympathy for these victims of the human passions clouds his own judgment. In making the following stanza the final one

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10) Ovid, *Fasti*. II. 835-36.
11) Ovid, *Fasti*, II. 841-44.

for Canto I, Spenser surely wished to draw increased attention to Guyon's misguided spiritual state:

> The dead knight's sword out of his sheath he drew,
> With which he cutt a lock of all their heare,
> Which medling with their blood and earth, he threw
> Into the graue, and gan devoutly sweare;
> Such and such euil God on *Guyon* reare,
> And worse and worse young Orphane be thy payne,
> If I or thou dew vengeance doe forbeare,
> Till guiltie blood her guerdon doe obtayne:
> So shedding many teares, they closd the earth agayne (II.i. 61).

Guyon's vow of vengeance not only suggest those of Brutus, but, also, given the details of the ritual, underlines the pagan elements of such vengeance, which defies God's prerogative to punish sin. In these terms, while Hamilton *et al* comment that Guyon's appropriation of that divine prerogative is defensible－that, "*As his virtue allows*, he ignores God's claim that 'vengeance is mine' (Rom. 12.19)", and that "his solemnity shows that he does not 'giue place unto wrath'" (Note to II.i. 61, p.170; emphasis mine)－I would contend that Guyon is, nevertheless, being presented by Spenser in a negative light, as someone who does give in to a pagan ethos. Tellingly, while Hamilton *et al* argue, here, that Guyon's "virtue allows" him to appropriate God's wrath in vowing "revenge", they later point out, more justifiably, with regard to Medina's subsequent warning about "bloodguiltinesse" (II.ii. 30), that "Her warning against mortal vengeance is esp. pertinent to Guyon who seeks 'dew vengeance' (I 61.7) against Acrasia" (Note to II.ii.30, p.176).

Also notably, it is Guyon－as an analogue of Brutus－who removes the

knife from Amavia's breast: "Out of her gored wound the cruell steele / He lightly snatcht" (42. 1-2). In turn, while Lucretia seeks to cleanse herself of even the suspicion of guilt by killing herself, Amavia's death is preceded by an assertion of her innocence, in the form of her appeal to her baby son to "attest" that "cleare she dide from blemish criminall" (2.1.37). From a Christian perspective, however, *both* women are guilty of the worse sin of self-slaughter. Spenser's portrait of Amavia, thus, functions in conjunction with that of Medina in the second canto, to present a Christian commentary on virtue and the myth of Lucretia.

A point of convergence among classical versions of the myth of Tarquin and Lucretia is that the suicide of the outraged woman was considered noble, or heroic. Even in Ovid's *Fasti*, which, as we have seen, exploits the opportunities for pathos, Lucretia is, nevertheless, praised as "[t]he matron of male courage" ('*animi matrona virilis'*, in the original).[12] However, with the coming of Christianity, Lucretia's heroism came to be challenged, as manifested in St. Augustine's condemnation of suicide—Lucretia's being his primary example—in the *City of God*.[13]

According to the Augustinian revaluation of the myth of Lucretia, her suicide demonstrated not her strength but her weakness, which had culminated in despair; Lucretia "made known the crime", secured her kinsmen's vows of vengeance, but "sick at heart and unable to bear the shame put upon her, she took her life."[14] Augustine effectively echoes the rationale of Lucretia's own kinsmen, that, having been raped by Tarquin, she was innocent of either sin or

12) Ovid, *Fasti*. II. 841-44, 847.

13) Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans, I-III*. English trans. George E. McCracken. The Loeb Classical Library, 411 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann, 1957; Repr. 1981).

14) Augustine, *The City of God* 85.

dishonor. In these terms, Augustine reasoned, "she did not deserve death", so her death—whether inflicted by another, or by her own self—was, consequently, blameworthy; he elaborated:

> Pronounce sentence. But if you cannot, because she is not in attendance before you to be punished, why do you praise with such eloquence the murderess of an innocent and chaste woman?[15)]

In an additional twist, intended to further cast her in a pejorative light, Augustine suggested that Lucretia's seemingly excessive remorse was motivated by her guilty conscience—that she had "been seduced by her own lust", that is to say that "though the youth violently attacked her, [she] consented."[16)] With that insinuation hanging in the air, Augustine returned to firmer ground by insisting on Lucretia's "irresolute shame", and, also—underlining the role of worldly vanity in her decision to die for honor—contending that Lucretia, "being a Roman lady, too greedy of praise", had placed fame, or reputation, above justice, or morality.[17)] In conclusion, St. Augustine equated suicide with murder, so that Lucretia's example—to be disregarded by "Christian women"—amounted to women's punishing themselves for another's crime of "rape", by "commit(ing) murder upon themselves."[18)]

The Lucretia myth, along with Augustine's Christian commentary on that myth, thus, provides a subtext to the figures of Amavia and Medina in the first two cantos of Book II of the *Faerie Queene*. By these means, although Guyon —benevolent and humane, but sentimental—carries out an extravagant funerary

15) Augustine 87.
16) Augustine 87.
17) Augustine 89.
18) Augustine 89-91.

ritual in honor of Amavia and Mortdant, in which his oath to avenge their deaths is a central feature, the Palmer takes a distinctly passive role; by these means, the Palmer represents a more orthodox attitude towards suicide, in line with the Augustinian condemnation, as well as implying recognition of God's prerogative to punish or forgive sin. Revealingly, the corpses of the two suicides rapidly begin to stink, and the possibility is raised that this is not simply a symbolic manifestation of their mortality, or the result of the poison drunk by Mortdant, but also a sign of God's hate of self-slaughter: "that high God, in lieu of innocence, / Imprinted had that token of his wrath, / To shew how sore bloodguiltinesse he hat'th" (II.ii.4. ll. 3-5). As Hamilton *et al* elaborate: "After Guyon has speculated on the nature of the stigma, the Palmer offers an etiological myth, similar to the one at I vii 5, which he moralizes to explain why the stain cannot be removed. (...) Either Guyon lacks such purifying water, or the skill to use it" (FN to II.ii.5, p.172). It is clear, in other words, that Spenser wanted to express that it is only God who can cleanse someone of sin, in person, or through the agency of his priests—who have the "skill" to consecrate water and carry out the sacraments.

Taken as a whole, the first two cantos of Book II, thus, represent a complex Christian allegory, centering on a dual re-founding of the mythical figure of Lucretia, one that incorporates the Augustinian condemnation of suicide, while upholding a model of female heroism that is based on fortitude and on the life-asserting restoration of peace and harmony.

주제어: 스펜서, 『선녀 여왕』, 아마비아, 메디나, 가이언, 루크레티아, 리비, 오비드, 성 오거스틴, 자살의 평화, 조화

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The Faerie Queene, II. i-ii: Amavia, Medina, and the Myth of Lucretia

Abstract

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There is critical consensus that Medina (*The Faerie Queene*, II.ii) represents a mean between the errors of excess and deficiency embodied by her sisters, Elissa and Perissa.

Medina's significance as a figure of moderation is first illustrated when she restores the peace between her sisters' champions—Sansloy and Huddibras—and Guyon, who had attempted to stop the initial strife between them.

Medina's stunning irruption, and her passionate appeal to the knights to cease fighting, is stunning from a dramatic point of view, and, as the present paper will demonstrate, involves a complex and distinctly ironic allusion to the legendary Lucretia, as treated by Livy and Ovid—an allusion which, in turn, forms part of Spenser's *Augustinian* commentary on heroism and suicide, as manifested in the deaths of Mortdant and Amavia in the immediately previous canto. By these means, the reader is made to contrast the destructive example of the maternal suicide, Amavia, in II.i, with the positive attributes of Medina, whose nobility and heroism are manifested, in Canto 2, through her nurturing, life-affirming role of hostess and peacemaker.

Key Words

Spenser; *The Faerie Queene*; Amavia; Medina; Guyon; Lucretia; Livy; Ovid; St. Augustine; suicide peace; harmony