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Spenser's Hermetic Tricksters in The Faerie Queene III and IV

Readers of Spenser's The Faerie Queene know that Books III and IV do not continue many of the patterns--structural, narrative, character, thematic--developed in the epic's first two books. Those later two books move away from the one-book/one-theme design as Spenser depicts a world in flux and in conflict when he introduces Chastity and Friendship as his themes.¹ Temperate Guyon yields to tempted Britomart who, though chaste, "is brought into conflict with various types of ignoble love--the shallow Squire of Dames, the wanton Hellenore, the lustful Paridell, to each of whom love is a snare" (Davis, p. 117). Instead of following the adventures of knights assigned to, and identified by, the titular virtues of the respective books, we find ourselves disoriented by a text that Jonathan Goldberg describes as exhibiting "disequilibrium, frequent disruptions in narration, and characters who exist [in order] to disappear" (p. xi). One cause of these jarring elements, the discordia concors of the human psyche, is Spenser's introduction of Trickster figures who create humorous disorder even as they parody and present more serious matters.

As a literary device, the Trickster has appeared for millennia. Although he himself may not be predictable, many of his associated activities have been catalogued, examined, and studied. And, while Spenser would not have known this figure in all the same ways we do, he would have known many of its literary, folkloric, and mythic forms and functions. Spenser would have known or intuited the narrative possibilities and ramifications of including the Trickster in his epic and would have recognized some of the figure's varied characteristics. For example, whether as Hermes, Mercury, Odysseus (Hermes's grandson), Coyote, Till Eulenspiegel, Folly, Maui, Krishna, or by any of his countless other names, the Trickster appears on the road; as lord of the in-between, he is associated with travelers, liminal states, borders, and crossroads. Lewis Hyde observes that "the road that Trickster travels is a spirit road as well as a road in fact. He is the adept who can move between heaven and earth, and between the living and the dead. As such, he is sometimes the messenger of the gods and sometimes the guide of souls." Sometimes the Trickster travels "not as a messenger but as a thief [...] and a boundary-crosser. [...] We constantly distinguish-- right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and

female, young and old, living and dead-- and in every case Trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction”(pp. 6-7). At the same time there are cases where Trickster creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight either of the reader, or of the tricked, or both.

And so the association with travel, be it literal or psychic movement, becomes important in discussing the Trickster, who often seems to appear by chance, at just the right or just the wrong time (Combs and Holland, p. xxxi). But as Hyde’s brief catalogue above suggests, the travels are also associated with other elements of the Trickster, such as (1) his marginality and paradoxical qualities, (2) his connections with relationships and the erotic aspects of life, (3) his functions as a creator and restorer, (4) his deceitful thievery, (5) his comedy and wit, and (6) his association with hermeneutics, the art of interpretation (the word for which is said to be derived from Hermes) (Doty, p. 46). A situation-inverter, a frequently-lewd bricoleur, a deceiver who nonetheless serves as a messenger or imitator of the gods (Hynes, p. 34), the Trickster may also be viewed not merely as a source of entertainment but as what Richard Hillman terms a “nexus of therapeutic self-exploration” (8) and one who, by endlessly challenging them, endlessly produces meaning and order, surprising “mundane reality with the unexpected and the miraculous” (Combs and Holland, p. 82).

In many Trickster narratives his paradox of simultaneously producing and challenging, creating and destroying, subverting and recreating the textual universe often involves a catalytic chaos out of, and because of, which the Trickster participates in generating a new world. At times such generation necessitates elimination of the old political, social, religious, psychic, narrative order; at times it transforms, fashions, or re-forms these into new models—or unforms them into their originals. To do this, the Trickster travels between one region and another, one realm of experience and another, and mediates between things manifest and things hidden. “As a figure of energy who goes between apparent oppositions, he opens a path between inward and outward contradictions experienced in the soul of every human being, between the individual and the community, and between the human (or material) realm and the divine (or spiritual) realm. The fool, the clown, the madman, the seer, and the prophet-- as offspring of the Trickster-- have all mediated oppositions like these”(Johansen, p. 30).

The Trickster’s dynamic energy may be mental, physical, spiritual, or any combination of these.

This is seen in Hermes stealing Apollo's cattle or cleverly lying his way out of so many situations (Homeric Hymn to Hermes); it is demonstrated in Prometheus taking the divine fire and by Odysseus masking his identity and undoing the court created during his long absence, throwing into disorder the patterned life of his family and his homeland. It is the very nature of this figure to be unidentifiable, to confuse the order of things, to refuse nomination. His exuberant energy is often evident in his exuberant creativity, characteristically embodied in those portions of experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined, where deception can yield creativity, where ambiguity rules, boundaries are blurred, and where we are reminded that the periphery, not the center, of our attention may very well be what is most important.

Yet, lest we get too certain about what to expect, the Trickster can appear in situations where the above-noted categories aren't necessarily applicable, and where the Trickster even gets snared in his own devices. Playing the fool he sometimes is victim of his own stratagems; setting traps, he at times is trapped and at times loses his bearings completely. This holds true for readers and critics of the Trickster too; to define the Trickster is to de-finis, that is, to put limits and limitations on him-- and this the Trickster avoids; given that his "essence is in his shape- changing, [...] he can only be known indirectly, through his entanglements" (Dollimore, p. 3). In brief, with the Trickster, anything goes-- and this is precisely how Spenser uses him in The Faerie Queene, where the figure's characteristic contradictoriness, complexity, deceptiveness, and trickery are often features of the language of the story itself and where "if the Trickster breaks all the rules, so does the story's language [which] breaks the rules of storytelling in the very telling of the story" (Doueiri, p. 200).

In two books whose assigned virtues are, respectively, chastity and friendship, the disequilibrium produced by Trickster figures seems oddly counterproductive, yet disequilibrium and disruption have important benefits both for the narrative development and in the unfolding maturation and psychic evolution of the major (and sometimes lesser) characters. The world of Books III and IV is a Trickster world; nevertheless, for readers, the confrontation with the kinds of distractions and disruptions the Trickster introduces necessitates taking a new perspective on the perceived directions of the poem, requires a revised look at what appears to be Spenser's unfolding of the plot, and forces a

reevaluation of, and gaining a sense of proportion about, ourselves (Singer, p. 290).

The Trickster's slipperiness links him with the god Mercury/Hermes and the mercurial and hermetic. He is important in many ways for healthy psychic growth. Jung identifies him as the archetype that precipitates disruption and that helps us confront unintegrated shadows and repressed, unconscious fears; the figure is "split off from the consciousness and consequently behaves like an autonomous personality" (p. 150). Such confrontation as he instigates is an essential phase in the process of individuation; it destabilizes existing mental arrangements by putting new energy into the patterns already presented, deconstructing what we already know and expect, and replacing them with transformed, dynamic new patterns.

At the same time, for the characters who must deal directly with such Tricksters, and who do not have the reader's advantage of being able to suspend the action in order to take account of what is "really" occurring, and to assess the evolving narrative interlude in light of the whole work, such encounters with the unexpected demand realignment of perspective and point of view-- often essential processes in the poem as a guide towards wholeness. Such "victims" of the Trickster, who themselves are often what Harry Berger calls "boundary figures," "break the new images [of man, woman, and love] down into their elements, exemplifying the 'moments' of transition and transformation, and in this sense they are sources as well as personified aspects of those images" (Berger, p.171).

The Squire of Dames, who "wanders" in the service of young women, is the predominant example of such a Trickster in Books III and IV; he has a penchant for sly jokes (of which he himself at times becomes the victim), an affinity for travelers and thieves, an ability for quick wit and smooth talking--and he has a number of figurative offspring and substitutes who take up where he leaves off.

These characteristics, along with the disequilibrium and disruption he causes, accompany Spenser's Squire, who (to use Goldberg's term) appears to exist in order to disappear. Indeed, disequilibrium and disruption are words that describe precisely the entrance of this Hermes-like figure into The Faerie Queene. He arrives at a point in the narrative where Satyrane has used Florimell's girdle to bind a symbol of lust, the witch's hyena (III.vii.22), and is leading the monster along the boundary of the strand--almost always a significant location for Trickster encounters. "Satyrane," as Roche suggests,

“represents the best elements of nature and society combined, the honesty and integrity of the naturally unified man. [...] He is equally at home in the court and in the world to which Florimell has fled” (p. 157). But Spenser demonstrates that Satyrane’s balanced life and his sense of victory over the hyena are only temporary conditions. In a startling tableau, disrupting Satyrane's sight as well as the narrative progress, the Squire rushes into the story as the bound thrall of the lustful giantess Argante, borne aloft in Argante's lap atop a fleeing horse. His predicament parodies, qualifies, and extends many levels of the preceding scene. The pathos of Florimell's fear and escape, and the hyena's slaying of her horse, are subsumed by the comedy inherent in this new chase scene. Apparently the bound Squire has momentarily lost his gift of speech. He is not, like the hyena, “swift as word”; instead he is described as being a "trembling Culver" who ends up dashed on the ground and "tumbled in the myre" (III.vii.45).

In such an astounding entrance scene Argante becomes the means for the Trickster Squire to disturb both the poem's action as well as our (and Satyrane's) consciousness. Even before the Squire unfolds his story of Argante's incestuous nymphomania, the double entendres and poetic inversion used to describe Satyrane's rescue-attempt provide a vivid picture of forced sexual intimacy, especially as Satyrane replaces the Squire in the giantesses' saddle. But before Argante can ride off with Satyrane in tow, a virgin knight, Palladin, comes to his rescue, and Argante lightens her load by angrily throwing away her burden. Having thus almost been swept away himself by wild, giant lust, “the good Sir Satyrane gan wake / Out of his dreame, that did him long entraunce. . . “ (III.vii.45).

Satyrane’s feeling as if he has been in a dream and his suffering humiliation suggest that in moving into the Trickster’s position he has had to confront parts of his own repressed, unintegrated unconsciousness; Satyrane, offspring of a satyr and Thyamis (“passion” in Greek), must confront as well as harmonize his beastly nature if he is to perform well his function in the poem as keeper of Florimell’s girdle, the symbol of chastity. While Satyrane’s own wholeness is not central to the poem, his integration of the animal and human, base lust and purer desire, reflected earlier in Britomart’s encounter with Malecasta (III.i. ff.), reminds the reader of the importance of not ignoring the complex range of emotions and drives that must be tamed in the fashioning of a gentleman.

Following these first disorienting offices as a Trickster, the Squire's mercurial wit and gift for

speech--other qualities of this archetype--come into play. Although still "trembling yet through feare" (III.vii.47), the Squire manages to enthrall both Satyrane and the reader with an account of the infamous Giantesse's incestuous ways with her brother and her bestial activities with animals. Eventually he relates how he came to be there, describing the vow made to his lady, Columbell, that he is to find 300 virgins to equal the number he "to faire ladies service did" when she first sent him out. For three miserable years he now has "strayd" throughout the world, finding not three hundred, but only three who refused his services (III.vii.53-59), and of those three, two did so for less than noble reasons (not being paid and fear of getting caught).

The Squire's story, a milder version of the host's tale of Giocondo in Orlando Furioso, invites a variety of responses; Satyrane's own response is to laugh. Reed Way Dasenbrock correctly sees the Squire as a victim of the Petrarchan code, a condition that precludes his ever thinking of abandoning his ridiculous quest. The Squire "is clearly the thrall of his desire for [his lady] as he is the thrall of Argante's desire. The one thralldom, in fact, represents the other" (p. 30). Berger adds that "we cannot know whether [the Squire's] 'trusty true intent' [to 'serve' his lady] was fulfilled beyond or contrary to her expectations or whether his success aroused anger, jealousy, and frustration as the concomitants of her vicarious pleasure. [...] Briefly but densely Spenser's ambiguous treatment of the Squire's tale reveals the sexes working at cross-purposes, love as warfare in which efforts at cooperation and *trouthe* break down, changing into lust and hate under the pressures of self-interest" (pp. 99-100). If we view the Squire as a Trickster, the kind of character who often is exposed to disequilibrium and disorder and who becomes, himself, the victim of jokes as perverse as those he plays on others, we may consider the Squire's story less as a comment on the binding mystique of Petrarchan women than as Spenser's means of introducing for our edification, in this legend of Chastity, further negative figures of "false chastity."

The Squire is so captivated by his lady Columbell that it never occurs to him to abandon this foolish quest, and he is so overcome by his lack of success that he doesn't even reveal his name: "as for my name, it mistreth not to tell; /call me the Squyre of Dames, that me beseemeth well" (III.vii.51). His lack of a name is, of course, part of the game Spenser --and perhaps the Trickster-- plays; the double-

entendre of his “squiring” Dames is as overt in the non-nomination as are his many references to all the “seruice” he has done to fair ladies. At the same time, in a poem famous in part for its author’s application of meaningful and descriptive names, the seeming lack of a name gives the Squire not only a unique position but also an aura of mystery. He has become, as Malbecco shortly will, the thing that he does.

The effect of the Trickster's narrative-disrupting entrance is equaled at this point in the text by his narrative-shifting departure; while it appears that only the immediate tale is interrupted, what actually happens has much wider ramifications. Satyrane's stopping to help rescue the Squire, and his eventual laughing at the Squire's tale of the dearth of chaste maidens, in their own way help free the bound hyena, symbol of lust, who escapes with Florimell's lost girdle. The hyena's release, caused ultimately by the Squire's interruption of the action, itself sets off a chain reaction. Only later (III.viii.2) are we informed that the animal returns to the Witch, who sees the girdle as a signal that Florimell is dead; her son, in turn, is so enraged that he almost slays his mother.

Yet in the larger picture, there are even more substantial long-range results of the Squire’s disruption. Once into the story of the Witch and her distracted son, we are told that in order to appease her son and ease his pain, the Witch alchemically creates the False Florimell, using wax, snow, a male spright and, importantly, mercury (III.viii.6). This alchemical connection links the False Florimell with the mercurial Trickster; she becomes, in her very essence, a Mercury/ Trickster figure herself, and her effect on others is similar to that of the Squire's. Since False Florimell's spirit is male, the link is even closer, and she later joins the Squire during his final appearance and in his most accomplished joke on all those concerned, at Satyrane's tournament in Book IV.

Concerning the alchemical possibilities of the materials used in the Witch’s (mis)creation, Robert M. Schuler provides an interesting commentary:

If Spenser had alchemical notions and terms in mind (and they were common enough that no unusual knowledge would be required), he would be playing on the alchemical associations of these terms (and of the ‘golden wyre’) to order to deepen the resonances of ‘counterfeisance’ and deception in the false Florimell. Moreover, all the main

elements of this created figure . . . share the property of fusibility, and the form that each takes is temporary and therefore undependable. (p. 13)

The instability of the Trickster figure emerges in this association of the False Florimell with the Squire; similarly, the characteristic Trickster traits of shape changing, non-procreative sexual energy, misdirective comic activity, and enterprising disequilibrium, link the classical archetype with Spenser's adaptations.

But the Squire has yet more mischief in Book III, and he manipulates the action at his own pleasure, bringing disorder, or subverting potential disruption, as he sees fit. Along with Satyrane, this mercurial, hermetic Trickster reenters the text at the end of Canto viii when the Squire adopts another of the Trickster roles--that of a travelers' guide. In this condition, however, he also becomes agent of the thief, Paridell. Irony abounds as Paridell expresses his own quest's purpose to find and safeguard Florimell, his dismay at Satyrane's description of her apparent slaughter, and his disgust at Florimell's plight and women's want of safety. The Squire stays long enough to direct travelers to Malbecco's castle and to explain why Malbecco bars their entrance. One of the ironies here is that the Squire's explanation of Malbecco's problem so closely fits his own situation. Although Malbecco has the freedom to come and go, he does not do so because he is bound by love of his money and fear of his young wife's infidelity. The Squire's comment that Malbecco "wreakes himself" in wronging others to obtain wealth, and that he cares not "what men say of him, ill or well" is similar to the narrator's comment about the Squire's defaming himself more than he does the Ladies in his "adventures vaine" (III.viii.44). The Squire's professed fidelity to his own mistress is as misdirected as Paridell's loyalty to Florimell once he sees Hellenore-- and his fidelity to Hellenore lasts only long enough to seduce her.

Further disruption and disequilibrium result from this episode as Spenser introduces another parody of love-gone-awry. The Ovidian Paridell, with whom the Petrarchan Squire is sometimes confused, takes the Squire's place in the action and, as a Squire substitute, provides further examples of Trickster qualities in this ongoing exploration of "right love" and of those things that hinder its development and expression. Like False Florimell in the preceding episode, Paridell fits the description of another offspring of Hermes--Autolycus--the most accomplished thief and liar of his time. Like the

Squire, and like Hermes, Paridell appears to be able to smooth-talk himself into and out of anything.

The Malbecco episode, in which Paridell plays a significant role in instigating the action, has received considerable critical commentary. Interestingly, given that one characteristic of the Trickster is his existence on the margin of activities, from which position he can affect his goals without seeming to be bringing them about at all, it is Malbecco, not Paridell, who has received most attention. Only after Paridell has accomplished his subversive, disorienting, and unsettling goals do we see the wide-reaching and transformative effects of his intervention in the narrative. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes depicts Hermes first as an outsider— but an outsider who changes and charges the static world into which he thrusts himself both as an enchanter and as a disenchanter; Paridell does the same. Like Hermes “he carries his charges into the underworld or out of it, into dreams or into wakefulness, into mythologies or out of them” (Hyde, p. 208). As master of boundaries and boundary crossings, of borders and liminality, the Trickster—be it Hermes or Paridell—is present both in physical transitions and also in thresholds between states of human experience: “between day and night, sleeping and waking, consciousness and the unconscious, life and death” (Combs, p. 83).

In this way Paridell is instrumental in the freeing of Hellenore from her sterile imprisonment and in the ultimate dehumanizing of Malbecco into his true form, Jealousy. In Paridell’s participation in both these processes, we are provided a reminder that “the presence of the creative element in Trickster tales is due to the integral relation of creativity and destruction” (Street, p. 97). The Greeks considered Hermes both as an Olympian, filled with exuberant life, and as Hermes chthonios, “from under the earth,” indicating his connections with the underworld. Like the imagination, “Hermes can manifest in Hades as well as on Olympus, or at any point between” (Combs, p. 89).

As an enchanter Paridell leads Hellenore into the underworld of sleep, dream, story, and myth; in her own, odd way, she comes alive to live the full expression of herself. “Hellenore is a woman without any sexual fears or inhibitions at all, and Spenser suggests through her [...] that even Busyrane, properly used, may have his value” (Evans, p.178). Karenyi relates an old tale that links Hermes with Persephone, with Hermes assisting in marriage rites as a guide both to brides and to souls (p. 367). In just such a way Spenser links chthonic Paridell with his “bride,” Hellenore, when the knight leads her

out of the hell of Malbecco's castle and into a new life, where she finds herself in a world as unlike Malbecco's as could be.

As an enchanter Paridell, like Hermes, delivers his listeners into whatever world or mental state lies across the lines they have drawn; when Odysseus slays the suitors, it is Hermes who carries their souls to Hades; in another story, it is Hermes who guides Persephone out of Hades and into the daylight. And in another, it is Hermes who puts to sleep the watchmen encircling Achilles's camp-- just as Paridell breaches the borders of Malbecco's suffocating and obsessive watch. As Homer writes, Hermes "bewitches the eyes of men to sleep and wakes the sleeping" (*Iliad*, Book XXIV); Paridell does the same.

The Malbecco episode is not a story in the ordinary sense; here, as William Nelson notes, the movement is inward, not outward. "The transformations of Malbecco and Hellenore are not really transformations at all but revelations of their essence. [...] As narrative, the episode is self-contained, for neither Malbecco nor Hellenore appears earlier or again, but the ideas which it expresses are presented in parallel and contrast, echoed, analyzed, developed, and refined throughout the Legend of Chastitie" (p.132). The episode actually begins on the road as the travelers move first to Malbecco's anxious castle and, after a skirmish, proceed inside. From the gate to the courtyard and, finally, to the dining hall (and ultimately to the bedroom/treasure hoard), the various knights make their journey. Once inside the castle, entered by threat, the errant knights are reluctantly treated to dinner. Just as Hermes is associated early on with hunger, food, and theft (stealing Apollo's cattle, after which he follows cleverly with his first lie), so Paridell begins here his wily seduction, and theft, of Malbecco's wife, replete with all the associative lies to trick Malbecco (and Hellenore as well). First feeding his "hungry vew" on Britomart (III.ix.23--and still unsatisfied in III.ix.24), Paridell soon realizes this will not be a fulfilling relationship. Amusingly, in III.ix.25 all the visitors link the sight of Hellenore with meat. These kinds of dead-end incidents are not uncommon in the Trickster literature, allowing viewers and readers to see how skillfully the Trickster can move to contingency plans, work with happenstance, and move backwards before moving ahead. This is precisely what happens as Paridell finds in Hellenore a more likely source of return for his attention--she on whose "faire face so did he feede his

fill” (III.ix.27).

After a successful, preliminary, wordless Ovidian game using spilt wine to convey to Hellenore his desires, Paridell continues, with Hermes-like skill, his seduction of Malbecco's wife. One tradition asserts Hermes's association with speech and language when, in an interesting connection with Aphrodite, he earns the epithet psithyros, “the whisperer” (Doty, p. 55). Like his mythic and literary precursors, Paridell is a traveler, a witty bricoleur, a master of creative fabulation who feigns, fibs and proves a master of gratuitous untruth, of opportunism, and even of encrypting his own image as he recreates Homer's own tales of Troy and of story-telling, polytropic --many turning --Odysseus. Paridell's retelling of the Trojan story, embedded in Spenser's own inclusions of adapted and revised Homer, Ovid, Ariosto, and Chaucer, among others, does not merely “recall a past experience but rather brings that past into the present, and through its articulation, transforms the speaker and the hearer [and, in this case, the reader] in the present” (Johansen, p.148).

Paridell's narrating of the Paris and Helen story, with additions and deletions suited to the seductive needs of the moment, elicits the desired results, just as Odysseus's adjusted tales fit the tastes and beliefs of local audiences, getting him what he desires. “Whenever travelers carry stories from place to place there will be reimaginings, translations, appropriations, and impurities. Only the new versions won't be described with those words; artfully told, they will be known as ‘the truth’” (Hyde, p. 69). This is how Britomart hears the Paris/Helen story as she attempts to connect with this distant relative, and how Malbecco unquestioningly accepts it as he, half-blindly and quite reluctantly, hosts his own version of the Trojan horse. As the Witch had fashioned the False Florimell, so Paridell fashions “worlds of fancies euermore / In [Hellenore's] fraile wit” (III.ix.52), thus keeping her attention focused on him; significantly, it is Britomart who, by questioning Paridell, elicits a view of history quite different from the way he presented it, redirecting his narration, as Berger observes, toward her own race and country (p.157). It develops that Paridell does know the more significant story of the “Troian reliques”; it simply had not suited his purpose to mention it earlier since it makes the story of Paris's line look rather paltry by comparison. “Paridell's account of Aeneas is a comically brief and flat retelling of the Aeneid; two stanzas give the epic story (one stanza for each six books!), and another

stanza the subsequent history until the founding of Rome” (O’Connell, p. 85).

Paridell’s story is important in a number of ways; like Spenser, who in part recounts here a well-known story (with many details drawn from Chaucer’s “Merchant’s Tale”), Paridell himself rehearses and revises a famous tale (the fall of Troy) putting himself, through his ancestors, at the center of the action. Through his skillful fashioning, in which he praises Paris and Helen as the first courtly adulterers and measures their fame by their ability to ruin Troy, he incites “inward flame” (III.ix.31) in Hellenore (whose “fall” is mock-heroically equated in III.ix.2. with the fall of the angels). Like Hermes, who not only steals Apollo’s cattle but then tells a beautiful, convincing, lie in the form of a theogony—a story of the gods and how they came to have what now is theirs --Paridell recounts his own genesis, a hermetic tale of how he came to be, and suggests thereby what is his by birthright. Hermes’s hymn shamelessly recounts Zeus’s dalliance with Hermes’s nymph-mother Maia (Doty, p. 59); Paridell explicates Paris’s and Helen’s dalliance. Through this particular story we find, as does Britomart, that the Trojan line from which Paridell comes is also, in a varied rendition, the line from which she, too, is derived. Despite the apparent amity of these two distant relatives, as Roche observes, “Britomart will ride off in the morning, and Troy will fall again. Unlike their prototypes the easy love of Paridell and Hellenore will not destroy any state but the inverted world of Malbecco” (p. 66).

Paridell’s story is also important in identifying the Hermes/Trickster connections. Plato, in the Cratylus, associates Hermes with the very origins of language, suggesting that his name has to do with speech and that the name signifies that he is the interpreter (hermeneus), messenger, thief, liar, or bargainer. Plato goes on to propose “that the two Greek words meaning ‘to tell’ and ‘to contrive’ were combined to form ‘the name of the god who invented language and speech,’ because Hermes is ‘the contriver of tales or speeches’” (Hyde, p. 75). And Paridell follows suit, guiding Hellenore, the hermeneutic outsider, through the door so that she can apprehend the otherwise hidden senses of things. His language takes various forms; he uses “speaking lookes” (III.ix.28) as well as “gracious speach” (III.ix.32), sending “close messages” (III.ix.27) and “close signes” (III.ix.31) to Hellenore. So perfect is he in his art of fashioning and seducing that he “beguyles Malbeccoes halfen eye” as well as “Hellenores both eyes and hart” (III.x.5). Stealing her love, he “her layd aboard” (III.x.6). Ovid (Met. i.

568-733) tells how Hermes talked “like a metronome” for hours, telling stories to Argus until the thousand-eyed monster slept so that Hermes, after this deceit, could kill the beast and steal Io (who had been changed into a heifer); in Spenser’s version, the guardian (ironically) actually has only one eye--but the parallel is a good one, furthering the Ovidian as well as hermetic connections.

On the following morning, when the other knights depart Malbecco’s castle, Paridell stays on, complaining that his recent fight with Britomart has left him in no condition to travel: “his late fight / With Britomart, so sore did him offend, / that ryde he could not, till his hurts he did amend” (III.x.1). Spenser loads the following stanzas (3, 4, 5) with references to and images of sight, recollecting the stages of love recorded in Britomart’s encounter in Castle Joyous (III.1.45) and reinforcing by contrast Malbecco’s blindness; while the husband keeps frantic watch, Paridell “kept better watch,” and the narrator laments

False loue, why do men say, thou canst not see,
 And in their foolish fancie feigne thee blind,
 That with thy charmes the sharpest sight doest bind,
 And to thy will abuse? Thou walkest free,
 And seest euery secret of the mind;
 Thou seest all, yet none at all sees thee. (III.x.4)

Paridell’s false love succeeds. Images of seeing and sight give way to those of “will” (III.x.10); and when we are cryptically told how Paridell “did [Hellenore] seruice dewtiful” (III.x.9), we are reminded both of the serviceable Squire of Dames and of Satyrane, all of whom are thematically linked by what Harry Berger calls “their skewed relation to the ambivalent term ‘service’: Satyrane and Paridell actualize its contrary meanings in simple opposition, while the Squire’s courtship of Columbelle is turned farcically awry by the term’s ambivalence in her demand that he ‘do service unto gentle Dames’” (p. 155).

Paridell, who wears on his chest a flaming heart, stirs in Hellenore’s heart the fires of lust; just so, she sets fire to Malbecco’s treasure. Just as Paris and Helen brought about the burning of Troy, so Paridell and Hellenore bring about the burning of Malbecco’s house, turning this “frothy fabliau with

tinctures of courtly romance and New Comedy farce” into “a grim parody of Ovidian metamorphosis” (Bernard, p. 99). When the lustfully-burning lovers leave the burning house they are described as “a wanton paire / Of lovers loosely knit” (III.x.16), a precursor to and antithesis of the hermaphroditic image of Amoret and Scudamour as depicted in III.xii.46 of the 1590 edition.

In an absurd parody of the knights of Maidenhood on their quest for Florimell, Malbecco, torn between rescuing his wife and his gold, blindly sets out after his wife. Although the object of the knights’ quest, Florimell is imprisoned by Proteus for her faithfulness, the object of Malbecco’s quest, Hellenore, is freed from his imprisonment--by her unfaithfulness (Heale, p. 92).

The Trickster’s disequilibrating effects continue to work as Malbecco regressively degenerates into a lower form--ironically, into a lower form of who he actually and already, is --“a new figure that is really the external representation of the deformity that was within” (Wood, p. 90). We witness his disintegration as he tries to outrun “griefe, and despight, and gealosie, and scorne” (III.x.55). Behind the cuckold image “is the shadow of the he-goat: animal lust not yet deprived of sexual vigor, a symbol which yokes together the compulsion and privation tormenting the old man. Malbecco’s being is dominated by the goat rather than by the satyrs to whom Spenser finally consigns Hellenore. Husband and wife are sent along different paths in their regression from complexity to simplicity, from human to sub- or pre-human lives” (Berger, p.162). The message is clear: there can be no relationship when repressed desires are not integrated in the conscious and where single-mindedness fixes one’s world (“tranfixe[s] the soule with deathes eternall dart” III.x.59). By his over-watchful, restrictive and restricting, anxious life, Malbecco imprisons both his wife and himself, thus already preparing himself for the life he will lead as the person he, in essence, already is. Ironically, the Malbecco/ Hellenore relationship is the only one we get in this book of a married couple together, adding to the broader messages that we cannot ignore our rudimentary nature if we seek relationship, and that companionate wedlock cannot be one-sided, enclosing and restrictive (Malette, p.108).

Malbecco’s “humour rancorous” (III.x.59) reminds us that the “humours” were once fluids, drawing originally from a Latin root (umor), pertaining to liquids, moistures, and dampness; but Malbecco’s inability to step back from and out of his confining relationship both with Hellenore and

with his idea of himself, deadens the fluid into a “cold complexion.” Failing a suicide attempt, Malbecco ends up in “a cave with entrance small” --both a tomb and the womb of his new being--in constant fear that the rock above him will fall; just as keeping an eye (his one good eye) on his wife proved ever a traumatic experience, so now, with “his one eye perpetually open,” he is “fixed on the rock that threatens to fall and ruin him” (Wood, p. 91). He is transformed and rearticulated into a lower level, reduced from a man to a quality and finally to a name--Jealousy.

When we have finished with Malbecco he is a shadow, a formless name locked in himself in his own cave. Paridell doesn't know this, nor does Hellenore, nor does Britomart; the lesson is for the reader. Malbecco's behavior “suggests anything but enlightenment concerning his wife's motives, and Spenser's didactic theory of poetry dictates that his ‘ensamples’ be directed at the reader. It is we who are reminded that concupiscence is an inescapable fact of the human condition. [...] Rather than reading us a Chaucerian lecture on giving wives free reign, [...] Spenser here is getting at the essence of the erotic imagination and exploring its consequences for the fallen mind. In Malbecco we experience the ‘self-murdring thought’ [...] that sexuality can produce and that is mythologized in his [Malbecco's] metamorphosis” (Bernard, p. 102).

Like the story itself, the lesson is multifaceted; defining it only limits it. On the one hand, and in part, the story is a reminder that to close off, to confine, to limit, ultimately is impossible. Those who confine life, who negate life forces, are fair game for the cataclysmic upheavals the Trickster brings; in learning this lesson, the reader can transform into something higher, just as Malbecco, in not learning it, transforms into a lower, almost-non, form. On the other hand we are reminded that ultimately Hellenore, who first exchanges Malbecco for Paridell, is equally happy to exchange Paridell for the satyrs and that, as Spenser observes at the end of Book II, sometimes Grill would rather be a hog than a man.

The Malbecco episode, charged as it is with the energy of various Tricksters, is also thematically important in another significant way, providing as it does another “ensample” of the various elements of Book III's major focus-- Britomart's developing character. Even in her absence from the majority of the action here, Britomart and the theme of chastity are reflected by the episode's

various characters and themes. Hellenore, for example, who “ioy[s] to play emongst her peares” (III.ix.4), and who instead is closeted away by Malbecco, is reminiscent of Britomart in canto ii, where in her love for Artegall she encloses herself “in dull corners” instead of playing with her “equall peares” (III.ii.31). “The verbal echo suggests that Hellenore, like Malecasta, represents a potential alter ego that Britomart must reject. The fact that Hellenore is so much more distinct from Britomart than Malecasta was—so much less emotionally and psychologically complex, and therefore so much easier for Britomart to spurn—shows the distance between the clear exemplary contrasts of canto ix and the amorous confusion that has already preoccupied Britomart during her encounters with Malecasta and Red Crosse. Britomart finds it easier to distinguish herself from Hellenore, and Paridell, than from Malecasta because the stakes are now social and political rather than personal” (Mikics, p. 103).

By the time the Squire of Dames reappears in IV.ii.20, his figurative Trickster-offspring and compeers already have been busily at work. Paridell has now become, in the convoluted and character-fragmenting narrative of Book IV, “False Paridell.” Other metaphoric offspring join in to further the disorder and disequilibrium. Another Trickster, Ate, “mother of debate,/ And all dissention,” appears (IV.i.19). And faithless, false, Duessa, a shape shifter whose reputation was established in the first book, reappears. To these, Blandamour, whose name means “flattering, smooth tongue,” is added.

Accompanying Paridell, this moving band of disrupters (whom the narrator ironically refers to as “this gallant with his goodly crew”) meets up with Scudamour, and a comic scene ensues. Paridell’s taking up Blandamour’s cause and ignominiously charging at Scudamour pokes fun at chivalry. In an effort to provoke further mischief, the Tricksters, with their special interpretive skills for discovering weakness, unite; together they manage to make Scudamour confront his own repressed jealousy by convincing him that Amoret has been faithless with Britomart. Scudamour’s ego will not accept his suppressed fears and he seeks revenge through Britomart’s agent, Glauce, raging as he does so: “False traitour squire, false squire, of falsest knight” (IV.i.52).

Chaos abounds. False Florimell joins Paridell, bringing pandemonium with her. “Foolish Paridell” and “boastfull Blandamour” forget their feigned friendship and end up fighting over her “like two mad mastiffes” (IV.ii.17), covering the ground with “bloudie gore.” Lest anyone confuse the

motives of these two with those initiating the initial competition between Scudamour and Britomart over Amoret, the narrator describes the promise of winning False Florimell, the lustful focus of Blandamour and Paridell's attention, as a "glorious theft" (IV.ii.4), "so fayre a spoyle" (IV.ii.5), and one "ygot" from a rival to put on display (IV.ii.8). It is interesting, ironic, and amusing, concerning the respective combatants' claims to a part of the False Florimell prize, that she is freely shareable by all! With the three counterfeit women loving the disorder and encouraging the fighters, when the discordia concors threatens to destroy not only all the relationships but the very lives of those involved, the narrator interrupts with:

There they I weene would fight vntill this day,
Had not a Squire, euen he the Squire of Dames,
By great aduventure travelled that way. (IV.ii.20)

In an interesting reversal of action, during which this Trickster disrupts the quarreling disruption, the Squire manipulates the activities not by bringing further disorder but by withholding further disruption until the unfolding of his masterful joke on everyone, at Satyrane's upcoming tournament, to which (as Lauren Silberman notes) all roads seem to lead: "Not only does the Squire of Dames take over the narrative and redirect its progress to the tournament, but the contest is a large-scale version of the jousts that seem, in endless variation, to be most of what takes place in Book IV. The Squire persuades Blandamour and Paridell to defer fighting over the False Florimell in order to defend the right to her against all the other participants in Satyrane's tournament; narrative deferral corresponds to the Squire's blatant strategy of putting off trouble until later" (pp. 99-100).

It is the announcing of this tournament that, in the first place, is the presumed reason for the Squire's presence. His hermetic quickness of mind and facility with language convince the quarreling Paridell and Blandamour to save their fight for the tournament where they will reap honor as well as gain their lady. Although the individuals assembled here are incapable of true accord, they hide their "hate and hollow guyle" under "golden foyle" (IV.ii.29), and postpone further fighting. The Squire "earnestly" calls on the combatants, "coniu'r'd by some well knowen token," and the fighting stops. Although Spenser does not detail the nature of this "token," in his gloss to IV.ii.21 Hamilton suggests

that it “anticipates Cambina’s ‘rod of peace’ which [later] in IV.iii.42 is described as a caduceus.” Of this staff Spenser says that “about [it] two Serpents weren wound, /Entrayled mutually in louely lore.” This, of course, is Mercury’s sign and, if what Hamilton proposes is what Spenser actually intended, there is here yet another connection between the Squire and the Trickster/ Hermes/Mercury model. That the Squire “coniuur’d” the knights is no surprise, given Hermes’s own magical abilities and the contemporary association of hermeticism with magic.

In this scene the Squire also fulfills the Trickster role of interpreter when the crew sends him off to discover who is in the group of four figures that “they [Paridell, Blandamour, Ate, et.al.] chaunst to overtake.” Just as Spenser retold Ariosto’s host’s tale when introducing the Squire, and revised Homer’s account of the Trojan war when Paridell related his ancestry, so Spenser continues here the Squire’s new adventures, doing so as redactor of Chaucer’s incomplete “Squire’s Tale.”

The Squire relays the news that these are “Couragious Cambell, and stout Triamond,/with Canacee and Cambine linckt in louely bond” (IV.ii.31). The Trickster Squire and his false friends disappear as the narrator provides Spenser’s own projection of the conclusion of Chaucer’s tale. The result of the narrator’s story is the recognition of a quaternity that “converts illicit attractions into permissible attachments” in twinship, friendship, kinship, and wedlock (Nohnberg, p. 274). The Squire, in his stories and by contrast, has shown us only examples of illicit or false attachments: Argante and Ollyphant, Paridell, Blandamour, Malbecco and Hellenore. His examples serve as parodies that follow the narrator’s precept: “...for good by paragone/ of euill, may more notably be rad” (III.ix.2).

The Trickster’s final joke is revealed in the preparation for, and at, the tournament, the place to which he is conducting his band of false friends. He is still with the travelers when they reenter the text. Returning with the information his travel companions sent him to seek, the Squire recommends they let the four new knights pass. But stirred by Ate, Blandamour’s envy surfaces when he rudely insults the two new couples, causing Cambell and Triamond to react. The Trickster needs help keeping this crew under control, and to diffuse this potentially explosive situation, Spenser uses Cambina to provide assistance, using her “perswasions myld.”

The calm is temporary. Another Trickster figure, Braggadocio, who shortly ago took the False

Florimell from the witch's son, rides up, claiming her as his own prize, and thus precipitating the usual farcical consequences. This time, however, another amusing twist occurs when Blandamour suggests that the loser will win Ate. This is just the excuse Braggadocio needs and he refuses to imperil his life for a hag like Ate. The Squire, by the way, is notably absent in these exchanges, although his earlier actions have set everything in motion.

When the now-enlarged yet ever-volatile crew finally arrives at the site of the tournament, we are told they "diuide /Them selues asunder" (IV.iv.14), a foreshadowing of the many divisions, diversions, disruptions and disequilibriums that will occur during the three-day tournament. The alleged purpose of this event is to determine the strongest knight and to ascertain who is the fairest lady. Jan Kouwenhoven notes, however, that in this scene Spenser doesn't employ the usual romantic convention of measuring a lady's fairness by the knight's strength; instead, at this topsy-turvy tournament, the two qualities are to be assessed independently in what Kouwenhoven calls a "two-stage ... monstrous absurdity" (pp. 177-78).

The tournament produces many of the same effects as in other places where the Trickster has been at work bringing out the beast, or at least the basest elements, in everyone. Not all the participants are dishonorable (Triamond, Cambell, Satyrane, and other "sirs," have not previously demonstrated the characteristics associated with the Trickster's crew). However, even with these good characters, the descriptions of the fighting draw upon savage animal imagery, and each successive day brings further degeneration--much as we witnessed in the depersonalization and ultimate transformation when the Trickster worked upon Hellenore and Malbecco. On the first day of the tournament, Satyrane and Bruncheval become "two fierce Bulls" (IV.iv.18). Elizabeth Heale observes that on the second day, "passions are aroused and imagery of wild boars and captive lions culminates in a description of Cambell and Triamond as 'two greedy wolves'" (p. 109) who

breake by force

Into an heard, farre from the husband farme,

[and] spoile and ravine without all remorse' (IV.iv.35).

On the third day the fighting is dominated “by a knight whose savage nature is indicated by the wildness of his appearance and his motto ‘Salvagesse sans finesse’”; this third day’s combat becomes a battle between wild beasts, with Artegall as a salvage knight fighting Sir Sangliere (the boar) and Sir Brianor (the bear) in what Heale calls a “grim image of discord from which we are rescued by Britomart...” (p. 109).

This anxious scene, similar to other episodes precipitated by the Trickster, parodies yet another episode--in this case, Cambell's tournament, in which the ends actually do justify the means. In Satyrane's tournament, however, the ends are self-defeating even before the action begins, and Britomart's victory upsets the chivalric code. With Britomart's settling the "prooffe of prowesse," the tournament turns into a beauty contest. False Florimell is the knights' choice as the fairest woman there, entitling her to the prize--the true Florimell's girdle, which passes from lady to lady, all of whom lack the chastity necessary to wear it (an echo of the Squire's account of his fruitless efforts to find chaste women). The knowledge that the False Florimell is not virtuous inspires a responsive chord in the warriors--but does not deter them from wanting to be her consort. It is the Squire of Dames, the Trickster who, with an echo of E.K.'s memorable and aphoristic “vncouthe unkiste” prefatory comment in The Shepheardes Calender, has the last laugh with his epigrammatic comment on the whole situation--"vngirt vnblest."

The effect of the Squire’s disruption is immediate: “thereat all knights gan laugh” (IV.v.19). In breaking up the over-seriousness of the situation, the Squire moves things to another level--and then disappears as quickly and mysteriously as he did when he first entered the narrative in Book III. Although he vanishes after his punch line, the Squire’s jest once again sets in motion action that will continue. When at last the girdle gets to and fits Amoret, another conundrum appears: the genuine winners who represent the two ideals (strongest, i.e. Britomart, and most beautiful, i.e. Amoret), are an impossible couple. But through the Trickster's metaphoric, mercurial protégé, False Florimell, the disruptive yet humorous chain-reaction continues.

When things are at the height of their new confusion, Satyrane suggests that False Florimell

choose her own knight. Her choice is fitting--Braggadocio--who also has assumed a false identity. This mis-coupling parodies the perfect couplings of Cambell's tournament and corresponds to the impossible attachment of Britomart and Amoret, especially given that this other Trickster figure, False Florimell, is comprised in part of a male sprite. We may infer only that Braggadocio will discover his error and rue the day, but not until the other false suitors, in jealous rage, have pursued them. By IV.v.27 the false suitors already “chaft and rag’d/ And woxe nigh mad for very harts despight, /That from revenge their willes they scarce asswag’d,” and so set out after the couple. Ate, Duessa, and Paridell—versions themselves of the Trickster—are among the group, continuing to inspire “cruell conflict.” The pursuit continues, behind the scenes, well into IV.ix.24, where the inflamed and enraged paramours continue to fight amongst themselves over “the love of that same snowy maid, / Whome they had lost in Turneyment of late.”

It takes the intervention of Arthur for all the contentious behavior to be brought to a halt and for Book IV’s serious journey towards wholeness to resume its proper focus. The Squire's hermetic function performed, he already has exited the text on a note of irreverence, laughing to himself at the dearth of chaste women. And this was precisely the same cause of Satyrane's laughter following the Squire's entrance in Book III. The Trickster has revealed a world larger than and different from what its inhabitants had originally believed it was.

The Trickster Squire has led the characters and the readers on a wild, unbalancing, merry chase. Yet the process of such chases and such imbalancing is necessary before characters and readers can successfully relate to others and before psychic growth can occur. Hyde reminds us that “trickster stories are radically anti-idealist; they are made in and for a world of imperfections” (p. 91); in this imperfect world the great shape-shifter demonstrates the degree to which the way we have shaped things may be altered. The Trickster makes this world --and then plays with its materials. His adventures open us “to the way our minds function to construct an apparently solid but ultimately illusory reality out of what is on another level a play of signs. And on yet a deeper level, there is still another meaning to trickster stories. The playfulness of language in the trickster tales reveals a different order of reality, one that makes possible both an ordinary, conventional meaning (the face-value,

referential meaning of the discourse as story) and a level of meaning that is extraordinary, unconventional, and sacred” (Doueiri, p.198).

Metaphorically, the Squire and his associated Trickster figures have destroyed and resurrected; old relationships dissolved and new ones developed, some people have been enchanted and others have been disenchanting. Ultimately it is Spenser himself who both shapes, unshapes, and reshapes, providing in the process one polytropic possibility after another. Trickster narratives, whether classical, modern, folk or myth, do the double task of marking borders and of violating the boundaries. The Trickster in the narrative ultimately is the narrative itself that helps us see into and beyond illusions, “unveiling the grand illusion with which most human beings secure themselves: the assumption that we--our earthly places, our possessions, our prejudices, even our principles, and all the activities with which we justify our existence--form the sum of reality” (Johansen, p.158).

Through his disruptions, the Squire has caused readers and Faeryland participants to become witnesses to human foibles and folly--and to experience their own disequilibrium. His sly jokes, his mercurial slipperiness, his ability to change the course of actions and expectations--these are the same elements Jung identifies as those that accompany the Trickster archetype, which exists to put new energy into staid expectations, to produce fresh thinking, to reveal human folly in its prideful self-consciousness, and to bring about dynamic, new patterns. The Trickster thus shows a new way to see the world by opening our minds to the spontaneous transformations of a reality that is always open and creative; he reminds us that no one creative ordering can capture all the dynamics of life. Spenser, Trickster extraordinaire, does precisely this, mediating between reality and fiction, weaving old and new texts, subverting narrow boundaries and arbitrary categories of social systems and the givens both of literary canons and conventions. And these are the realities that Britomart herself must learn as she moves into, through, and out of the various adventures encountered in her own path to wholeness.

Endnote

1. Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London, 1977). All subsequent references appear in the text and are to this edition.

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