
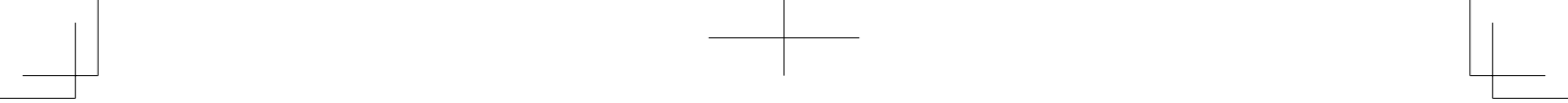


A Reading of *Nuns and Soldiers* in Terms of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

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The paper offered a new reading of *Nuns and Soldiers* in terms of colour symbolism, virtue ethics and references to Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. argued that certain characters in the novel are identified with the knights from the books of *The Faerie Queene* who represent the 'private' Aristotelian virtues. Guy is identified with Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperance and Gertrude, the 'Arthurian girl' in search of what constitutes 'just mourning', is identified with Sir Artegall ('the equal of Arthur'), the Knight of Justice; like him she has to deal with the danger of slanderous wagging tongues personified by the Blatant Beast. One of the clues to Gertrude's identification with the Knight of Justice is that Guy speaks of justice as being 'like brown', not in the spectrum, whilst Gertrude is repeatedly described in terms of her brown hair and brown dresses; colour in *Nuns and Soldiers* often has a chain of symbolic significances, similar to what Merleau-Ponty, (a philosopher indirectly alluded to in the novel at a number of points), refers to as a 'ray of the world'. The 'nun' Anne Cavidge (whose signature colour is the blue associated with the Virgin Mary) plays a role corresponding to that of Britomart, the lady knight of Chastity, and her near-drowning experience has parallels with a famous passage of Britomart in distress by the seashore. The Count with his soldierly virtues and his struggle to overcome suicidal despair plays the role of the Redcrosse Knight, with the precious lifeblood of Poland taking the place of the redeeming blood of Christ (his colours are the red and white of the Polish flag, which is the same as those of the flag of St. George). The group of friends surrounding Gertrude play the roles of the knights of friendship (Cambell and Triamond) and Tim Reede plays the role of Sir Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, which explains his associations with wild nature



and leaves which take us into the pastoral world of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, suggesting that his name is intended to invoke that of the pastoral ‘reed’ flute.