The Battle Rages On: The Psychomachia and The Faerie Queene, Book I

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Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

(I Peter 2:11)

The CONCEPTION of Christian life as a pilgrimage towards God, a war against the forces of evil, has been reiterated right through the literature of late antiquity and the Middle Ages well into the Renaissance. This 'war' between Virtues and Vices, who fight for dominion over the Christian soul, possibly found its first poetic representation in Prudentius' Psychomachie. The action of this personification-allegory is fairly simple. The Christian Virtues led by Faith, despite certain initial reversals, ultimately triumph over the Vices in a series of combats and move on to build a holy city (in man's soul) in which will stand a temple dedicated to Wisdom.

C. S. Lewis1 is critical of the Psychomachie and points out a mechanical defect in the pitched battle. Fighting, Lewis feels, is an activity that is not proper to most of the virtues; and though he accepts that possibly Courage can fight, or that maybe 'we can make a shift with Faith',2 he cannot understand how Patience or Mercy or even Humility can fight.

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1 C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford, 1936), pp. 68-9
2 Ibid. p. 69.
I feel that Lewis has possibly missed the complexity inherent in the Prudentian allegory. Macklin Smith, however, has read a meaning more ‘complex’ and intricate than Lewis does, primarily because Prudentius seems to relate his personification-allegory to Scriptural history. Smith feels that the story of Abraham included in the Psychomachia indicates that the allegory participates in the history of human salvation. Thus he concludes that the Psychomachia is ‘no simple narrative, but a sophisticated version of Christian history operative in several moral senses’.\(^3\) Even considering Psychomachia merely as personification-allegory, I feel it is unique in its impact on the allegorical writing of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

A Prudentius-like battle between the virtues and the vices abounds in the dramatic as well as the poetic literature of the Middle Ages and is carried well into the Renaissance.\(^4\) A comparison between the several battles of the Psychomachia and the battles waged by the Red Cross Knight in Spenser’s Faerie Queene, Book I would be an interesting case-study.

There is no specific evidence that Spenser had read the Psychomachia. But one has to acknowledge that Prudentius’ work was notable for its powerful influence upon medieval and Renaissance culture. By the second half of the fifth century, Prudentius’ works were being widely appreciated. Sidonius Apollinaris, in one of his epistles, tells us that the library in the country estate of a friend had to offer ‘works distinguished by the grandeur of Latin eloquence … here Augustine, there Varro, here Horace, there Prudentius’.\(^5\) Moreover, Raby in Christian Latin Poetry summarizes a strain of scholarly opinion on the Psychomachia: ‘[It] has been described … as … the most important [work] from the literary and historical standpoint. For it presents the first poetical Christian allegory … which caught the fancy of the Middle Ages and inspired many imitations.’\(^6\)

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\(^3\) Macklin Smith, Prudentius’ Psychomachia: A Re-examination (Princeton, 1976), p. 4

\(^4\) Interesting examples can be found in early morality plays like The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, The Interlude of Youth, Mundus et Infans; later morality plays like The Tide Tarrieth No Man, All for Money; Lydgate’s The Assembly of Gods; Stephen Hawes’s The Example of Virtue and The Pastime of Pleasure, to name only a few.


Apart from the imitations that Spenser may have been acquainted with, the poet himself had great respect for old traditions. He had a 'deep passion for “old records from ancient times derived” '. Obviously Spenser did not merely pillage 'Biblical, classical, medieval and Renaissance epics for source material'. Some of the poetical sources, Fowler feels, are beyond doubt; but he goes on to add that 'the informational sources may have been...more compendious...than scholars have assumed'. Keeping all this in mind, one cannot rule out the possibility that Spenser was acquainted with or at least aware of Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* and its battle structures.

Are the Spenserian battles indebted to the battles of the *Psychomachia* at all? Are the battles fought in *The Faerie Queene* real and of serious consequence like those of the *Psychomachia*? Is there a sense of moral evolution as one vice is defeated by a virtue, or are the battles waged in man’s soul or fought by the Red Cross Knight erratic and haphazard? Finally, is the victory wrought in the last battle of the *Psychomachia* between ‘Faith’ and ‘Heresy’ the ultimate triumph of virtue over vice? Similarly, does the battle with the Dragon in Canto xi of *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, finally announce the victory of resurrected virtues over vice? Can we then bask in the confident glory of the fact that ‘Evil’ has been vanquished and does not pose a threat any more?

Apparently the *Psychomachia* delineates a two-part sequence of warfare and peace. Apart from the relatively small reversals of fate and suspense which add to the interest of the plot, the action moves...

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8 Ibid. p. 29.
9 J. E. Hankins, *Source and Meaning in Spenser’s Allegory : A Study of the Faerie Queene* (Oxford, 1971), p. 21 notes : 'This conception of allegory is not new. In the fourth century Prudentius used it in his *Psychomachia*, or *Battle of the Soul*. After his work, the war of the virtues and vices gradually became the most popular subject of medieval allegory.' Cf. also Joshua McClennen’s ‘Allegory and *The Faerie Queene* : A Study of Spenser’s Use of Moral Allegory’, Harvard Dissertation, 1940, p. 87, where he lists the several combats from Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* but does not connect them to their counterparts in Spenser. Nor does Hankins connect the several battles to the ones in Spenser, apart from identifying the encounter between Chastity and Sexual Perversion as the basis of making Britomart the conqueror of Busyrane.
through the various battles — Faith versus Worship-of-the-Pagan-Gods, Chastity versus Sodomy or Sexual Perversion, Patience versus Wrath, Humility and Hope versus Vanity, Sobriety versus Luxury, Charity versus Avarice and Faith versus Heresy — to a culmination in a scene of anagogic significance. *The Faerie Queene* is apparently a story of knight-errantry full of giants, monsters and enchantresses. Actually both the *Psychomachia* and *The Faerie Queene* seems to externalize the conflict experienced in postlapsarian man, between worldly desires and spiritual inclinations. The intervention of Christ (or Divine Grace) has salvaged mankind and directed him towards the fulfilment of an eternal life, yet the conflict in his will remains.

At the outset of the *Psychomachia* the Virtues and Vices are poised against each other. The outcome of the conflict naturally remains uncertain. The battle, however, starts on an enthusiastic note, primarily because Christ is present in the believer’s soul as the giver of Grace, aiding him to withstand the ‘disorder among our thoughts and rebellion’ which ‘arises within us’ (I.279). In the various battles waged by Red Cross, too, we are never sure of the outcome. Red Cross himself becomes a victim of the ‘disorder among our thoughts’ (I.279) in his battles, and in most of them he succeeds only with divine help.

Interestingly enough, Faith fights twice in the *Psychomachia*, in the first as well as the last battle. One feels as if Faith, despite his initial victory against Doubt, has to keep vigil against dogmatic error (named Worship-of-the-Pagan-Gods in the first battle and Heresy in the last). Even after the last battle, when peace seems to have returned and the Virtues are directed by Faith and Concord to construct their holy city, there remains an uneasy sense of yet another impending attack by the Vices that will call for yet another struggle, in fact an unending chain of struggles.

The battle pattern, then, seems cyclical, the persistent moral combat with the Vices being necessitated by man’s sinful nature. The order of the battles, however, is chaotic. The outcome of the battles may not be linked with any sense of the moral evolution of the soul towards salvation. The various battles, with the several sins, are chaotic in nature because victory over a particular sin does not prepare the soul for the next battle. In fact, the many onslaughts of various sins seems to bear out the fickle nature of man and his inability to resist temptation. The
inherent weakness of the soul seems to permit this invasion. Concord's speech reminds us of the battles the soul has waged and won with the help of the Virtues, and warns us to beware of 'a divided will' which 'creates disorder in our inmost nature'. Her advice is to 'let one spirit shape in single structure all that we do by action of soul and body'. (I.333).

Like Prudentius, Spenser in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* seems to display virtues and vices as concrete earthy manifestations of spiritual realities. In Prudentius, however, the Virtues and Vices are not permanent faculties of the soul (though the soul has obviously been born with original sin): the Vices remain temporary external manifestations of sin, while the Virtues form corresponding manifestations to counter them. Spenser's Red Cross Knight, on the other hand, is a type of human soul that is virtuous though not perfect: Thus he is engaged in a struggle with various vices who are really external manifestations of certain misgivings in his own soul.

The interesting thing about Red Cross is that most of the time, he is unaware of his shortcomings. In fact, Red Cross fails to achieve salvation easily because he himself seems to share certain qualities of the vice he fights. His combat with Error is a long and difficult one primarily because the knight's motivation for fighting Error is rooted in a false reliance on his own physical prowess rather than faith in divinity. Again, in Red Cross's encounter with Sansfoy the two of them are momentarily conflated by the image of the two rams who 'stire with ambitious pride, Fight for the rule of the rich fleeced flocke' (I.ii.16). For Red Cross, then, not only are the battles very real and of serious consequence, but victory in them is extremely difficult. Almost always, his ultimate triumph over the vices is aided by divine grace.

Thus both the *Psychomachia* and *The Faerie Queene*, I feel, are epic allegorical narratives that have an explicitly psychological content. Moreover, not only have moral pitfalls been indicated in them (in terms of the various battles), but the means by which they can be overcome have also been suggested by the poets.

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The Battle Rages On

The various battles in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* may be considered as reworkings of the typical psychomachic battle form. What we have to keep in mind, however, is that apart from the open warfare between Spenser’s knight and the evil characters there runs, woven into the poem, a muted struggle between the two polarities of good and evil or virtue and vice. The struggle is never fought out in the open, but there is a tendency all along for the ‘vice’ characters — like Archimago and Duessa — to demolish the ‘virtue’ characters like Una. This demolition is almost always attempted through guile or treachery.

Interestingly, in the *Psychomachia*, Greed operates on almost exactly similar lines.

‘It matters not,’ she says, ‘whether the prize of victory comes by arms or by guile.’ With these words she puts off her grim look and her fiendish weapons, and changes to a noble bearing. In appearance, with austere mien and dress, she becomes the Virtue men call Thrifty, whose pleasure it is to live sparingly... (I.317).

Greed’s transformation reminds us of Archimago’s changed appearance as a ‘holy father’ (I.i.30) who lives in ‘a little lowly Hermitage’ (I.i.34). As Red Cross is gulled by Archimago’s appearance, so in the *Psychomachia* the ‘Virtues’ line falters ‘for they are misled by the monster’s twofold figure and know not where to see a friend in her and where to mark a foe. The deadly creature’s changing, double form makes their sight unsteady and dubious, not knowing what to make of her appearance.’ (I.319). This is exactly the fate of Fradubio and Red Cross, who unknowingly trust Duessa. Red Cross, moreover, is constantly led astray by the dual operations of Archimago and Duessa, primarily because he is not able to distinguish between friend and foe.

Again, in the *Psychomachia*, even after Greed has been physically killed by Good Works, she seems to make a comeback in the form of Discord. Discord is described as a ‘crafty defender of the beaten side’ who had entered the ranks of the Virtues ‘wearing the counterfeit shape of a friend’ and now operates ‘with bitter treachery’ (I.327). Duessa and Archimago also try to make a comeback and create havoc in the last canto of Book I of *The Faerie Queene*.

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12 I would like to discuss the reappearance of these figures of guile and deceit only after treating of the various battles in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. 

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To go back to the first canto of *The Faerie Queene*, we notice that though the introductory description of Red Cross —

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,  
Y cladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde.  

(I.i.1)

— is deceptively simple, the inherent turmoil in his nature is communicated to us through the description of his horse:

His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,  
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield: ...  

(I.i.1)

Though Red Cross seems to bear the shield of faith and of 'soueraine hope' (I.i.2), we cannot miss the significance of anger and disdain that is obviously reflected in his horse. The point to notice is that Red Cross's pride in himself makes his faith in God imperfect. He is unable to judge rightly, which naturally renders him more vulnerable to error and sin.

The 'wandring wood' is 'Errours den' (I.i.13) precisely because there are 'wayes vnknowne,/.../So many pathes, so many turnings scene, /That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been' (I.i.10). The hideous physical description of Error (I.i.14), her huge long 'taile ... in knots' (I.i.15), referring probably to knots of doubt, and 'Her vomit full of bookes and papers' (I.i.20)\(^{13}\) naturally makes Una cry out, 'Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint:/Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee' (I.i.19). Interestingly enough, Red Cross's reaction is

in great perplexitie,  
His gall did grate for griefe and high disdaine,  
And knitting all his force got one hand free  

(I.i.19).

His mind is perplexed, full of doubts, and he hardly adds faith to force but redoubles his physical strength because his pride has been hurt.

\(^{13}\) Hamilton in his notes to I.i.20 explains 'bookes and papers' as 'published lies or ... learning generally in its opposition to faith'. The last battle in the *Psychomachia* between Faith and Heresy offers an interesting parallel in being a psychomachic battle in which Heresy may stand for heretical writings or propaganda. However, we cannot draw a closer parallel, because in *The Faerie Queene* the reference is to Catholic 'heresies' in particular.
Red Cross finds it so difficult to win against Error primarily because 'error' resides in his soul. However, he finally overcomes her only when he strikes her 'with more then manly force' (I.i.24) and severs her head from her body.

Red Cross battling with Error has an obvious resemblance to Faith who, in the *Psychomachia*, fights Worship-of-the-Pagan-Gods, egged on by 'the sudden glow of ambition, burning to enter fresh contests'; he 'takes no thought to gird on arms or armour, but trusting in a stout heart and unprotected limbs challenges the hazards of furious warfare, meaning to break them down' (I.281). Somehow the ambition to crush Worship-of-the-Pagan-Gods without the protection of 'armour', trusting merely in 'a stout heart and unprotected limbs' (I.281), makes one feel uneasy. We cannot forget that the Virtues of the *Psychomachia* are virtuous but imperfect. It is for this reason that a final battle has to be fought, and 'only when the psyche is ordered in the pure worship of Sapientia can' the temple of Christ 'be well perceived'.

Thus for Red Cross it is not enough to merely double his physical strength. He has to do away with 'fire and greedy hardiment' (I.i.14) and add 'more then manly force' to 'raft her hatefull head without remorse' (I.1.24). Remorseless also is the death meted out to Worship-of-the-Pagan-Gods in the *Psychomachia* by Faith, who 'smites her foe's head down ... lays in the dust that mouth that was sated with the blood of beasts, and tramples the eyes under foot, squeezing them out in death' (I.281).

Una is overjoyed with Red Cross's victory. As we are about to join her in the celebration, Spenser takes us back, with Red Cross and Una as they begin their journey afresh, to 'That path...which beaten was most plaine' (I.i.28). The path of sin, we suddenly remember, is always wide and easier to follow: in fact, a veritable thoroughfare what with

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14 The 'armour' may refer to 'the armour of God': 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world ...' (St Paul, Ephesians 6:11-12).

15 Smith p. 193.

16 Hamilton in his edition glosses 'more then manly' as 'more than human' and says that this expression alludes to the faith that Red Cross adds to his force. I feel this is not merely faith as opposed to the knowledge with which the serpent is traditionally associated (Hamilton, notes on I.i.19), but faith in divinity also.
the number of people that tread it.\textsuperscript{17} We are slowly made aware that though Red Cross has won a battle, he is still on the path of sin and pride. None of the battles that Red Cross wins really prepares him for his final battle with the Dragon. The various encounters should each be read as a ‘self-contained mini-story’\textsuperscript{18} and not as a part or step in Red Cross’s self-realization. Thus it comes as no surprise to us that soon after his encounter with Error, Red Cross meets Sansfoy or Faithlessness.

Despite Red Cross’s recent victory over Error, he seems to approximate curiously to Sansfoy. As Sansfoy rushes towards the knight, ‘prickt with pride/And hope to winne his Ladies heart that day’ (I.ii.14), there seems to be a moral coming-together of the two so-called opponents. This momentary conflation is repeated in the detailed imagery of their battle:

\begin{verbatim}
As when two rams stird with ambitious pride,
    Fight for the rule of the rich fleeced flocke,
Their horned fronts so fierce on either side
Do meet, that with the terrore of the shocke
Astonied both, stand senselesse as a blocke,
Forgetfull of the hanging victory :
So stood these twaine, vnmooved as a rocke,
    Both staring fierce, and holding idely
The broken reliques of their former cruelty.
\end{verbatim}

(I.ii.16)

The combatants are conflated, and as ‘Each others equall puissaunce enuies’ and ‘The flashing fier flies,/As from a forge out of their burning shields’ (I.ii.17), we realize that Red Cross’s motive of combat is still rooted in ‘ambitious pride’ even as Sansfoy’s is. Thus the slaying of Sansfoy does not help Red Cross regain his faith but merely establishes a sexual alliance with Duessa.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} This path may be compared with the path leading to Lucifera’s palace (I.lv.2-3).
We next find Red Cross in the House of Pride with his consort Duessa. Here he encounters Sansjoy. One would naturally expect a psychomachic encounter like that between Humility and Hope versus Pride in the *Psychomachia*. Sansjoy, ‘Enflam’d with fury and fiers hardy-hed’ (I.iv.38), seems a true protégé of Pride in the *Psychomachia*, ‘galloping about, all puffed up, through the widespread squadrons, on a mettled steed which she had covered with a lion’s skin,…as she looked down on the columns with swelling disdain,’(I.291-3). Sansjoy accosts Red Cross ‘burning all with rage’(I.iv.39). But we are surprised at the immediate motivation that led to the battle: the Red Cross Knight’s desire to hold on to Duessa and Sansjoy’s shield. Despite the elaborate build-up that Red Cross receives as ‘The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought/And is with child of giorious great intent’ (l.v.1), we cannot but feel uneasy as we read the actual description of the battle that follows. Both Red Cross and Sansjoy seems to share not only their armour, ‘shining shields’ and ‘burning blades’, ‘The instruments of wrath and heauinesse’ (I.v.6), but also certain moral attributes and general physical build:

The Sarazin was stout, and wondrous strong,  
And heaped blowes like yron hammers great:  
For after bloud and vengeance he did long.  
The knight was fiers, and full of youthly heat:  
And doubled strokes, like dreaded thunders threat:  
For all for prayse and honour he did fight.  
Both stricken strike, and beaten both do beat,  
That from their shields forth flyeth firie light,  
And helmets hewn deepe, shew marks of eithers might.  

(I.v.7)

Apparently the pagan knight is seeking revenge while the Christian knight is fighting for honour. Whatever misgivings we have are quickly dispelled by the next stanza, where the latter is compared to a ‘Gryfon’. It is interesting to recall W. M. Carroll’s association of the griffin with

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20 One could compare Spenser’s Wrath riding ‘Vpon a Lion’ (I.iv.33)

the guarding of gold as an emblem of Covetousness.\textsuperscript{22} We are now left in no doubt that Red Cross is fighting for his personal honour in order to hold on to his spoils.

Moreover, we notice that Sansjoy does not die; in fact he cannot die — a ‘darksome cloud’ (I.v.13) merely makes him invisible — because Red Cross is still very much a slave to his own insatiable pride which makes him seek his enemy ‘with greedie eye’ and ‘thirstie blade’ eager to bathe in the enemy’s blood (I.v.15). It comes as no surprise that he rushes to prostrate himself before Lucifera and offer her his services. Red Cross never seems to learn a lesson. He ultimately flies from the House of Pride not because of the guilt of self-recognition, but merely driven by fear.

Thinking himself secure from temptation, Red Cross merely blunders forth, takes rest\textsuperscript{23} where he should not, rejects the armour of God, and easily falls a prey to Orgoglio. The giant whose parents are ‘the greatest Earth’ and ‘blustering Æolus’ (I.vii.9) boasts of ‘high descent, whereof he was yborne’ (I.vii.10). He reminds us of Pride in Prudentius’ \textit{Psychomachia} who makes a great point of displaying her heroic and royal genealogy.\textsuperscript{24} Orgoglio seems to combine in himself the tyrannical pride of the Devil and the excessive concupiscence of the flesh.\textsuperscript{25}

It is impossible for Red Cross to fight Orgoglio as he is ‘Pourd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd’\textsuperscript{26} (I.vii.7) in the company of Duessa. He seems to be an ideal victim of Indulgence in the \textit{Psychomachia} whose hand

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\textsuperscript{22} W. M. Carroll, \textit{Animal Conventions in English Renaissance Non-Religious Prose, 1550-1600} (New York, 1954), pp. 67, 105.
\textsuperscript{23} One may contrast this rest with the well-earned rest offered to Job in the \textit{Psychomachia} by Long-Suffering or Patience after her battle with Wrath: ‘Him the heavenly one bids rest at last from all the din of arms ... ’ (I.291).
\textsuperscript{24} The similarity between Orgoglio’s ‘high descent’ and Pride’s genealogy in the \textit{Psychomachia} has been noted by Kenneth Gross, \textit{Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Magic} (Ithaca, 1985), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{26} Hamilton in his notes says that the phrase expresses Red Cross’s dissipation: ‘sexually expended and exhausted, he is like the water he drank’.
on them [the Virtues] ... softening their iron-clad muscles and crush­
ing their strength ... their hands, alas! enfeebled, all to their shame ...
... (I.301, 303).

Prudentius had told us earlier that 'it is through the grace of God and specifically the agency of Christ that the soul is enabled to combat sin'. Without the help of divine grace the soul (even as Red Cross) remains abandoned. ‘Heauenly grace’ (I.viii.1) in the form of Arthur ultimately rescues Red Cross, but even as he comes out of Orgoglio’s dungeon his ‘sad dull eyes’ and ‘bare thin cheekes’ (I.viii.41) provide us with an insight into his mental condition, where he is still very much a victim of the evil powers. Thus despite Arthur’s warning ‘That blisse may not abide in state of mortall men’ (I.viii.44) — just as Concord in Psychomachia warns ‘Therefore be on the watch, my soldiers, that there be no discordant thought among our Sentiments’ (I.333) — Red Cross falls an easy victim to Despair.

Red Cross’s so-called battle with Despair is purely on a mental plane, which provides us with an interesting variation from the physical battles fought so far. The knight is beguiled by Despair’s ‘subtill tongue’ (I.ix.31), and his earlier fumblings over acknowledging his own sinfulness are now replaced by a guilt-ridden inability to see any possible goodness in himself. Actually, we realize that Red Cross is at the same spiritual nadir as he was earlier, and none of the battles that he has waged and won so far has prepared him for salvation. Thus it is easy for Despair to miscon­strue facts, to offer a blasphemous parody of the crossing of the river Jordan and the ‘great grace’ (I.ix.39) that awaits Red Cross if only he could overcome ‘the bitter waue’ and obtain the peaceful ‘death after life’ (I.ix.40). Red Cross overlooks the phrase ‘death after life’, which should have been the promise of eternal life after death, and fails to understand that ‘great grace’ should really have referred to the grace offered by Christ through the waters of baptism.

Initially Despair infiltrates Red Cross’s mind with slow, deliberate arguments — urging him, for instance, to live and die by the letter of the law — that convinces him of the need to commit suicide. Suddenly

27 Smith p. 159.
Despair changes his technique. He whips up his argument by changing the pace of his speech. He directly blames Red Cross for his shortcomings and assaults his mind with a ‘hellish anguish’ (I.ix.49). He deliberately suppresses the mediation offered by divine mercy till Red Cross is prepared to take his own life. It is only with Una’s reassuring words that Red Cross comes back to his senses and manages to escape from the clutches of Despair.

The knight, like the Virtues of the Psychomachia, is imperfect. A final battle thus remains to be fought in both the Psychomachia and The Faerie Queene, Book I. The virtues in the Psychomachia can succeed in battle only when the psyche is in a condition to worship Sapientia. Even after six battles are won, the outcome of the war between the Virtues and the Vices remains in doubt till the virtues are able to attain the final mystic vision: ‘until Christ our God comes to our aid, orders all the jewels of the virtues in a pure setting, and where sin formerly reigned builds the golden courts of his temple, creating for the soul, out of the trial of its conduct, ornaments for rich Wisdom to find delight in as she reigns for ever on her beauteous throne’ (I.343).

Despite the several battles Red Cross wages, he can hope to succeed in the final battle with the Dragon only when he has been educated in the House of Holiness where Caelia and her three daughters, Fidelia, Speranza and Charissa (along with Reverence, Obedience, Patience, Penance, Remorse, Repentance and Mercy) teach him ‘the way to heauenly blesse’ (I.x. Argument). The knight’s reward, like that of the Virtues in the Psychomachia, is a glimpse of ‘Hierusalem’:

The new Hierusalem, that God has built  
For those to dwell in, that are chosen his,  
His chosen people purg’d from sinfull guilt...

(I.x.57)

‘Purg’d from sinfull guilt’, Red Cross is now ready for the final battle with the Dragon. The Dragon invites cross-references with Error—‘His huge long tayle wound vp in hundred foldes’ with ‘wreathed boughts’ (I.xi.11), Wrath—‘His blazing eyes,../So flam’d ... with

30 Cf. Error’s long tail ‘in knots and many boughtes vpwound’ (I.i.15).
rage and rancorous yre’ (I.xi.14)\textsuperscript{31}, and Pride—‘Forelifting vp aloft his speckled brest, …/Eftsoones he gan aduance his haughtie crest’ (I.xi.15). One could cite here the description of Pride in the *Psychomachia* where Pride is described as the ‘boastful she-warrior’ looking ‘down on the columns with swelling disdain’ (I.293). The several falls suffered by Red Cross (I.xi.16, 23, 28, 38 and finally 45) show how difficult it is to overcome the formidable Dragon. Sometimes he is flicked to the ground with the Dragon’s ‘long tayle’ (I.xi.16), sometimes ‘Snatcht vp both horse and man, to beare them quite away’ (I.xi.18); twice the knight’s stroke ‘left not any marke, where it did light’ (I.xi.25); and once Red Cross ‘thought his armes to leaue, and helmet to vnlace’ (I.xi.26). One is immediately reminded of an earlier instance when Red Cross had been ‘Disarmed all of yron-coted Plate’ (I.vii.2) and overtaken by Orgoglio.

This time, however, it is merely a thought, and Red Cross, ‘faint, wearie’ (I.xi.28), luckily falls into ‘a springing well,…/Full of great vertues’ (I.xi.29). The miraculous waters revive Red Cross and he goes on to fight the Dragon with his ‘baptized hands’ (I.xi.36).\textsuperscript{32} Red Cross is purified and seems to ‘shine and flash with unfading light’ like the ‘stained sword’ of Chastity in *Psychomachia* who, after killing Sodomy (or Sexual Perversion), washes the sword in ‘the waters of Jordan’ (I.287) in order to purify it.

Yet Red Cross has to suffer one more fall, from which he is finally resurrected by the balm that flows from the Tree of Life. Armed with the grace of God like Abraham — ‘filled with the spirit of God’ (I.277) — it is now that Red Cross finally succeeds in killing the Dragon.

The next canto opens on a note of peace and happiness, of victory and celebration. One could have gone on from the *Psychomachia* : ‘The kindly Peace, her enemies now routed, banishes war … and a civilian sobriety  moderates their quick step’ even as a ‘light from heaven begins to shine resplendent to the view’ (I.323). This picture of Peace and Concord is suddenly disrupted ‘through the cunning of a woeful Evil, to spite and trouble calm Peace and disturb the great

\textsuperscript{31} Wrath’s eyes ‘hurle forth sparkles fiery red’ (Liv.33).

triumph with a sudden disaster’ (I.325-7). Discord ‘wearing the counterfeiT shape of a friend’ (I.327) strikes at Concord. All sense of peace is instantly torn apart and a search ensues for the culprit till she is discovered and ‘rent limb from limb’ (I.329). With such an end, one would have thought that evil was dead. But as one reads the concluding portion of the Psychomachia, one feels that evil cannot be banished forever and that Anti-Christ is not dead, for

> How often, when the plaguing sins have been driven away, have we felt our soul aglow with the presence of God, how often, after these pure joys, felt our heavenly nature grow cool and yield to foul desire. (I.343).

To go back to Spenser, we see that the atmosphere of peace and concord that is spontaneously evoked by a betrothal is momentarily ripped apart by the renewed machinations of evil in the form of ‘A Messenger with letters’ (I.xii.24). The letters are delivered with every sense of urgency, an urgency that seems to have the welfare of the ‘king of Eden faire’ (I.xii.26) and his daughter at heart. The letters reveal a tale of woe, a story of jilted love in which Red Cross seems to have promised himself to another maiden. The letter has its desired effect. The king is visibly shaken and a series of anxious questions are directed at Red Cross. The latter’s defence of himself, backed by Una’s faith in him, ultimately clears his name. Peace and concord are established once again. Nevertheless we have seen that evil has yet again tried to disrupt the atmosphere of peace. Duessa, disguised as a friend, has struck when it was least feared that she would. Luckily the plot is discovered and the messenger, Archimago, is seized by the guards. He is ‘layd full low in dungeon deepe’, bound hand and foot ‘with yron chains’ and kept under ‘continuall watch’ (I.xii.36).

One is naturally tempted at this point to write off evil, to imagine that Red Cross has not only triumphed over evil but that evil has been rendered ineffectual and is dead to all intents and purposes. Yet an unanswered question at the end of Book I stops us and makes us rethink the other possibility. Despite Archimago being so securely bound, an uneasy question follows:

> Who then would thinke, that by his subtile trains
> He could escape fowle death or deadly paines?

(I.xii.36)
The answer is deliberately left in abeyance, because the answer is obvious — even as in Revelation 20:3, though Satan is bound and cast into 'the bottomless pit', it is only for a 'thousand years ... and after that he must be loosed a little season'. Satan (like the Vices in the Psychomachia, or Duessa and Archimago in Book I, or Ate and her followers in Book IV, or even the Blatant Beast in Books V and VI of The Faerie Queene) is never dead; he has merely been defeated for the time being.

Despite the horrifying deaths meted out to the Vices in the Psychomachia or even in The Faerie Queene, Book I — to Error, Sansfoy, Orgoglio and the Dragon — the unwritten message cannot be ignored: a message that says that the battle between the virtues and the vices rages on, only at a different place and a different time.