



The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity

Joseph Campana

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The Pain of Reformation argues that Edmund Spenser's 1590 *Faerie Queene* represents an extended meditation on emerging notions of physical, social, and affective vulnerability in Renaissance England. Histories of violence, trauma, and injury have dominated literary studies, often obscuring vulnerability, or an openness to sensation, affect, and aesthetics that includes a wide range of pleasures and pains. This book approaches early modern sensations through the rubric of the vulnerable body, explores the emergence of notions of shared vulnerability, and illuminates a larger constellation of masculinity and ethics in post-Reformation England.

Spenser's era grappled with England's precarious political position in a world tense with religious strife and fundamentally transformed by the doctrinal and cultural sea changes of the Reformation, which had serious implications for how masculinity, affect, and corporeality would be experienced and represented. Intimations of vulnerability often collided with the tropes of heroic poetry, producing a combination of defensiveness, anxiety, and shame. It has been easy to identify predictably violent formations of early modern masculinity but more difficult to see Renaissance literature as an exploration of vulnerability.

The underside of representations of violence in Spenser's poetry was a contemplation of the precarious lives of subjects in post-Reformation England. Spenser's adoption of the allegory of Venus disarming Mars, understood in Renaissance Europe as an allegory of peace, indicates that *The Faerie Queene* is a heroic poem that militates against forms of violence and war that threatened to engulf Europe and devastate an England eager to militarize in response to perceived threats from within and without. In pursuing an analysis, disarmament, and redefinition of masculinity in response to a sense of shared vulnerability, Spenser's poem reveals itself to be a vital archive of the way gender, violence, pleasure, and pain were understood.

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