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Spenser's Blatant Beast: The Thousand Tongues of Elizabethan Religious Polemic

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Abstract: This article addresses the final two books of the 1596 edition of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, in which there arises a formidable adversary: the Blatant Beast. This monster, whose presence dominates the end of Book Five and a substantial portion of Book Six, represents the worst excesses of caustic and satirical rhetoric as manifest in the theological and ecclesiastical pamphlet disputes that erupted after Fields and Wilcox's 1572 *Admonition to Parliament*. That these disputes were about serious and far-reaching matters is undeniable; it is also undeniable that the means by which these disputes were waged, especially in notorious cases like those of Martin Marprelate, caused significant intellectual, rhetorical, and religious anxiety among combatants and observers alike. Spenser's heavily allegorized presentation of polemic and pamphleteering in the figure of the Blatant Beast—and the travails of the Knights of Justice and of Courtesy in bringing the beast to heel—can illustrate for students the full extent of that anxiety in Reformation England, as well as articulate Spenser's call for the timely application of “well guided speech” as the solution to these reckless disputes.

Keywords: polemic; allegory; satire; rhetoric

1. Introduction

In the collision of the topical and broadly allegorical modes that mark Spenser's method in his *Faerie Queene*, the student of his work finds many opportunities to read his commentary on features of Elizabethan politics and culture. Instructors can capitalize on Spenser's method and follow his example of illustrating moral and ethical concerns by concretizing them in identifiable fictional figures. One of the more puzzling instances of Spenser's allegorical and narrative strategy arises at the end of Book Five, the Legend of Arthegall. Having defeated the great wrong (“Grantorto”) on Irena's behalf, and having restored the commonweal of Irena's island to a form of justice, the Knight of Justice is called back to the court of the Faerie Queene to render Gloriana further service ([1], 5.12.26–27). Upon gaining the “strand” of Faerie Land, he is immediately set upon by two hags and a monster: Envy, Detraction, and the Blatant Beast. This episode, placed at the very end of the twelfth canto of the book, puts the knight and his story in a remarkably unsettled position. There is a surprising amount of discord and even condemnation following what should have been occasion for a triumph. An experienced reader of Spenser would not necessarily find it surprising that any one of the six books of the poem ends with a continuation rather than a conclusion; this is after all the pattern that holds in each of the other books. Arthegall's strange and unaccustomed passivity in response to vicious and even physically disgusting attacks may strike a student as remarkable: he “seem'd of them to take no keepe,” wordlessly passing on. What is more, he “forbids” his lethal iron man Talus from administering what would have been an entirely justifiable chastisement, instead keeping on his original course ([1], 5.12.42–43).

Arthegall's inaction here in Canto 12 can be at least partially explained by Spenser's topical political analysis in Book 5, especially its links to the trial and execution of Mary Queen of Scots

on the one hand and the ongoing—for Spenser, immediately relevant—permutations of Elizabethan policy toward Ireland. In this closing episode of the book, Arthegall is often linked to Lord Grey, Lord Deputy Governor of Ireland from 1580–1582—for whom Spenser worked as secretary and about whom he writes in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (published 1633). In the broader allegorical sense, throughout Book 5 we have been repeatedly shown how the operations of sovereign justice are both necessary and precarious. We are also shown how those same operations can be open to criticism, spite, and envy. In the case of Arthegall and the aftermath of his climactic battle with Grantorto, we are invited to see the criticism literally flung at the knight of justice (see [1], 5.12.39) as particularly unjust, especially given what we ourselves have observed in his conduct. In any case, however, we have to grapple with the fact that Arthegall does nothing in response to considerable provocation. His apparent indifference to the necessity of an active response has an effect far beyond himself and this one moment, allowing the Blatant Beast to spread destruction in the following book; the Beast spends eleven cantos eluding the grasp of Calidore, the knight of courtesy who has been tasked with bringing it to heel.

Students of Spenser might rightly ask why it should fall to the knight of courtesy rather than the knight of justice to subdue this monster. Arthegall has already proven his sufficiency against any foe, especially when paired with the rigor and power represented by Talus, so it is not a matter of ability. It may be better interpreted to students as a matter of relevance: Spenser assigns the Beast to Calidore partially because of the larger design of his “dark conceit,” but also because the Blatant Beast represents social sins or interpersonal wrongs that fall outside or only liminally within the purview of the formal operations of justice. Accounts of the Blatant Beast, especially as it takes a central role in Book Six, therefore emphasize three points: first, that the Beast manifests its power through its teeth and its voice; second, that the Beast’s attacks are aimed at the innocent or the heedless; and third, that the Beast’s range carries it through all estates and degrees, leaving no one secure from the threats it represents. The teacher of Elizabethan history and culture can profitably use Spenser’s allegorical method to examine the link between these characteristics of the Beast and one of the aforementioned features of Elizabethan popular culture: the burgeoning market for cheaply printed religious polemic, particularly Martin Marprelate’s pamphlets and the flood of anti-Marprelate pamphlets that followed in the years 1589–1591. This controversy even in its earliest phases seemed in the eyes of many observers to have gotten out of hand, doing more to regenerate itself than to put theological or ecclesiological questions to rest. Much like Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, written to methodically defang the Presbyterian challenge to the Elizabethan settlement, the 1596 Second Part of *The Faerie Queene* comes along far too late to serve as a direct intervention in the specific controversy to which it seems to refer—but it does show that the discursive and rhetorical concerns highlighted by the brief Martinist pamphlet warfare are very much on Spenser’s mind, requiring a discursive and allegorical response that highlights the social virtue of courtesy as the surest remedy.

2. Fighting the Blatant Beast

In the several descriptions we are given of the Blatant Beast, we notice that its power comes from or is focused on its mouth. We read that it “barks and bays” in response to the provocations of Envy and Detraction, to the point that all the air “rebellows” from its voice. Its “hundred tongues” bray at Arthegall, reinforcing and amplifying the attacks of the hags (see [1], 5.12.41). When reporting the appearance of the Beast to Calidore at the beginning of the following book ([1], 6.1.9), Arthegall describes its “thousand tongues,” and again recounts how it “bayed and loudly barkt,” though he also knows that it was not dangerous to him personally (“I knew my selfe from perill free”). In the final canto of Book Six, when the Beast is cornered and finally turns to fight Calidore, we read the description of its “iron teeth in ranges twaine” ([1], 6.12.26), and the horrors of its gaping mouth:

And therein were a thousand tongs empight,
Of sundry kindes, and sundry quality,
Some were of dogs, that barked day and night,

And some of cats, that wrawling still did cry;
 And some of Beares, that groynd continually,
 And some of Tygres, that did seeme to gren,
 And star at all, that ever passed by:
 But most of them were tongues of mortall men,
 Which spake reprochfully, not caring where nor when.

And them amongst were mingled here and there,
 The tongues of Serpents with three forked stings,
 That spat out poyson and gore bloody gere
 At all, that came within his ravenings,
 And spake licentious words, and hatefull things
 Of good and bad alike, of low and hie;
 Ne Kesars spared he a whit, nor Kings,
 But either blotted them with infamie,
 Or bit them with his banefull teeth of iniury. ([1], 6.12.27–28)

Those “teeth” are described by the hermit in Canto Six as being “exceeding venomous and keene,/Made all of rusty yron, rankling sore,/That where they bite, it booteth not to weene/With salue, or antidote, or other mene/It euer to amend” ([1], 6.6.9). The damage done is certainly real enough, sometimes grievously so.

The Blatant Beast is associated with several figures in Book Six, several of whom refer at least glancingly to what the Beast’s name means. In his annotated edition of *The Faerie Queene*, A.C. Hamilton identifies “blatant” as deriving from the verb “blatter” [2]. His reference points to the OED, which defines the word as “to speak or prate volubly” and provides an example from Hugh Latimer (1533): “Procuring also certain prechers to blatter agaynst me” [3]. Latimer’s use of the term shows what we are supposed to understand, making links to slander, backbiting, nonsense, railing, and generally loose talk. The verb “to rail,” like “snarling” or “biting” or “barking,” words that show up frequently in the descriptions of the Beast, is explicitly used by Elizabethan satirists in the self-conscious revival of the Juvenalian tradition to describe their own tone; Marston’s dedicatory poem “To Detraction” in his satire collection *The Scourge of Villainy* provides the whole gamut:

Foul canker of fair virtuous action,
 Vile blaster of the freshest blooms on earth,
 Envy’s abhorred child, Detraction,
 I here expose, to thy all-tainting breath,
 The issue of my brain: snarl, rail, bark, bite,
 Know that my spirit scorns Detraction’s spite. ([4], lines 1–6).

Almost all of Marston’s terms here are assigned by Spenser to figures associated with the Blatant Beast: it appears beside Envy and Detraction when Arthegall returns from his defeat of Grantorto. It also collaborates with the three brothers Despetto (spite), Decetto (deceit), and Defetto (blame) in the episode where it attacks and wounds Arthur’s squire Timias ([1], 6.5.13–20). Envy, detraction, spite, blame, and deceit all describe malicious uses of language—uses that, significantly, may not be illegal although they would certainly be judged to be wrong by Spenser’s usual ethical and moral standpoints.

The Blatant Beast is also associated with several other monstrous figures within and without the poem. Its presence as a questing beast, with reference to the original meaning of that name, is a clear nod to the monster of Arthurian myth [5]. As a fearsome and even ravenous canine creature, it resembles the Hyena sent to chase down Florimell in Book 3. When the hermit in 6.6 points out that the only way to avoid its poison is to avoid the occasion of its attack, we should recall the encounter between Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, and his adversaries Furor and Occasion in Book 2; Guyon has to learn to confront Occasion, lest Furor should become too powerful for him to handle. Though

Spenser gives us two sets of parents for the Beast, Cerberus and Chimera in 6.1.8 and Echidna and Typhon in 6.6.11, the tie to the canine monster Cerberus and the three-formed Chimera is particularly important because, according to the *Spenser Encyclopedia*, Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* (1567) glosses Chimaera as a representation of the arts of rhetoric ([6], Book 9, Chapter 4) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Natale Conti, “Sphinx and Chimaera” [6].

In the first appearance of the Beast, Spenser only has it make noise; Arthegall knows that its voice is a problem but remains confident that he is in no physical danger. As Book 6 carries us along, however, we recognize that the Beast can do far more serious damage, or “injury”, to all estates and degrees of person ([1], 6.12.28). This is indicated among other things by the progression of the descriptions in that particular stanza: from noise to poison to physical wounding. The middle cantos of Book 6 do in fact show examples of the progression described above, especially with the two attacks on Serena and Timias, a beautiful young lady representing tranquility in the first incident, and Arthur’s errant squire in the second. These characters reveal how the Blatant Beast causes direct and fairly intimate harm.

Serena and Timias, their names indicating their own innocence and native goodness, are wounded by the Blatant Beast in two separate episodes wherein they, like Arthegall at the end of Book 5, think themselves secure. Their self-assurance of their security means that they remain heedless of the danger it represents. The Beast’s attack on Serena—whose name belies how she is made victim in Canto 6—comes after she has been assured of both her own good reputation and her good pleasure; she has been embracing her lover and innocently weaving a garland “without suspect of ill or dangers hidden dred” ([1], 6.3.23). From her wandering the Blatant Beast bears her away in its mouth, piercing both her sides with its iron teeth. The wound proves to be nearly fatal, and would be if not for Calidore’s pursuit; it only drops her to better flee from Calidore because it “durst not abide with Calidore to fight” ([1], 6.3.24–27). Its later assault on Timias makes use of similar language. Timias has been restored to the good graces of Belpheobe, his unattainable love, and finds himself “nether of enuy, nor of chaunge afeard/Though many foes did him malign.” Finding him on a hunt for “saluage game,” the beast both draws him into “danger of defame” and bites him with his “tooth impure” while luring him into the intended ambush by Defetto, Decetto, and Despetto ([1], 6.5.12–20). Though certainly hardy enough to withstand them at first, Timias requires the unlooked-for intervention of his master Arthur before he can put the threat to rest.

In both cases, however, we learn that the wounds caused by the Beast are not easily cured: as both Serena and Timias are caught when least aware of the danger, both of them also begin to suffer from inward corruption thanks to the poison of its “infamy”:

Such were the wounds, the which that Blatant Beast
Made in the bodies of that Squire and Dame;
And being such, were now much more increast,
For want of taking heed unto the same,
That now corrupt and curelesse they became. ([1], 6.6.2)

The hermit who cures them both has to provide “counsell to the minde” to counteract the putrefaction of their “inner parts,” using “fit speeches” and the “art of words” to provide the impetus toward healing that ultimately only Timias and Serena can provide to themselves by right thought and right conduct. In other words, the wounds heedlessly earned must be carefully and purposefully healed from within. Experienced readers of Spenser recognize at moments like this that Spenser’s allegorical frame is pushing us to make some important connections; the Beast has created wounds we cannot help but associate with harmful uses of language—but language must also be used to heal those very same wounds. Unfortunately, the wounds are created with much greater speed than can possibly be brought to bear on their restoration—the latter is a slower process that even the hermit, with all his counsel, can only begin. The completion of the healing work has to be left up to the wounded figures themselves.

Serena and Timias are hardly alone in their suffering, though they are given a starring role in the middle of the book. As Calidore continues to pursue the Blatant Beast, we see that it has also cut a wide swath of destruction through court, city, town, country, and “priuate farms” ([1], 6.9.3) in an echo of what happens when Cupid runs away from Venus in Book 3 ([1], 3.6.13–16). Those locations illustrate briefly both the magnitude of Calidore’s task and the breadth of the Beast’s reach—how it affects all people. As this fictional frame expands to encompass more kinds of people, it can provide a teacher with shorthand descriptions of a political and religious issue that appeared to Elizabethan observers of all stripes to affect everyone. This breadth of range is emphasized in the final episode of the book, when Calidore follows the Blatant Beast’s path through “all estates” in which it has left “massacres,” finding that not even the clergy have been spared. Following this pursuit and its destruction, Calidore is finally able to use his shield to “suppresse, and forcibly subdew” the monster ([1], 6.12.31). Calidore’s triumph is widely praised, and is matched with a fitting restoration of the destruction and spoils the Blatant Beast had caused. However, the book is not done before the Beast breaks its chain to cause even “more mischiefe and more scath . . . to mortall men, than he had done before,” and at which point we see that it has broken free of the poem, victimizing the poet himself in addition to every other “degree and state” ([1], 6.12.39–40). Unlike many of Spenser’s antagonists, the Blatant Beast is not tied to a particular genre, poem, location or circumstance; Error and Mammon are confined to their caves, Busyrane has his enchanted palace, while the Dragon and Grantorto each oppress a specific nation. The Blatant Beast, on the other hand, ranges freely and even promiscuously. Wherever it ranges, it does its characteristic “barking and biting” and “rends without regard of person or of time” ([1], 6.12.40), revealing the very same characteristics that made it fearsome from its first entry into the poem.

Each major adversary in the six books of *The Faerie Queene* is given qualities that are calibrated to reveal the crucial elements of each corresponding knight’s quest and character. The part the Blatant Beast plays in both the plot and the symbolic development of Book 6 should indicate to students of his work how seriously Spenser, writing as a poet and as a political and social observer, takes the challenges of poetic and social discourse. The Blatant Beast is a monster that strikes with biting voice and biting teeth when its victims are least prepared to defend themselves; it is a monster that cannot be fully subdued either by force or by art; and it is a monster whose wounds are given by words and harm more than the body:

No wound, which warlike hand of enemy
 Inflicts with dint of sword, so sore doth light,
 As doth the poisonous sting, which infamy
 Infixeth in the name of noble wight:
 For by no art, nor any leaches might
 It euer can recured be againe. ([1], 6.6.1)

And even when subdued by the operations of courtesy, it escapes to cause even greater harm.

Much of why Arthegall is not the man to subdue the Blatant Beast is implicit in these descriptions of the monster; from a strictly symbolic or allegorical standpoint, it is simply not his task. Every knight is given a quest—Grantorto's defeat belonged to Arthegall—the story must move on. But it is also not the case that the Knight of Justice has no reasonable connection to punishing verbal or rhetorical wrongs. In fact, Talus's handling of the revolutionary rhetoric of the Levelling Giant shows that there is a direct way for the rigorous hand of justice to deal with proud and swelling words ([1], 5.2.49–54). So too does the scene where we come upon Malfont, with his tongue nailed to a post as punishment for his "reviling," and "blasphemy," his "bold speeches," "lewd poems," and "rayling rhymes," and for his being a "welhed/Of euill words, and wicked sclaunders" ([1], 5.9.24–26). With his former name, "BON FONT," not quite completely obscured by his new name, "MAL FONT," he has apparently received notoriety for his ability as a poet, but he also chose some of those words carelessly—or with care for the wrong things. The link to Elizabeth's policies regarding spoken and written discourse is crucial for students to grasp because this is the ground from which so much Elizabethan social commentary arises. Utterances that could be construed as disloyal to the monarch, or to her political and—critically in the 1570's and 80's—ecclesiastical settlement, could and would contribute to widespread social disorder. It falls to the mechanisms of justice, then, to protect and reinstitute that order, just as Arthegall helps set the disordered realms under Radigund and Grantorto back into proper frame once he has won victory by his might. Among the many manifestations of how justice operates, these examples show that it can be profitably applied against disordered language. Yet Spenser recognizes, and uses the sixth book of his poem to show, that courtesy, with its foundation in self-control and its orientation toward social union, provides an even surer remedy to those same kinds of disorder.

3. The Blatter of Pamphlets

Spenser uses Calidore to at least provisionally or temporarily solve the discursive problems represented by the Blatant Beast because he is studying carefully the broader rhetorical challenges facing the English ecclesiastical landscape in the decades following the 1572 Admonition Controversy. These challenges exist in two realms at once. On the one hand, there is the problem of unregulated and even promiscuous speech—manifest most glaringly in the burgeoning world of cheap print—and its tendency to cross boundaries of decorum. On the other hand, there is the problematic relationship between religious belief and practice in the context of political and ecclesiastical conformity. In the pamphlet warfare of the late 1580's and 90's—the period during which Spenser was writing the *Faerie Queene*—these problems are dramatically manifest in the unauthorized publications of Martin Marprelate, and also the various writers hired and inspired to write pamphlets against him.

Though the Marprelate tracts are widely regarded as the most dramatic and rhetorically inventive of the pamphlets supporting the presbyterian critique of the Elizabethan church, and while they retain enough energy to merit a recent critical edition [7], they do represent only part of a varied and vigorous combat waged through the cheap press. It is therefore necessary to pair our appreciation of Marprelate's energetic attacks on the Elizabethan bishops with similarly close attention to the pamphlets written in defense of the Elizabethan church, or at least as attacks on the attacker. The pamphlets written from the establishment perspective highlight the rhetorical concerns inherent in pamphlet warfare in a way that Marprelate, going on the attack and with no reputation or establishment to defend, does not.

Many of the official responses to Puritan provocations—Marprelate's most dramatically—spend their energy not attempting to change people's minds about their theological or devotional

commitments, but instead linking religious conformity to political order and pursuing remedies along those lines. Thomas Cooper's 1589 *Admonition to the People of England*, and the oft-referenced Paul's Cross sermon delivered by Richard Bancroft in February 1589, both official defenses against the early Marprelate tracts, explicitly reference this idea: to make common cause with Martin Marprelate, they assert, makes one not only an opponent of true religion, but also a common conspirator with Brownists, Anabaptists, Family-of-Loveists, and even Papists—all for the purpose of overturning good government and civil society. Bancroft, taking as his sermon text 1 John 4:1, warns that unless we “test the spirits” of the prophets speaking to us, we are at the mercy of “*Arrians, Donatists, Papists, Libertines, Anabaptists, the Familie of love, and sundry other (I know not of what opinion) so many sectaries and schismatics, as that in very deed divers do revolt daily to Papistrie, many are become meerly Atheists, and the best do stand in some sort at a gaze*” [8]. The result is fearful to contemplate. As Thomas Cooper warns in his *Admonition*, “if this outrageous spirit of boldnesse be not stopped speedily, I feare he wil proue himselfe to bee, not onely *Mar-prelate, but Mar-prince, Mar-state, Mar-lawe, Mar-magistrate, and all together, vntil he bring it to an Anabaptisticall equalitie and communitie*” [9]. The political, social, and moral disorder can be clearly discerned in the kind of language used to mock, back-bite, and rail:

For, *Sermo est index animi*, that is, Such as the speeche is, such is the minde. *Ex abundantia cordis os loquitur*. It hath also in all Histories bene obserued, that loose boldnesse of minde toward the Superiours, is ioyned alwayes with contempt: and contemptuous boldnesse is the very roote and spring of discord, dissention, vprore, ciuill warres, and all desperate attemptes, that may breede trouble and danger in the State. [9]

What becomes clear when we read the pamphleteering surrounding and arising from the Marprelate Controversy is that the uproar itself, and its mode of argument by *ad hominem* attack and satirical extravagance, is for many observers more significant than the ecclesiastical matters allegedly under dispute. Cooper's many warnings about Marprelate's tone can be summed up in his comment that “not he that is railed at, but he that railleth, is the wretched man” ([9], p. 41). To return to Bancroft's sermon, his point is the same: when we read the intemperate words, we should recognize the intemperate spirits behind them and beware.

Martin Marprelate is all too aware of the unique possibilities represented by his ability to cause a commotion, and he certainly makes use of his readers' squeamishness as an element of his argument. For example, in one of Marprelate's most famous comments on the notoriety occasioned by his first pamphlet (The *Epistle* of October 1588), he gripes perhaps not entirely seriously that the “Puritans”—the very figures we might assume to be on his side in the ecclesiastical dispute — are angry with him for “jesting”:

The puritans are angry with me, I mean the puritan preachers. And why? Because I am too open. Because I jest. I jested, because I deal against a worshipful jester, D. Bridges, whose writings and sermons tend to no other end than to make men laugh. I did think that Martin should not have been blamed of the puritans, for telling the truth openly. For may I not say that John of Canterbury is a petty pope, seeing he is so? You must then bear with my ingramness. I am plain, I must needs call a spade a spade, a pope a pope. ([7], p. 53)

There is a carefully calibrated vocabulary and appeal to truth here: the jesting for which Marprelate is blamed, by both his enemies and his supposed allies, should be understood as a mode of discourse that is both paradoxically decorous and strenuously truthful. If it violates readers' expectations of how one should deal with such matters, the “indifferent reader” (to whom so many pamphlets are written) might need to examine the reasons for those expectations and whether they are answerable to the requirements of the present moment.

Martin's strategic “jesting” proved to be both incredibly potent for his own purposes and too seductive for many of his adversaries to resist. Having had the institutional heft of Bridges' *Defense of*

the Government Established ridiculed in the first two Marprelate pamphlets, and the moral earnestness of Bancroft and Cooper turned to mockery in *Hay Any Work for Cooper* (March 1589), the next steps were for the defenders of the church to answer Martin “after their own vein” in writing [10]. Anti-Marprelate pamphleteers, then, joined playwrights and doggerel poets in counter-mockery of Marprelate’s mockery. From the standpoint of policy, this seems like it was a necessity if only for the sake of form. Yet there appears to be deep discomfort with the moral compromises necessary to adopt Marprelate’s “jesting” style. In even the most aggressive anti-Marprelate pamphlets, we read the negotiation between the risks of the railing style and the apparent righteousness of the cause of the Elizabethan bishops. In his epistle to “The Indifferent Reader,” the writer of *Pappe with an Hatchet* (1589) is quick to provide a defense of the “undecent” characteristics of the style he has adopted. His discomfort is plain, and the defense implicitly admits moral compromise while also asserting that the “lavish” or jesting style is necessary because of the conditions Martin Marprelate has himself created:

I seldome vse to write, and yet neuer writ anie thing, that in speech might seeme vndecent, or in sense vn honest; if here I haue vsed bad tearmes, it is because they are not to bee answered with good tearmes: for whatsoeuer shall seeme lauish in this Pamphlet, let it be thought borrowed of Martins language. [11]

Martin in his self-defense, and the writer above in his, both point out that the apparent infelicities of their style are entirely attributable to the deficiencies of their adversaries. What results is a proliferation of the *tu quoque* style of argument, each attempting to out-rail the other.

There are plenty of examples in the anti-Marprelate pamphlets. Thomas Nashe uses three gossip pamphlets in the persona of Pasquil, a name derived from a Roman statue associated with satire, to expose “Pruritan” foibles like ignorant preaching. He also taunts them with his customary bravado while glancing significantly at allegations of multifarious sins both lurid and banal.¹ Meanwhile, Catholic pamphleteers like the Jesuit Robert Parsons and Richard Verstegan write that the uproar surrounding this controversy reveals an ecclesiastical polity broken beyond recognition. As Parsons writes in his polemical *Advertisement Written to a Secretarie of my L. Treasurers of England* (1592),

he gathereth together divers particuler, & speciall causes of the troubles, and dangers of her Majestie, and England, whereof the first and principall, and roote of the reste, is (as he saith) the greate and irreconcilable differences, and warres in Religion, not onely with the Catholiques, but especially betweene the protestants, and puritanes them selves, who he saith, are mortall enemies, and would have been longe agoe by the eares together, had not the feare of the Catholique helde them bothe in awe. He toucheth divers of their books written one against the other as *Martin Marprelate, Mar Martin; The Worke for the Cooper. The Countercuffe to Martin Junior; the Owles Almanack; the Pap with a hatchet, or countrycuffe. The Epistle to Huffle Ruffe, and Snuffe*; in which among other things is affirmed, that the Martinistes or Puritans are much more dangerous for domestical broyles, then the Spaniardes for open warres, which this answerer also confirmeth, for that they must needs (as he saith) hate her Majestie, & the protestante Councell most deadly. [12]

The titles he references are not merely Marprelate tracts; most of them are among those we classify as anti-Marprelate pamphlets—and the point he sardonically makes is that the “domestical broils” of the pamphleteers are far more dangerous to the commonwealth than any foreign Papist power.

Small wonder, then, given even this brief sampling, that slightly more removed observers like Ben Jonson and Francis Bacon write disappointed commentaries referencing not only the unlawful presbyterian pamphlets but also the licit, though equally immoderate, responses by the defenders of Whitgift’s and Bancroft’s policies. Jonson’s comment on this ilk appears in his *Discoveries*:

¹ Disappointingly, most of Pasquil’s allegations were promised in what was sure to be a tremendously popular and (given its authorship) entertaining volume called *The Lives of the Saints*. Despite all of Pasquil’s repeated promises, it never appeared.

Controvers. scriptores.—Some controverters in divinity are like swaggerers in a tavern that catch that which stands next them, the candlestick or pots; turn everything into a weapon: oftentimes they fight blindfold, and both beat the air. [*More Andabatarum qui clausis oculis pugnant.*] The one milks a he-goat, the other holds under a sieve. Their arguments are as fluxive as liquor spilt upon a table, which with your finger you may drain as you will. Such controversies or disputations (carried with more labour than profit) are odious; where most times the truth is lost in the midst or left untouched. And the fruit of their fight is, that they spit one upon another, and are both defiled. These fencers in religion I like not. [13]

Bacon's firm admonition against treating the matters of the church in the language of the theater is the most famous comment on the controversy by far: "first of all, it is more than time that there were an end and surseance made of this immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage" [14]. Countering Marprelate's assertion that the harsh style is an indicator of truth, Bacon points out that the harsh style is necessarily destructive in its lack of discipline and decorum. The bulk of Bacon's *Advertisement* repeats and expands on that assessment, casting critical blame at length in both directions.

These assessments are not limited to the rarefied judgments of poets laureate and chancellors; writers closer to the level of cheap print show some of the same concerns. Richard Harvey, brother of Spenser's friend and correspondent Gabriel Harvey, tries to offer an evenhanded warning in his pamphlet *Plain Percival the Peace-Maker*:

Nay no further Martin, thou maist spet in that hole, for ile come no more there: here I pitch my staffe, and stand to vrge thee, with these premises aboue named: thou begannest first, and therefore giue not ouer last. Thy beginning was worst, let thine ending be best. Controuersies be meate and drinke to the people: but doo not cramme them with such gobbets, as may sticke in their throats, least they hang the head on the shoulder, like him that was slaine with an arrow at Tiburn prickes. That is a new kinde of diet, with all my hart. Yet sir, when the steele and the flint be knockde together, a man may light his match by the sparkle: surely, but I thinke tinder be verie danke now adaies, and though it take fire quickly, yet it takes light by leisure: for there hath been striking and iarring euer since, and a great while before, that a learned man some what on thy side, Martin, seemed to persuade that contention for good matters was good: you should haue his words: but that *Græcum est, non potest legi* [Car.] and yet I see no more Candles tinded thē wont to be, but a great many Beacons more fired then ought to be. You shall neuer make me belieue, that many Arguments turne soonest to Agreements. [15]

If we look beneath the aggressively jocular tone, we can see that to Harvey, the "striking and jarring" is at the heart of his urgent concern. What is certain is that the firing of beacons and making of arguments puts the entire commonwealth in a precarious position. Even those readers convinced of the need for polemical defenses of truth—or attacks on heresy and disorder—cannot help but recognize a troubling paradox: books of controversy, or pamphlets of invective, accomplish little more than generating more books of controversy, or pamphlets of invective. As Jesse Lander clarifies in his *Inventing Polemic*,

It is this public quality of "Bookes of Encounter" that guarantees their endlessness, for it becomes common to assume not simply that polemics can be answered but that they *must* be answered. In such a world to have had the final word was considered a victory. Martin Marprelate is not merely engaged in special pleading when he asserts that Cartwright bettered Whitgift in the Admonition Controversy simply because Whitgift failed to answer Cartwright's last book. A printed book, far more than a circulated manuscript, was perceived to require a printed response, a response required because such a document was immediately seen to be attempting to reach a diverse audience, but also because from its beginnings print conferred a certain authority. [16]

Every printed pamphlet calls forth further printed pamphlets, each attempting to answer the former in tone and notoriety, and the reach of the conflict expands beyond the point of any possible reconciliation or resolution. As Joseph Black quips, “a dignified silence appears not to have been an option” [17]. The Blatant Beast is a vivid and active representation of what Lander and Black detect as features of a bellicose discursive mode, and as such can provide a local habitation and a name to crucial but apparently remote Elizabethan rhetorical concerns.

4. The Remedies of Courtesy

Students both of Spenser and of the cultural moment in which he is writing can find in his poem a rigorous engagement with both the matter and the form of what is described above. Spenser finds himself observing these doctrinal and ecclesiastical conflicts—he in fact had personal contacts with several of the parties involved in the conflict, including Richard Harvey and Thomas Nashe—and undoubtedly arrives at the same conclusion most of them assert: no matter the theological or doctrinal motivation behind it, immoderate language is itself a problem, and forecloses the possibility of any meaningful resolution. The repeated use of harsh invective, satire, and mockery can only break the communal bonds that make a church possible in any sense, regardless of the particularities of theological controversy. In the words of Spenser biographer Andrew Hadfield, “Spenser’s religious position is less doctrinal or confessional in emphasis and more based on a commitment to the institution of the church as a means of incorporating the diverse believers who constitute a nation” [18]. Though written as a gloss on the July eclogue of Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calender* (1579), an earlier work than *The Faerie Queene*, Hadfield’s succinct description of the unifying role of the church does illustrate for us why Spenser’s remedy for the rhetorical and discursive destructiveness of the Blatant Beast in Book 6 of the *Faerie Queene* must be the social and sociable value of courtesy, “which of all goodly manners is the ground,/ And roote of ciuill conuersation” ([1], 6.1.1–3). Calidore, the knight of courtesy, is

beloued ouer all,
In whom it seemes, that gentlenesse of spright
And manners mylde were planted naturall:
To which he adding comely guize withall,
And gracious speach, did steal mens hearts away. ([1], 6.1.2)

He is able to augment his natural gifts through close attention to the finest points of his conduct. This serves as the index to his moral qualities as well:

he could wisely vse, and well apply,
To please the best, and th’euill to embase.
For he loathd leasing, and base flattery
And loued simple truth and stedfast honesty. ([1], 6.1.3)

Students should not miss the ethical and affective ties here: Calidore’s simple truth and steadfast honesty here is tied to gentleness of spirit, mild manners, and gracious speech. Whereas Marprelate claims truth as a kind of license to invent new canons of decorum, and in doing so sets in motion the destruction illustrated by the Blatant Beast, Calidore uses truth in conjunction with his native courtesy to please the best and “embase” the evil. What makes courtesy important in this polemical context is that the courteous man is able to speak and act well, even pleasingly, in any circumstance, no matter the degree or status of the persons involved. Because Calidore’s speech is “gracious” and “true,” he—like Arthur in Book 1 ([1], 1.7.42)—manifests the “civil conversation” that is the true sign of the courteous mind.²

² It seems likely that Spenser is influenced in this phrase by Stephano Guazzo’s four volume handbook of *Civil Conversation*, translated into English by George Pettie and Bartholomew Young in 1581 (the first three books) and 1586 (the fourth book). Guazzo’s dialogue places “civil” conversation at the center and as the realization of all of the proper social virtues.

The difference between words that bring healing, like Calidore's or Arthur's, and words that create wounds and division, like Marprelate's or Pasquil's, is reinforced in the person of the hermit in the middle canto of Book 6. The medicine he supplies to Timias and Serena reveals discourse that heals instead of wounding:

One day, as he was searching of their wounds,
 He found that they had festred privily,
 And ranking inward with unruly stounds,
 The inner parts now gan to putrify
 That quite they seem'd past helpe of surgery,
 And rather needed to be disciplined
 With holesome reede of sad sobriety
 To rule the stubborne rage of passion blinde:
 Give salves to every sore, but counsell to the minde.

So taking them apart into his cell,
 He to that point fit speaches gan to frame,
 As he the art of words knew wondrous well,
 And eke could doe, as well as say the same. ([1], 6.6.5–6)

The hermit is able to apply goodly and civil words to overcome railing and poisonous words and the wounds they have caused. In the context of the hermit and the wounding mouth of the Beast, there is another application to be made to the world of cheaply printed polemic and the risks it seems to pose. The Beast has its thousand tongues and many voices, highlighting more than cacophony and unpleasant noise. The thousand tongues, and the many realms through which the Beast tramples, show that its influence is both on and manifested through the multitude of readers well beyond the control of any authority. Put simply, you may be able silence the barking of the dogs, but not necessarily the "wrawling" of the cats ([1], 6.12.27).

One more example can help reinforce for students of Spenser how Calidore's courtesy provides a better solution to the discursive and social problems posed by the Beast. In the end of Book 6, when the Beast is nearing the end of its rampage through all the degrees and estates, it turns to the Church:

Through all estates he found that he had past,
 In which he many massacres had left,
 And to the Clergy now was come at last,
 In which such spoile, such havocke, and such theft
 He wrought, that thence all goodnesse he bereft,
 That endless were to tell.

...

From thence into the sacred Church he broke,
 And robd the Chancell, and the deskes downe threw,
 And Altars fouled, and blasphemy spoke,
 And th'Images for all their goodly hew,
 Did cast to ground, whilest none was them to rew;
 So all confounded and disordered there. ([1], 6.12.23–25)

The church and the clergy stand defiled and defaced, even blasphemed—Spenser provides the latter as an inescapably verbal offense. In the end of the combat between the Beast and Calidore, we even see the beast compared to the Hydra, both many-headed and yet again many voiced. In an echo of the warnings voiced by Richard Bancroft, Thomas Cooper, and even Ben Jonson, the cacophony increases in intensity and scope to encompass physical wounding of people, and then increases even more to the ruin of church and commonwealth. In each case, the destruction of social amity is the precursor and symptom of more severe trouble. The social virtue of courtesy, showing as it does the combination

of so many other virtues, is called on to fix the problems, hence Calidore's conditional victory. His victory echoes the remedy proposed by many who saw the controversies of the church and wished, regardless of their doctrinal positions, that moderate and apt speech might more profitably counter and even overcome the grievous proliferation of vain and destructive speech.

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