



Spenser's engagement with fanaticism asked in different ways whether the fanatic was a wilful agent or a divinely inspired instrument, and whether his countrymen, their readers, or the fanatic himself could tell the differ-

Glossing the defeat of the dragon as a product of Redcrosse's own *doing*, the Palmer has forgotten the role God's grace plays in Book 1. But Redcrosse imputes the act to God. In his transformation into holiness, Redcrosse, or at least his synecdochic hand, becomes both a figurative and literal organ of divine might—the manifestation of God's word in the world and the executor of divine violence as his weapon, 'organ' suggesting both sound and instrumentality.

Readers attentive to Spenser's theology, from A. S. P. Woodhouse to Daryll Gless, often take Redcrosse's correction as a didactic lesson about the theology of grace, a Protestant hero correcting the mistake of a presumably Catholic Palmer.⁵ But more is at stake in this interpretative divergence than doctrinal precision. Redcrosse does more than remind the Palmer that willed temperance is not sufficient for salvation or for the violent execution of God's will. Rather, he insists that he himself was not the agent of that violence. 'His be the prase, that this atchieu'ment wrought' counters the Palmer's earlier attribution of agency to Redcrosse and renders the actual agency of the 'atchieu'ment' ambiguous. 'Wrought' is equivocal in its ascription of agency; it fails to disclose who actually 'wrought' the 'atchieu'ment'. And this line tracks in two directions syntactically. If 'atchieu'ment' is a subject, then the line suggests that the 'atchieu'ment' itself wrought the praise that is due to God. But if achievement is a direct object, then it is the praise (perhaps Redcrosse's own performance of praise in the past) that wrought this 'atchieu'ment'. The grammatical doubleness at once draws our attention to Redcrosse's desire to highlight God's achievement and makes it literally difficult to

might we attribute to Redcrosse the *experience* of 'goodwill'—perhaps the only mode in which his mind, as it tries to recollect its own annihilation after the fact, can register the presence of God—without concluding that that experience implies his will as cause?⁷

Redcrosse's 'atchiu'ment' poses acutely. After all, the poem authorizes neither the Palmer's attempt to demystify Redcrosse's violence as willful heroism nor Redcrosse's interpretation of his own divine inspiration (which has its own equivocations). The reader is left to choose without definitive evidence, pushing Book 1's epistemological concerns, which we thought we had left behind at the start of Book 2, to a kind of breaking point. How can spectators—the Palmer, we the readers—know whether

nal section of this chapter maps the poem's most significant strategy for addressing its own scepticism toward its capacity to conform fanaticism's origins and effects, and to delineate between a genuine instrument of God and a demagogue or madman. This deepening doubt leads to the suggestion in Book 5, the book of justice, that one way to recognise a false fanatic is simply to make a judgement based on his or her politics. Part of a 'pattern of overreaction' that Jeff Dolven has shown structures the poem,¹⁵ Artegall and Talus's encounter with the Egalitarian Giant and his rebellious multitude in 5.2 reveals the poem's self-relexively panicked effort to expel the very questions raised by Redcrosse's instrumental unfashioning. This scene increasingly focuses the poem's fears about fanaticism on the figure of the fanatical multitude rather than a single organ. I will consider the stakes of the political and cosmological project that the Giant and this crew articulate and why they are depicted through the mobile, amorphous figure of the *swarm*, a threat to both allegory and justice.

The word 'swarm' does not yet appear in the narrator's first account of the Giant and his crew, but its figurative implications of contagious collectivity are already active:

For why, he sayd they all vnequall were,
 And had encroched vppon others share,
 Like as the sea (which plaine he shewed there)
 Had worne the earth, so did the re the aire,
 So all the rest did others parts empaire.
 And so were realmes and nations run awry.
 All which he vndertooke for to repaire,
 In sort as they were formed aunciently;
 And all things would reduce vnto equality.

Therefore the vulgar did about him crosse,
 And cluster thicke vnto his leasings vaine,
 Like foolish ies about an hony crocke,
 In hope by him great benefite to gaine,
 And vncontrolled freedome to obtaine.
 All which when *Artegall* did see, and heare,
 How he mis-led the simple peoples traine,
 In sdeignfull wize he drew vnto him neare,
 And thus vnto him spake, without regard or feare. (5.2.32–33)

Echoing a discourse associated with the Anabaptist revolt in Germany of the 1520s, the Giant critiques a world in which political and economic

inequality, so structurally entrenched, appear like natural forces. The Giant's project means to return the world to a state of prelapsarian grace: 'as they were formed aunciently'. The alexandrine sums up the Giant's work, presupposing that the original divine creation formed a world in which 'all things' were equal. Through a collective levelling, the Giant and his multitude can repair or reduce all things so that they return to that original state.

The next stanza works to undo this vision of redemptive revolution. It re-casts the Giant's vision as demagoguery attractive only to the dipterous

In which they doe these many yeares remaine,
 And mongst them al no change hath yet beene found,
 But if thou now shoulst weigh them new in pound,
 We are not sure they would so long remaine:
 All change is perillous, and all chaunce vnsound.
 Therefore leaue off to weigh them all againe,
 Till we may be assur'd they shall their course retaine. (5.2.36)

Artegall's perspective could not be more dissonant with that espoused by the narrator in the proem to Book 5, for whom 'all things else in time are changed quight./Ne wonder; for the heauens reuolution/Is wandred farre from, where it first was pight' (Proem 4). By contrast, Artégall's 'heauenly justice' consists of everyone always knowing his place within the whole, his 'certaine bound'—implying both limitation and bondage. In this way heavenly justice resembles an overwrought allegory, a hyperbolically ossified example of what Angus Fletcher calls allegory's inclination toward the imposition of topocosmic unity, where 'euery one' has its place, remaining fixed in time, space, and meaning.¹⁷ Over-reacting to the

static allegory, and to return the 'commons' to a state of original divine creation. This equalisation is, implicitly, divinely authorised. Both the Giant and Artégall, then, claim to be instruments in a divine plan, one a manager of the unchanging bounds of heavenly justice, and the other a levelling medium for the return to an originary divine creation held in common.

This disagreement between two purported instruments of God recalls Redcrosse's transformation into an organ of divine might. Artégall echoes Redcrosse's language explicitly when he claims that divine agency determines justice:

What euer thing is done, by him is donne,
 Ne any may his mighty will withstand;
 Ne any may his soueraine power shonne,
 Ne loose that he hath bound with stedfast band. (5.2.42)

Artégall's 'certain bound' cannot be undone because it is God's 'mighty will'. Where Redcrosse averred that he momentarily became an organ of divine might, Artégall suggests that every action is reducible to God's agency. The Giant never contradicts Artégall's claim of God's sovereign agency. Instead he disputes the claim that God's will supports Artégall's hierarchical order and conception of justice. While Artégall's erasure of will yields an allegorical world of hierarchical, eternal stasis, the Giant implies that his will has been dissolved into the divine command to reduce

of judgment applicable to both arguments'.¹⁹ Both parties posit but cannot present the divine will that could adjudicate the claims. Neither readers of the poem nor witnesses to this scene, including the crowd soon to be dis-

so lewdly minded Talus found' [5.2.49]), and that seems to justify his violent outburst, but Spenser's syntax leads us, momentarily, to apply

These stanzas represent this uprising as at once concerted and chaotic. First, there is the depiction of a gathering 'tumultuous rout'. The gathering makes them sound like an organised group—they 'all in battell order stood'—but 'tumult' and 'rout' give the sense of dis-organisation and fragmentation, as though their coming together is already a kind of brokenness. This tension—the rout as its own totality and as a series of fragments—frames the narrator's imputation of a split motivation to the rout: first, that they rebel in mourning ('For certaine losse of so great expecta-

be recognized and named, each one is a temporary participant in an act of swarming or

swarming, or potentially for something else entirely. It is crucial that we do not know what they do in hiding.

Joseph Campana has recently argued that images of swarms in early modern English texts, 'of hovering, leaderless collectivities', 'pose a threat to the idea that sovereignty was, whether by monarch or the people, necessary'.²³ I want to add to this a sense of the way this swarm in *The Faerie Queene* registers how a leaderless, vertically in-

Such revelation is meant to produce lessons so that characters within the poem, and readers themselves, can discriminate between false fanatics and true organs of God's will.

Yet the problems that fanaticism raises remain, sometimes hidden, regularly resistant to allegorical discipline. Sometimes the poem is even unsure about its ostensibly authorised instruments of God, like Redcrosse. *The Faerie Queene's* extraordinary representational resources either refuse or do not have the capacity to offer a sure way to know how to recognise true divine inspiration. The poem makes us linger, repeatedly, in the failures of its own didactic project, its own procedures of knowing and unknowing. Spenser's experiments with allegorical verse attempt to do justice to the complexity of the problems fanaticism raises, while calling this very sense of 'justice' into question.

We have seen, with Redcrosse, that the moment when the divine will overtakes the will of a character entirely is at once the achievement of the allegory of holiness and the emptying out of allegory's capacity to analyse and distinguish, a radicalisation of Book 1's notorious epistemological concerns. There is good reason for the Palmer to worry about allegory's power to contain and make use of the extraordinary violence that emerges when Redcrosse becomes an organ of divine might. This is perhaps why the poem never allows us certainty about his status. With the Giant and his comrades, we see that divine violence, and justice's fraught attempt to police it, can have difficult political consequences. The singularity that defines the transformation of Redcrosse can spread to a multitude. Inspiration—even a supposedly false claim to it—is transmittable; it threatens to move from one body to another, to cluster them thickly together in a new 'commons', a transindividual swarm that gathers and escapes allegory and justice. The poem has trouble holding fast to Redcrosse's divine mission and dismissing the Giant's. The irresistible possession of allegorisation allows *The Faerie Queene* to reveal the content and the formal structure of fanaticism, even as the poem works to secure, through allegory, a way to demystify fanatics and distinguish them from those true organs of divine might. In taking the impossibility of discerning the presence of divine inspiration as a provocation internal to his theology and his poetics, Spenser sets the stage for encounters with fanaticism that emerge in later poets like Donne and Milton. Indeed, Milton's late innovations in the tragic poetics of *Samson Agonistes* are perhaps more indebted to the problems Spenser raises than has been acknowledged, especially insofar as his play is structured in such a way as to make possible, and necessary, a meditation on how witnesses

respond to the fanatical violence prompted by '[s]ome rousing motions' in Samson, the origins of which remain unknowable to him and to the audience.²⁵ Spenser is one of the poets who lingers most profoundly, in both the form and content of his verse, with this knowing and unknowing that shape the witness of fanaticism.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, citations of *The Faerie Queene* are from Hamilton's edition (2007).
2. Thomas Müntzer, designated by Martin Luther as the exemplary fanatic, offers this definition in, among other places, *Schriften und Briefe*, pp. 241–63. See Spannheim, *Disputationum Anti-Anabaptisticarum* (1646) and *Englands VVarning by Germanies Woe* (1646) on the long-lasting fear of Anabaptist revolt in England and elsewhere.
3. Spenser, *Faerie Queene* (1590), A 2.
4. Hamilton's note calls attention to disagreements over how to read this pronominal ambiguity in Hale, 'Spenser's *Faerie Queene*', pp. 6–7, and McDermott, 'Spenser's *Faerie Queene*', pp. 198–99. The last lines of the canto recall the difficult cult of such discernment in this violent encounter. The canto ends with an alexandrine that contains a pronoun that could apply as easily to God as to Redcrosse: 'Then God she [Una] prayd, and thankt her faithfull knight,/That had atchieved so great a conquest by *his* might' (1.11.55, my emphasis).
5. Gless, *Interpretation and Theology*, p. 179; Woodhouse, 'Nature and Grace', p. 131; see also Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory*, p. 8.
6. David Landreth reads 'goodwill' here as something external to Redcrosse, as the force that 'replaces his own control over what his hands accomplish with the agency of God.... Redcrosse's mental faculties of "reason" and "will" succeed by effacing themselves into a holy instrumentality' (Landreth, *Face of Mammon*, p. 88). I have found Landreth's analysis clarifying, but it does not account for the ambiguity of Redcrosse's transformation, or the fact that the poem never fully authorises Redcrosse's interpretation as the *right* corrective to Palmer's emphasis on wilful achievement, which I discuss in greater detail shortly.
7. Wegner, *Illusion of Conscious Will*.
8. Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*.
9. Escobedo, 'Daemon lovers', p. 122.
10. Fletcher, *Allegory*.
11. Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, p. 18; see also Escobedo, 'Daemon lovers'.
12. Wofford, *Choice of Achilles*, pp. 276–77.
- 13.

14. In Hamilton (ed.), *Fairie Queene*, p. 714.

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