THE ETHICS OF SATIRE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Erin L. Ashworth-King: The Ethics of Satire in Early Modern English Literature
(under the direction of Reid Barbour)

This dissertation argues for a critical re-examination of the satiric literature circulating in print and manuscript in the years prior to the bishops’ ban of 1599, an order that called in numerous texts and prohibited the continued publication of satires. Drawing upon a variety of genres, from religious pamphlets and prose satire to allegorical epic and verse satire, I argue that the authors writing satire at the threshold of the seventeenth century challenge the ethos of the state by affirming their authority to scourge vice and admonish sinners. In their attempt to reconcile the contradictory aims of reformation and bitter personal attack, early modern satirists authorize themselves with the libertas to rail at a their targets while simultaneously asserting the godliness of their means. Underwriting this examination of the early modern satiric persona is the belief that satire is not a fixed genre or a single form but a plastic mode of literature, infiltrating multiple generic categories and poetic structures at once.

Beginning with a satiric persona freed from the constraints of biography, my first chapter argues that the creator of the Martin Marprelate tracts revises his authorial personae repeatedly to manufacture himself as a godly admonisher of the anti-Christian bishops of the Church of England. Turning in the next chapter to a satirist who embraces the lowness of satire, I examine the literary career of Thomas Nashe, focusing upon the authorial figures of
An Anatomie of Absurditie, Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell, and The Unfortunate Traveller.

In the next two chapters, my inquiry shifts outward to examine the ambiguous effect of satiric speech upon the audience in and of the works. My third chapter engages Edmund Spenser’s conflicted portrayal of satire in book five of The Faerie Queene. In Mercilla’s court, Spenser positions scornful speech as both a criminal act and a legitimate tool of justice. Lastly, I interrogate John Donne’s anxious consideration of his audience in his Satires, where he repeatedly weighs the benefits of the reclusive but uncharitable life of contemplation against the possible infection he risks by participating fully in society.
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INTRODUCTION

The Bishops’ Ban of 1599: Satire, Malicious Speech and Authority

On June 1, 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift and the Bishop of London Richard Bancroft prohibited the publication and sale of certain books, calling in all extant copies for burning. What unifies these books is hard to say; the text of the ban exhibits a rather flexible rule:

Satyres tearmed HALLes Satyres viz. virgidemiarum or his toothelss or bitinge Satyres
PIGMALION with certaine other Satyres
The scourge of villanye
The Shadowe of truth in Epigrams and Satyres
Snarlinge Satyres
Caltha Poetarum
DAVYES Epigrams, with MARLOWes Elegyes
The booke againste woemen viz. of marriage and wyvinge
The xv joyes of marriage
That noe Satyres or Epigrams be printed hereafter

That noe Englishe histories be printed excepte they bee allowed by some of her maisties privie Counsell

That noe playes be printed excepte they bee allowed by suche as have aucthorytie

That all NASSHes bookes and Doctor Harvyes bookes be taken Wheresoever they maye be found and that none of theire bookes bee ever printed hereafter

That thoughghe any booke of the nature of theise heretofore expressed shalbe broughte unto yow under the hands of the Lord Archbissishop of CANTERBURYE or the Lord Bishop of LONDON yet the said booke shall not bee printed until the master or wardens have acquainted the said Lord Archbishop, or the Lord Bishop with the same to knowe whether it be theire hand or no
Jo[hn Whitgift] Cantur
Rich[hard Bancroft] London

Such bookes as can be found or are already taken of the
Argumentes aforesaid or any of the bookes above expressed
lett them bee presentlye broughte to the Bishop of London to
be burnte.¹

Four days later, the bishops activated their threat, throwing to the fire several of the texts they
had collected, sparing only a few. The decree of June 4, 1599 gives modern scholars little
additional understanding of the bishops’ motives, for it comprises no more than a list of
printers to which the ban was sent and lists of texts “burnte” and “staid”:

The foresaid Commandmentes were published at Stacyoners
hall to the Companye and especially to the printers. viz. John
wyndett, Gabriell Simpson, Richard Braddocke, ffelixe
Kingston William whyte, Raphe Blower, Thomas Judson
Peeter Shorte Adam Islipe, Richard ffeild Edmond Bolifante
Thomas Creed, Edward Aldee [and] valetyné Symes,

Theis bookes presently thereupon were burnte in the hall

PYGMALION
The scourge of vilany
the shadowe of truthe
Snarlinge Satires

DAVIES Epigrames
Marriage and wyvinge
15 Joyes of marriage

Theis staid

Caltha Poetarum
HALLS Satires
Willobies Adviso to be Called in.²

The vagueness of the ban has spurred much of the modern scholarship that has endeavored to
piece out the bishops’ motivations and targets. Generally, three different opinions have

¹ Edward Arber, ed. Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London 1554-1640, Vol. 3
(London, 1876), 677-678.

² Ibid., III: 678.
emerged. One holds that the bishops aimed to edify their flock and thereby condemned lurid verse and prose. The most recent expositor of this view is Lynda Boose, who has asserted that the bishops attempted to preserve public morality by regulating standards of decency.\(^3\) Boose, however, rehashes the opinion of John Peter, who in *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* claims with certainty the bishops’ intentions: “there can surely be no doubt whatever” that the bishops were concerned “very largely with obscenity.”\(^4\) Peter, in turn, follows Charles Gillett, who asserts that the ban acted righteously to quell licentiousness: he states that “in the years 1599 and 1600, a number of writings were burned because of their offense against morality.”\(^5\) In contrast to these scholars, Annabel Patterson and Richard McCabe interpret the ban not as a spiritual tonic but as a political weapon used to defend the government from the sabotage of political dissent. In her seminal study *Censorship and Interpretation*, Patterson anchors the bishops’ suppression of texts in a fear that criticism of the government will tear apart the state’s already fraying dominion; her focus falls upon the histories that the ban proscribed because they overtly criticized moral, social or political institutions.\(^6\) McCabe concentrates on satire instead, but to the same effect:

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\(^4\) Peter grounds his argument for the bishops’ regulation of decency in a distinction he sees between “complaint,” which he defines as legitimate religious rebuke, and “satire,” a rebuke which he deems of a more illicit secular nature. See John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 150.


\(^6\) Patterson describes the regulation of the printing press in England as consistently thriving from a “functional ambiguity” that encouraged all criticisms of the state to be veiled in vague and obscure language (8). According to Patterson, if the authors seeking publication complied with this implicit request, the censors, in turn, would look the other way. For Patterson, this symbiotic relationship breaks down with the bishops’ ban. See Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).
according to his study, the ban aimed to quash the rapid publication of prose and verse satire that threatened to undermine the government of the commonwealth. Differing from all of the above, Cyndia Clegg posits that the bishops’ ban was occasioned specifically by the mounting criticisms of the government and the Earl of Essex’s disastrous mission to Ireland.

She conjectures that Whitgift, a friend and supporter of Essex before and during his Irish campaign, issued the ban in order to quell the presses’ topical satire of his friend.

What all of these interpretations have in common is that they suppose the target of the bishops’ ban to be some literary genre or mode that is narrower than what the words of the ban actually indicate, either obscenity (Boose, Peter, Gillett), history (Patterson), or satire (McCabe). While Clegg differs from the rest by reading the target of the ban not as a genre, but as a subject, she falls into the same trap of viewing the ban through equally narrow terms.

While falling out with one another over what the ban proscribes, these scholars fail to address the ambiguity written into the ban itself. At its core, the bishops’ order of conflagration is a

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8 She argues that the bishops’ ban “was motivated less by prevailing attitudes than by particular interest in deflecting criticism of the government during the crisis of 1599—the Earl of Essex’s ill-fated war effort in Ireland.” See Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 202.

9 Clegg overstates her case. She builds her argument from Whitgift’s intervention—which she sees occurring at the behest of Essex—in his previous censorship of Hayward’s *Henry IV*: “Sitting on the Privy Council, Whitgift certainly knew that Essex’s enemies would welcome any further opportunity to think ill of him…If Essex had called upon his friend once before to take advantage of whatever authority he exercised over the press and use it on his behalf, would not Whitgift, unbidden, exercise such authority to help his absent friend?” (Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 208).

10 Debora Shuger acknowledges the ambiguous and ambitious nature of the ban. She claims that the order was “the single most sweeping act of censorship during the entire period from 1558 to 1641” (76). Despite the ban’s obvious importance to her argument, however, Shuger brings it up rarely. When she does, she confines her discussions of it to the commentary provided by the three anonymous poems written in response to it, *The Whipper Pamphlets*. See Debora Shuger, *Censorship & Cultural Sensibility: The Regulation of Language in Tudor-Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
bifurcated proclamation. Most obviously, it is a narrow statement of explicit textual censorship, represented by the bishops’ revocation of specific texts such as Marston’s *Pygmalion* or Edward Guilpin’s *Skialetheia*. The attempt by modern scholarship to unify the disparate texts under a category or genre has resulted in arguments of narrow scope which have attempted to look through a glass darkly, guessing at the motivation of the bishops and the specific target of their antipathy. However, such a view of the bishops’ proclamation is incomplete. More subtly, yet more simply, the ban serves as a broad yet historically specific attempt by the bishops to regulate malicious speech. Reinforcing the authority of the Archbishop and Bishop of London as official licensers of the press, the vagueness of the ban grants the ecclesiastical hierarchy unlimited reach as censors. The proclamation sums up the breadth of the bishops’ power with the all-encompassing claim that “any booke of the nature of theise heretofore” warrants censorship. The ambitious yet indeterminate nature of their demand fixes the bishops’ authority as the arbitrators of legitimate and illegitimate speech. According to the ban, it is the bishops alone who are authorized to decide the “nature” of texts. Condemning specific texts of satire and misogyny and increasing their regulation of whole generic categories, the bishops cast a wide net. By listing texts without the reasons for their censure, they are able to cloak their claim of authority even as they

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11 The bishops’ ban was not the first measure taken by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to censure and regulate speech in early modern London. On June 23, 1586, the Star Chamber Decrees for Order in Printing, executed by Archbishop Whitgift, consolidated the authority to license and censor in the High Commission, re-affirmed the privilege of the Stationers’ Company members as the only authorized London printers, and expanded punitive measures for operators of illegal presses. The text of the Star Chamber Decree reads as follows: “No person or persons shall ymprynt or cauSe to by ymprinted … any booke, work, coppye, matter, or thinge whatsoever, Except the same book, work, coppye, matter, or any other thinge, hath been heretofore allowed, or hereafter shall be allowed before the ympryntinge thereof, accordinge to th order appoynted by the Queenes maiesties Iniunctyons, And been first seen and perused by the Archbishop of CANTERBURY and Bishop of LONDON…Nor shall ymprynt or cause to by ymprinted any book, work, or coppie against the fourme and meaingie of any Restraynt or ordannaunce conteyned or to be conteyned in any statute or lawes of this Realme, or in any Iniuncyton made, or sett foorth by her maiestie, or her highness pryvye Councell, or against the true intent and meaingie of any Letters patentes, Commissions or prohibicons under the great seale of England, or contray to any allowed ordynaunce sett Downe for the good governaunce of the Cunpany of Staconers with the Cyttie of London.” See Arber, *A Transcript of the Registers*, II: 810.
reassert it. That the bishops needed to reinforce their status as the authorizers of legitimate and criminal utterance signals their anxiety regarding the usurpation of such authority by authors popular in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

While all the texts and genres detailed by the bishops in their proclamation—epigram, history, satire and anti-feminist texts—potentially threaten public order and the authority of the Elizabethan government, satiric texts receive pride of place in the ban. The first five texts mentioned by title in the ban are verse satires (four of which were burned three days later). These texts opposed the satirist’s own sense of authority to that of the ecclesiastical establishment, threatening to overturn established moral, social, and political order. Likewise, the texts of the Harvey-Nashe quarrel also posed a threat to the ecclesiastical order. These *ad hominem* attacks supplanted conventional rules of decorum, order and civility through the authors’ ribaldry. While the rest of the works discussed in the ban are outside the scope of this study, they too challenge the bishops’ status as arbitrators of morality: the anti-feminist works appeal to an independent morality, one very much at odds with the interests of the crown, while nostalgic or revisionist English history plays demonstrate the employment of history as a mutable weapon against the current government. The anxiety expressed in the bishops’ ban serves as a powerful reminder that satiric literature advanced a very real challenge to ecclesiastical and political authority in the last years of the sixteenth century. It is to this decade, the high-point of satire’s popularity in early modern England, that I shall devote this study.

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12 As Richard McCabe argues, satire threatens public order: “Satirists have traditionally claimed not merely a talent but a privilege to abuse” (“Right Puisante and Terrible Priest,” 90).

13 To protect the monarch’s authority, Elizabethan Parliaments not only continued the strict Marian statutes protecting the queen from slander and malicious rumor, but also increased the penalty for first offenders. Previously, one found guilty of authoring “false matter, clause, or sentence of slander, reproach and dishonour of the king and Queenes Majesties” would “have his or their right hand stricken off” in a public venue. In 1581,
This dissertation argues for a re-examination of early modern satiric literature in the years leading up to the bishops ban of 1599. Until recently, modern scholarship has tended to treat early modern satire as a tight formal or generic category. Viewed formally, satire is defined by its “roughness” of rhythm and meter, which can occur in either verse or prose. Such satiric roughness is quintessentially English, taken from William Langland and John Skelton’s adoption of the voice of the honest, plain-speaking plowman, sermonizing upon the world’s sinfulness. Viewed generically, satire is discussed as a kind of lyric comparable to other verse forms such as the epigram, sonnet and elegy, but distinguished by its irregular meter, elisions, severe enjambments and forced rhymes. This type of scholarship has tended to view the early modern verse satirist as a reflection of its classical antecedent. The early modern satiric persona is classified as either Horace, Juvenal, or Persius: “the satirist’s emotional state determines his aim or approach to vice: Juvenal’s anger and saeva indignatio erupt in an equally strong rebuke and bitter indignation; Horace’s calmer, more pleasant personality leads to a gentler mockery and ridicule; and Persius’ high seriousness avoid[s] the extremes of amusement and anger.”

Obviously, these two views, formal and generic, overlap. Scholarly opinions of early modern satire have been born from the idea, common in the Renaissance, that satire derived from “satyr,” and that therefore “satire” should exhibit the characteristics of the cranky, flute-playing, half-goat, woodland god. Alvin Kernan’s influential study of the persona of the early

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modern satirist has been key in perpetuating this approach. Indeed, Kernan’s view is not wrong. He avoids the problem of many other scholars, who focus separately upon verse and prose satire, manufacturing a distinction between forms that the primary material does not support. For early moderns, satire is not bound by form or genre. It is a flexible, amorphous, and self-conscious style of rebuke.

Given its protean nature, it is more accurate to refer to satire as a literary mode rather than a genre. Modes, Alastair Fowler argues, contain “a selection only of the corresponding kind’s features, and one from which overall external structure is absent.” Such terminology allows for the inherent slipperiness of satire: according to Fowler, “[d]iversity of form is paradoxically the ‘fixed’ form of satire.” To early modern audiences, satire could be, and was, found anywhere. Common to both verse and prose, satire infused lyric, epic, romance, and drama. Within such genres, satire works as admonition, polemic and complaint, on one hand, and invective, slander and libel on the other.

Spanning the literature of the “long 1590s,” this dissertation takes as its focus a variety of meta-critical moments culled from both conventional satires and texts that treat

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16 Outside the Renaissance, modern scholarship has more overtly embraced the amorphous nature of satire: Northrop Frye insists that only “Two things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor,…the other is an object of attack” (224). Ronald Paulson questions whether or not “satire is anything more than a tone attached to certain forms and subject matters” (4); Fredric Bogel has pointed out the limits of formalist studies, which have not satisfactorily fixed satire. Alastair Fowler’s *Kinds of Literature* insists upon the continual flux of generic categories (45). See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957); Ronald Paulson, *The Fictions of Satire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); Fredric Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982).


18 Ibid., 110.
Drawing upon religious pamphlets, prose satire, allegorical epic, and verse satire, I argue in this dissertation that the authors writing satirically at the threshold of the seventeenth century challenge the ethos of the state by affirming their own authority to scourge vice and admonish sinners. In their attempt to reconcile the often contradictory aims of reformation and bitter personal attack, early modern satirists authorize themselves with the liberty to rail at a variety of personages and institutions. Embodying the tension of his discourse, the satirist aims to scourge humanity for its sins, employing what the bishops considered malicious speech in the goal of admonition: to urge society’s transformation from sin to virtue, the satirist has recourse to such weapons as *ad hominem* attack, name-calling, and mud-slinging. The satirist justifies his violent instruments by citing his goal of moral reform. By doing so, the satirist reinvigorates and challenges early modern debates regarding the moral authority of rebuke, the nature of godly religious speech and the criminality of slander. A dynamic and incendiary mode of literature, satire is never stagnant, nor is it isolated from the larger issues of interest to scholars studying the literature of early modern England, such as identity formation and the ways in which authority is construed and challenged in religious and political discourse.

**Renaissance Theories of Satire**

In his discussion of the history of poetry in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham honors satire as essential to the maintenance of the commonwealth and second in importance only to hymns praising the gods, but defines the mode of literature as fundamentally fallen. Privileging the apprehension of wide-spread vice over the praise of rare virtue, Puttenham empowers satirists with the *libertas* to castigate and reprove bitterly
the corrupt of society. For Puttenham, the satirists’ rebuke of “most offensive” public and private vice makes up the deficit left by the lack of “good civility and wholesome doctrines” in society, likening satire implicitly to law and satirists to lawmakers.\footnote{George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie, in \textit{Elizabethan Critical Essays}, Vol. 2. ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 32.} But, while he recognizes that the satirist’s admonitions of society may be godly assertions of his authority, he admits that the satirist will be hated by those he attempts to reform:

Poets used for that purpose three kinds of poems reprehensive, to wit, the \textit{Satyre}, the \textit{Comedie}, and the \textit{Tragedie}. And the first and most bitter invective against vice and vicious men was the \textit{Satyre}: which, to th’intent their bitternesse should breede none ill will, either to the Poets, or to the recitours (which could not have bene chosen if thy have bene openly knowen), and besides to make their admonitions and reproofs seeme graver and of more efficacie, they made wise as if the gods of the woods, whom thy call \textit{Satyres}.\footnote{Ibid.}

The satirist is licensed to employ “reprehensive” speech in order to urge the reformation of his audience; however, Puttenham acknowledges that his license will not endear him to the people he castigates. Here, Puttenham demonstrates the paradox of satire: while it claims to be born of love and a sense of godly charity, satire inevitably will breed “ill will” in its audience.

Rooted in its compulsion to name names, satire’s tendency to breed such “ill will” is not new to the Renaissance. Linking satire’s reprehension of vice with \textit{vetus comeodia} like Aelius Donatus before him, Puttenham derives his account of early modern satire from “satyr,” a false etymology of the word widely believed until the publication of Issac Casubon’s \textit{De satyrica graecorum poesi et romanorum satira} in 1605.\footnote{For an excellent summary of the chronologies of Satire, Old and New Comedy, see Oscar James Campbell, \textit{Comical Satyre and Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida} (San Marino, California: Huntington Library Press, 1959), 24-40.} Donatus imagines
that the vitriolic Old Comedy was suppressed because its writers “abused their freedom so scandalously that they had to be restrained” from condemning specific individuals for their private vices.\textsuperscript{22} While for Donatus, satyre was created from the ashes of Old Comedy, Puttenham reverses Donatus’s chronology, attributing the transformation of the more dogmatic Satyre to the more festive Old Comedy. According to Puttenham’s version of events, the format changed from satire’s preference for the grave sermon to comedy’s lively and jocular dialogue, but the author’s employment of malicious speech largely carried over to the new form. As before, the actors remained disguised, “for feare of quarrel & blame,” while they violently reproved their audience members for their sins.\textsuperscript{23} Thomas Lodge, writing before Puttenham, likewise insists upon the obscurity of the actor’s and author’s persons and the malice of their speech: “they presented the lives of Satyers, so that they might wiselye, under the abuse of that name, discover the follies of many theyr foolish fellow citzens.”\textsuperscript{24} While Puttenham and Lodge insisted that the first satirists demonstrated their godliness physically, donning disguises to assure their audiences of their authority—“they made wise as if the gods of the woods”—early modern satirists did not have the recourse to such obvious physical indicators. Rather, they attempted to justify repeatedly their art’s godliness through demonstrations of their moral character.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Quoted in Campbell, \textit{Comicall Satyre}, 24.

\textsuperscript{23} Puttenham, \textit{The Arte of English Poesie}, 33-34.


\textsuperscript{25} Perhaps looking forward to his future publications, Thomas Lodge laments the lack of satire, asserting that, in Rome, men like Horace “kept men in awe” and “restrain’d unbridled cominaltie” through satire and comedy. London, lacking satire, lacks discretion: “Yea, would God our realme could light upon a Lucilius; then should the wicked bee pointed out from the good” (81). Later in the same tract, Lodge more specifically attacks Stephen Gosson, arguing “if we had some Satericall Poetes nowe a dayes to penn our comedies, that might be admitted of zeale to discypher the abuses of the worlde in the person of notorious offenders, I knowe we should wisely ryd our assemblyes of many of your [puritan] brotherhood” (82).
As early modern satirists attempted to underscore the righteousness of such vehement rebuke of sin, the ethics of employing malicious speech in a godly cause remained unclear, depending largely upon the particulars of the situation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of John Donne. Looking back on his own satiric career several years later as the Dean of Saint Pauls, Donne articulates his own ambivalent relationship with satire. For Donne, the efficacy of the satiric enterprise largely hinges upon the righteousness of the satiric persona. While “a malicious man will turne a Sermon to a Satyre, and a Panegyrick to a Libel,” a holy man, filled with the gentleness and love of the holy spirit “makes a Satyr, and Slander, and Libell against me, a Panegyrique, and an Elogy in my praise.”

Godliness transforms slander to praise; conversely, a lack of godliness debases sober speech to the status of libelous trash. Indeed, the ethics of satire in early modern England would seem to be highly negotiable.

**The Whipper Pamphlets: The Satirist and His Critics**

Immediately after the bishops had announced their prohibition on malicious speech and rounded up the works of some of the offenders for burning, a pamphlet emerged from the printing press championing the bishops’ rejection of satire. Attributed now almost universally to John Weever, *The Whipping of the Satyre* criticizes satire as a seditious, unchristian and ineffective usurpation of the authority of the bishops, magistrates and even...

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27 Later, Donne seems to assert a less conflicted opinion regarding the moral validity of satiric rebuke, accusing satirists of sinful hypocrisy. Against the common claim that the satirist is compelled by a Christian sacred duty to castigate the vice he discovers around him (a claim he himself implies in his own satires), Donne charges satirists with making the times worse with their malicious speech: “We make Satyrs; and we looke that the worlde should call that wit; when God knowes, that that is in a great part, self-guiltinesse, and we doe but reprehend those things, which we our selves have done, we cry out upon the illnesse of the times, and we make the times ill” (Ibid., VII: 408).
the Queen herself. Coming at the end the century, Weever’s condemnation of the satirists is largely representative of the arguments used against satire in the decade leading up to the bishop’s proclamation. *The Whipping of the Satyre*, as well as the replies it elicited, serves as a good example of the difficulty of defining, and therefore criticizing satire.

Weever’s text represents the problem inherent in the polemical rebuke of satire. Like the critics of satire before him, Weever builds his case against unlawful speech by attacking the satirists’ lack of moral authority, calling upon both religious and civil arguments to champion the bishops’ actions. His methods, however, do not differ markedly from those he castigates. Weever appears less interested in reforming the English population than in attacking satire with satire. He demonstrates his relish for poetic flyting, matching the satirist low-blow for low-blow. Throughout his condemnation, Weever attempts to balance his general criticism of abusive speech with his particular topical satire of his literary enemies. Positioning his targets as straw-men, Weever’s choices are not without personal motivation: he blasts all malicious speech, but in particular, he picks out John Marston, England’s Juvenal, as his representative satirist, Edward Guilpin as the ungodly epigrammatist, and

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28 It is uncertain whether Weever ran afoul of the very censures who had previously condemned satire to the fire; most likely, Weever simply and opportunistically aimed to distance himself from the condemned texts while simultaneously cashing in on a popular trend.


30 Marston is almost universally regarded as a Juvenalian satirist—a distinction he himself seemed to foster: he mimics Juvenal’s *saeva indignatio* and his compulsion to satirize. In *Scourge of Villanie*, particularly, he resembles the biting satirist: he models his second satire on Juvenal’s second, while he mimics Horace more in his third satire, taking his epigraph from Horace’s satire II.viii. Even in that satire, however, he ends by affirming his likeness to Juvenal: “Nay, shall a trencher slave extenuate, / Some Lucrece rape? ... Whilst my satyrick vaine / Shall muzzled be … No gloomie Juvenall, / Through to thy fortunes I disastrous fall” (III, 191-196). See Arnold Davenport, ed., *The Poems of John Marston* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961).
lastly, Ben Jonson as the inappropriate and licentious humorist. The two responses to Weever’s pamphlet, Nicholas Breton’s *No Whippinge, nor trippinge, but a kinde and friendly Snippinge* and Edward Guilpin’s *The Whipper of the Satyre his Pennance in a white Sheete*, represent the two options available for poets attempting to counter such polemic. *No Whippinge*, issued two months before Guilpin’s reply, earnestly calls for peace, whereas *The Whipper of the Satyre* vehemently calls for violence.

Taken collectively, *The Whipper Pamphlets* present a conflicted portrayal of the satirist’s motivation and the righteousness of his means. Writing first, Weever attacks the malicious language of the satirist, epigrammatist and humorist on religious and civil grounds (distinguishing his three targets only by the form in which they write: verse satire, short epigram, and satiric drama, respectively). Writing next, Breton calls out Weever and the satirists, epigrammatists and other authors more interested in perpetuating literary feuds than in mending England’s sinfulness. Writing last, Edward Guilpin insists upon the morality of his satiric art, condemning Weever for his ungodly acceptance of the follies and corruptions of the world.

In *The Whipping of the Satyre*, Weever attacks the godliness of the satirist, contradicting the conventional protestation that satire is motivated by Christian duty by accusing the satirist of vindictively spewing choler onto his targets. According to Weever, the satirist abuses the power of admonition. Opposing the satirist’s typical scriptural justification that he “hates the sin, but loves the sinner,” Weever posits that the satirist’s anger and hatred of men makes him worse than his targets:

> The world growes old, & age growes froward stil,  
> With gentlest speech it therefore should be won,

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31 These identities have been almost universally accepted since Arnold Davenport argued for them in his Introduction to his edition of *The Whipper Pamphlets*. 

14
It’s sore with sinne, and sinne swell sorer will:  
Yet stead of balme, he powers out blame thereon:  
With filthie rancour still he vomits out  
The poisoned malice of his spitefull thought.  

Amid the moral decay of the world around him, the satirist’s tools are not medicinal, but rather spiteful: instead of healing his target’s sin with the balm of reformation, the satirist offers blame, filth, anger, vomit, poison and malice. According to Weever, the satirist rails against offenders, his true motive arising not from charity, but from malicious anger: “Malice did twist what discontent had sponne, / (For malice always doubles discontent) / Anger drew out what malice double twonne, (For anger still unfoldeth bad intent)” (I: 565-568). The satirist suffers from discontent twisted by malice to a sinful anger. Weever’s condemnation of satiric anger cannot be taken as gospel, however. Beyond the simple fact that he employs the very methods he admonishes here—as Nicholas Breton would admonish later, “he that is possessed with despight, / Shewes but a wicked kinde of instigation”—the godliness of satiric speech was not then, nor is it now, monolithic. While Breton would urge his poetic audience to err on the side of charity, to “Winke at each faulte & wish it were amended” (II: 146), Edward Guilpin, the author of the satiric answer to Weever’s *The Whipper of the Satyre his Pennance*, affirms the charity and godliness of even violent rebuke:

> [Preachers] may command as God commandeth them  
> But we will do our willes: Why? we are men. […]  
> Is this our life? then whip each other well,  
> Better to be whipt on Earth, then scourg’d in Hell.  

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For Guilpin, the innate sinfulness of humanity justifies even brutal satire. Breton, conversely, dismisses the value of satiric language in reformation, arguing “It is a course of little charitie, / To finde out faults and fall upon them so” (II: 281-282). While one argues for the permissiveness and even charity of satire in a godly cause, the other dismisses it as unchristian.

Not content to disavow satire as only unchristian, Weever also denounces it as seditious. In *The Whipping of the Satyre*, Weever accuses the satirist, epigrammatist, and humorist of undermining the authority of the state through their slander. Once he is able to divorce satire from its goal of reformation, Weever is able to relegate it to mere defamation, making satire synonymous with slander and libel. Admonishing his targets for their railing satires, Weever likens the crime of the satirists with that of libeling the state:

Was not one hang’d of late for libeling?
… you deserve the same:
For you before whole volumes foorth did bring,
And whome you pleas’d, did liberally defame.
For shall we his by right a Libell call,
That toutcht but some? not yours, that aym’d at all? (I: 331-336)

Satire is positioned in this passage not as a measure of correction, but as a criminal speech act punished by hanging. Etymologically speaking, Weever is not wrong to associate satire with slander. Like satire, slander is difficult to codify. Linked etymologically with “scandal,” slander is defined by the OED in a way that makes it almost synonymous with satire: “Discredit, disgrace, or shame, incurred by or falling upon a person or persons, esp. on account of some transgression of the moral law, unworthy action, or misdemeanour.”

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35 Potentially referring to the new, stricter punishment of first-time offenders found guilty of libeling the Queen’s majesty. See note, page 7.

36 While for moderns, slander represents “a false accusation which results in the humiliation of its victim,” for early moderns, slander was more slippery of a term, not necessarily denoting a false accusation. M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.
their core, slander and satire both intend to injure a person or institutions’ ethical credibility, either in the cause of reform or for the sake of mere defamation.

Here more than anywhere else in the work, Weever replicates the voice of the bishops’ ban, installing himself, as they did, as the judge of legitimate and illegitimate speech. He accuses the satirist, epigrammatist and humorist of usurping the moral authority of the magistrates, bishops and even Queen Elizabeth, herself. 

Weever’s sustained portrait of the satirist’s lack of moral authority indicates the danger posed by such a challenge and the perceived righteousness of the bishops’ actions. He admonishes the satirist for overstepping his reach:

Our noble Princesse (Lord preserve her Grace)  
Made godly lawes to guide this Common-weale,  
And hath appointed Officers in place,  
By those her Lawes with each offence to deale:  
Well looke the rowles, no office overskippe,  
And see if you can finde the Satyrshippe.  
If not, dare you usurpe an office then,  
Without the licence of her Majestie,  
To punish all her Subjects with the pen,  
Against the Law of all Civilitie? (I: 577-586)

On a simple narrative level, Weever poses a jurisdictional argument, appealing to the uses of licenses and royal privileges that must be in place before an Elizabethan citizen could be appointed as a magistrate or officer. On a deeper level, the satirist’s offense is more of a threat than a simple jurisdictional crime would dictate: the satirist violates public order by usurping “an office” with his satire. Weever’s opposition of the panegyric to Queen Elizabeth in the opening lines of his portrait and his criticism of the satirist that immediately follows demonstrates the flimsy nature of such constructed authority. For Weever, as well as for the bishops, the satirist’s very existence threatens the order and peace of the realm. Weever continues, elaborating upon the specific crimes of the satirist:
I have him up, tis pettie treason all,
And therefore feare to breake his necke this fall. …

Thinking (O heavens) his vild injurious speech
Will Princes lawes, lawes Justice over-reach. …

As though the vapour of his windfull words,
Would blow up vices of their own accord. (I: 589-590, 593-594, 599-600)

Returning to the image of the punished body of the satirist, Weever associates the satirist’s usurpation of the moral laws of the land with treason and injustice. Moving beyond his initial jurisdictional argument, Weever indicts the satirist first for his “injurious speech” that dares to “over-reach” the Princes’ laws, and then for his prideful assumption that he will succeed where the laws of the land failed. Weever portrays the regulation of legitimate and illegitimate speech as essential to the maintenance of the peace of the commonwealth. Oddly, both Breton and Guilpin are silent against this charge. Guilpin answers the broader indictment of treason by repeatedly asserting his compulsion to satirize, attempting to build his moral authority through his discovery of vice while affirming his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth.

**Chapter Summaries**

This dissertation examines the various strategies of satiric speech produced in the years leading to the bishops’ ban of 1599, beginning with the Marprelate controversy (1588-1589). The span of the “long 1590s” offers an important synecdoche from which to analyze the plasticity of early modern satire and the satirist. Scanning various literary genres, I have organized this project with an eye toward the changing locus of contradiction. In my initial chapters, I analyze the authorial constructions of the satiric persona in the tracts of Martin Marprelate and Thomas Nashe, examining the ways in which these authors construct moral
authority. Then, in the second half of the dissertation, I turn outward to interrogate the satirist’s effect on society. Within chapter three, I study the state’s responses to and adoption of the satiric voice in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, and in chapter four, I explore John Donne’s conflicted investment in his readers’ salvation. As the satirist both shapes his discourse and is shaped by it, this dissertation speaks to larger issues involving how meaning is construed—and potentially misconstrued—and how such interpretation forms authorial and satiric identity.

My first chapter analyzes the fictional persona of “Martin Marprelate,” the anonymous Puritan satirist who scourged the ecclesiastical order of the Church of England. In this chapter, I argue that the constructed fiction of “Martin Marprelate”—at once a reformer akin to Martin Luther and a satirist threatening to “mar-a-prelate”—highlights the essential duality of satire’s goals: reformation and attack. Attempting to put satire in the direct service of religion, the authorial construction of “Martin Marprelate” challenges the strictures imposed upon religious discourse through his mixture of secular *ad hominem* attack and scriptural rebuke. Over the series of his seven satires, Marprelate self-consciously attempts to defend himself against the charge of immodest jest that characterized his first, ill-received publication, gradually revising his satiric persona to accommodate a scriptural model of Pauline rebuke. These ever-changing and self-correcting satires serve as a sharp reminder that we cannot speak of Elizabethan orthodoxy in belief and discourse as though it were monolithic; like satire, the grounds of orthodoxy are unstable and contested.

Turning to a satiric mask that embraces the “lowness of satire,” I argue in my second chapter that Thomas Nashe adapts the pose of the prodigal son throughout his career in order to interrogate the profit of his critical task. Although Nashe begins his career confident in the
ability of admonition to elicit reformation, publishing the heavily didactic *Anatomie of Absurditie* to chastise Londoners for their licentious ways, he soon abandons this voice of authority. In *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil*, Nashe assumes the very pose he had previously condemned, refusing to justify his satiric supplication or his lack of moral authority as a satirist. Through the mask of Pierce, Nashe defends prodigality as a means of achieving Aristotelian discretion: “*Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*: that villainy we have made no assaies in, we admire.” 37 This constructed persona enables Nashe to advise his readers to indulge in vice, but, in turn, questions the effectiveness of the rebuke he would administer. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Nashe pushes the flexibility of satire to a breaking point, adopting the mask of the prodigal in order to divorce satire from its undeliverable promises of reformation. As Jack Wilton, Nashe mocks satire’s ability to cleanse the world of sin, conceiving of his own text as a narration of knavery, with little profit or edification.

Next, I examine book five of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, focusing my sights on the Malfont episode immediately preceding the trial of Duessa. In this chapter, the locus of contradiction moves from the constructed mask of the satirist to the state’s responses to satire. Here, I argue that Spenser portrays Malfont—the only self-titled poet in *The Faerie Queene*—as a satirist who publishes “rayling rymes” against the monarch Mercilla, a queen who nails the poet’s tongue to a post for his crime. A decidedly negative example of the satirist, Malfont is not the only character linked with satire in canto nine, however. Like a satirist, the prosecutor Zele hunts out and reveals the hidden vices of the state, closing the gap between himself and Malfont. A common characteristic of the early modern satirist, zeal operates in the liminal space between righteous indignation and uncharitable scorn.

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close proximity of two such seemingly opposite allegories questions the righteousness of employing satire in the service of secular justice, specifically problematizing the state’s co-option of the “dissident” mode.

I argue in my fourth chapter that while three of the most well-known lyric satirists—Joseph Hall, John Marston and John Donne—all view satire as the most utilitarian literary mode, only Donne attempts to recuperate the mode to put it to work. Demonstrating in his *Satires* his spiritual responsibility as a Christian poet to help cleanse a corrupt society of sin, Donne applies satire in order to urge his readers to seek truth and reformation. He recognizes that his choice of cure may result in his soul’s contamination, however. Throughout his satires, Donne struggles to reconcile the need for charity with his desire to preserve his soul by retreating from such moral infection. In his attempt to balance the active life of participation and the contemplative life of meditation, Donne must limit the effectiveness of satire. Restricting the availability of his satires to his manuscript coterie, and later, to an even more intimate correspondence with close friends, Donne circumscribes his goal of reformation to include only those wise readers who “esteem [his] writs Canonick.”

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CHAPTER ONE

“Raylers shall not in herit the Kingdome of God” : Martin Marprelate and the Negotiation of Godly Rebuke

Most broadly, the seven texts of Martin Marprelate tackle the politically dangerous topic of the power and biblical authority of the Church of England’s episcopal hierarchy in 1588 and 1589. In October 1588, a tract with the cumbersome title *Oh read over D. John Bridges / for it is a worthy worke: or An epitome of the fyrste Booke of that right Worshipfull volume / written against the Puritanes in the defence of the Noble cleargie…Compiled for the Behoofe and overthrow of the Parsons / Fyckers / and Currats / that have lernt their Catechismes and are past grace: by the reverend and worthie Martin Marprelate gentleman and dedicated to the Confocationhouse* appeared in London, and promised to mock the bishops into a serious consideration of reformation. A month later, *The Epitome* appeared, with an identical title page and a similarly mocking oration to John Bridges, the Dean of Sarum. Through the author’s use of ridicule and *ad hominem* attack, the two tracts claim that the hierarchy of the Church of England has no root in Scripture and is detrimental to England as a whole. Martin Marprelate continues to denounce the bishops’ government with five more tracts, namely, the broadside *The Mineral and Metaphysical School-points* (March

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39 John Whitgift, *A most godly and Learned Sermon, Preached at Pauls Cross*, 17 November 1583.

40 Cited hereafter as *The Epistle.*
1589), his largest tract *Hay Any Worke for Cooper* (March 1589) and then, in quick succession, *Theses Martinianae* (July 1589), *The Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior* (July 1589), and finally, *The Protestatyon* (September 1589).

The scholarly debates surrounding the seven satiric tracts penned under the name “Martin Marprelate” are numerous, offering more questions than answers, more complications than easy solutions. The most obvious questions relate to the history of the controversy itself: who was the elusive polemicist who taunted the bishops under the witty pseudonym? Why did the author claiming to be Marprelate appear so quickly after the victory over the Spanish Armada and then, just as inexplicably, disappear from sight less than a year later, only to be reinvented in the years leading to the English Civil War? These questions have riveted scholars of history, religious studies and literature alike, tempting would-be sleuths into seductive theories of authorship and suppositions involving the highest members of Elizabeth’s court and well-known Puritan reformers.41 As seductive as the questions of authorship may be, the four-hundred year mystery has not been conclusively solved, despite the work of many capable scholars.

Equally puzzling to the biographical identity of the tracts author(s) is the authorial fiction fashioned by the mysterious pamphleteer. This chapter intends to argue that the polemicist claiming to be Martin Marprelate constantly revises his dynamic authorial fiction throughout his tracts, refiguring his voice and persona to fit his ends of attack and reformation. With each tract issued, Marprelate’s authorial fiction evolves. He slowly exerts

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41 According to Leland H. Carlson, at least 23 people contributed to the tracts, including Job Throkmorton (heavily favored by Carlson and the Elizabethan inquisitor Matthew Sutcliffe as Martin Marprelate); the Welsh minister John Penry (the answer according to Donald J. McGinn and a favorite choice by many Elizabethans); the Puritan minister John Udall (who died in prison on suspicion of being the author); the Separatist Henry Barrow (the unlikely choice of Henry M. Dexter: Barrow was in the Fleet prison while the pursuivants ransacked the English countryside looking for Marprelate); and lastly, the Welsh layman Sir Roger Williams (the choice of J. Dover Wilson). See Leland H. Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman: Master Job Throkmorton Laid Open in his Colors* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1981), 21-27.
more control over his voice and arguments, managing to balance more appropriately the sometimes contradictory goals of his polemic. He negotiates the tensions of satire first by incorporating the work of previous reformers, then by increasing his citations from scriptural authority, and later by manufacturing filial support, that of his sons “Martin Junior” and “Martin Senior.” Over the course of his seven satires, Martin Marprelate self-consciously defends himself against the charge of immodest jest that characterized his first, ill-received publication, transforming his voice and his arguments to accommodate a scriptural model of Pauline rebuke. At the close of the Martin Marprelate controversy—occurring only a short year after the first tract appeared—Marprelate has learned to put satire in the direct service of religion.

In his first tract, The Epistle, Marprelate relies almost exclusively upon secular *ad hominem* attack and ridicule to damage the reputation of Archbishop Whitgift and his churchmen. Justifying his satire of the bishops through precedent, Marprelate fashions himself according to the model of religious polemic outlined by the tracts of the Admonition controversy fought a decade earlier: he styles himself the legitimate heir of the epistolary skirmish between the “upstart” Puritans and the “unyielding” bishops, co-opting the language of rebuke found in the anonymous *First and Second Admonitions to the Parliament* and Thomas Cartwright’s *Replyes* to John Whitgift. Unfortunately for Marprelate, this first tract was received with bitter antipathy by the very people he aimed to champion. Chastising Martin Marprelate’s use of satire and *ad hominem* attack, several Puritan leaders distanced themselves from the polemicist, who, they believed, had compromised the dignity of the reformation with his vitriolic means.
In his next tracts, *The Epitome* and *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*, Marprelate responds to the criticisms levied against him by revising his persona to portray a more godly model of rebuke. Marprelate adapts his voice to the example of admonition outlined by the Apostle Paul in his Epistles. However, Marprelate does not merely parrot Pauline doctrine; rather, he transforms Paul to accommodate his contemporary need for ecclesiastical reformation, ousting the bishops from power through Paul’s descriptions of the ideal ecclesiastical officers. He adjusts Paul’s imperative to Timothy in the Second Epistle, “Preach the worde: be instant, in season and out of season: improve, rebuke, exhorte with all long suffering and doctrine” to make room for even violent moral correction.

In his later tracts, *Theses Martinianae* and *The Just Censure and Reproofe*, the author of the Marprelate tracts constructs two additional voices to embody dramatically the tension between the purveyors of satiric attack and the supporters of religious circumspection. Through these new, independent personae, the author more fully interrogates the legitimacy of satiric means in the urging of reformation. Fleshing out his authorial fiction into separate individuals, the author of the tracts positions Marprelate’s two sons “Martin Junior” and “Martin Senior” as embodiments of contention and sobriety, respectively. While Martin Junior is portrayed as the more froward youth, immature and contentious, Martin Senior is constructed as a more temperate voice, castigating his younger brother for his riotous behavior and urging caution. The author’s utilization of such epistolary dialogue in order to puzzle out the proper means of reformation demonstrates his dynamic engagement in the tensions of satire but also functions to distance Martin Marprelate himself from the very charges cast at the presumptuous youth, Martin Junior. Thus the authorial fiction of Martin Marprelate proves dynamic, inwardly conflicted, and in some measure, self-regulating.
In his final tract, *The Protestatyon of Martin Marprelate*, Martin Marprelate himself re-emerges, but in a more sober form than his previous incarnation in *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*. While the frontispiece of the tract promises the return of Martin Marprelate’s satiric ribaldry—the author proclaims that he fears neither “proud priest, Antichristian pope, tiranous prellate, nor godlesse catercap”—such satiric promises remain undelivered in the text of the work. The tone of the last tract is decidedly more urgent than his earlier pamphlets, marking a turn away from the satiric means of reformation after the advertisement of the title. In the place of his previous scourgings of the bishops, Marprelate offers disputation, and failing that, resistance. Throughout the tract, he is preoccupied with questions of his own salvation and what he feels is his moral imperative to resist governments contrary to the will and Word of God. Although he still has occasion to castigate the bishops for their moral corruption in his last tract, *The Protestatyon* is characterized by the author’s confidence in his moral duty, marking “Martin Marprelate’s” valediction and his maturation as a godly admonisher.

The authorial fiction developed by “Martin Marprelate” throughout his tracts serves as a complex but sharp reminder that we cannot speak of Elizabethan orthodoxy in belief and discourse as though it were monolithic; in contrast, the grounds of orthodoxy are themselves unstable and contested. While Martin Marprelate’s dynamic and inventive fiction undoubtedly belongs with contemporary figures such as Pierce Penniless and Jack Wilton, his fictions’ burdens are greater than those of other personae. The author(s) claiming to be Martin Marprelate negotiates his way through the complex strictures of religious controversy by assuming and refashioning the authorities of the Apostle Paul and Thomas Cartwright to suit his own ends.
The Incendiary Arrival of Martin Marprelate

Martin Marprelate certainly was not the first polemicist to employ vitriolic attack in religious discourse. Prior to his incendiary arrival, the Puritans and bishops had been engaged in various literary skirmishes, most notably, the *Admonition* controversy. These pamphlet exchanges are characterized by their participants’ struggle to reconcile the uncharitable means of vitriol and *ad hominem* attack to the dignified ends of religious reformation. Beginning in 1572, the *Admonition* controversy was sparked by Archbishop Parker’s new, stricter enforcement of Elizabeth’s Act of Uniformity (1559), which necessitated the suspension and deprivation of nonconforming ministers who refused either to don the cap and surplice, to use the Book of Common Prayer in their ministry, or to subscribe to the Articles of Religion. Two ministers, John Field and Thomas Wilcox, voiced their displeasure in the anonymous *An Admonition to the Parliament*. The tract presented a series of complaints through the lawful channels of Parliament, strongly urging the ecclesiastical reformation of the Church of England. In their tract, Field and Wilcox declaim the Popish “rags” left in the Church of England and promote a Presbyterian model characterized by congregational, rather than episcopal, control. Specifically, the tract argues that seniors, elders and deacons should govern the congregation according to the rubric outlined by Paul in his second letter to Timothy, through consultation, admonition, correction, and exhortation. Wildly successful and circulated throughout London, the divisive quarto immediately ruffled feathers, and the ecclesiastical hierarchy was quick to
respond. 42 On June 27th the Bishop of Lincoln answered the tract in his sermon at Paul’s Cross. Field and Wilcox were arrested and imprisoned in Newgate soon after.

In November of the same year, The Second Admonition to the Parliament was published, elaborating on the reforms outlined in the first tract.43 The tone of the Second Admonition is more vitriolic than the first, arguing that the bishops themselves are responsible for the anti-Christian elements of the Church, and should be roundly denounced. Like the satirists and reformers of the past, the author of the tract feels compelled to speak against the abuses of the bishops as a subject and a godly man: “for the very states sake, for the princes sake, for the churches sake, and for conscience sake, he hathe but a bade conscience that in this time will holde his peace, and not speak it for feare of trouble, knowing that there are such intollerable abuses in it."44 The Dean of Lincoln and Master of Trinity College, John Whitgift, was tapped to issue the orthodox literary response, entitled An Answere to a certen Libel intitled An Admonition to the Parliament. In turn, Whitgift’s quarto was countered by Thomas Cartwright, who answered his old adversary from Cambridge with the punchy A Reple to an answer made of M. Doctor Whitgifte, Againste the Admonition to the Parliament, by T.C. in September of 1573. A year later, Whitgift retorted with A Defense of the Answere, and Cartwright issued The Second Replie (1575) and

42 Elizabeth issued a proclamation calling in the tracts of the Admonition controversy, dated June 11, 1573. According to A.F. Scott Pearson, no copies were relinquished. See Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism (1535-1603) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 106.

43 The Second Admonition was also published anonymously, but the mystery of authorship remains unsolved. W.H. Frere, C.E, Douglass, and William Pierce are satisfied attributing authorship to Thomas Cartwright, while Pearson argues from historical accounts against the theory. Pearson asserts that Cartwright’s “contemporaries (Whitgift, Bancroft, Sutcliffe, Hooker, Rogers, etc.), when alluding to [the Second Admonition], are tacitly agreed on not ascribing it to him, and write as if they did not know who its author was” (Pearson, Thomas Cartwright, 74).

The Rest of the Second Replie (1577). Whitgift chose not to respond to the last tracts printed and, indeed, bid farewell to authorship. 45

In his various Replyes to Whitgift, Thomas Cartwright echoes the language of rebuke found in the two Admonitions. In his skirmish of words, Cartwright positions himself as a godly admonisher and his interlocutor as a spurious raider. He charges Whitgift with moral hypocrisy for condemning the methods he would employ himself: “in words condemning it / and approving it in your dedes / I will not say that you mislike thys sharpness / as you are sory that you are prevented / and are not the first in it.” 46 Cartwright accuses Whitgift of using the same pugnacious rhetoric he would rebuke in the Admonitions. At the end of his Replye, Cartwright counters Whitgift’s assertion that the tracts of the Admonitions should be condemned as libels by arguing that Whitgift’s tract is a satire: “If he call it a libel / because it useth some sharper speeches / surely all men see that hys book deserveth then to be called a Satyre / having for tarte wordes / bitter [replies] / and for one / twentie.” 47 For Cartwright, Whitgift has lost his authority through his bitter rebukes of godly men; his book is nothing more than a satire, without profit or the potential for reform.

Building upon the urgency demonstrated in his Admonition to the Parliament, John Field continues to employ the vitriolic language of reformation throughout the decade following the publication of The Admonitions. In his examination before the High

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45 William Pierce argues that Whitgift dismissed Cartwright’s responses to his Defense. He paraphrases Whitgift, stating that he “was strongly advised by his friends to not proceed farther with the controversy. And indeed, from personal point of view, it would have been misspent labor.” See William Pierce, The Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts: A Chapter in the Evolution of Religious and Civil Liberty in England (London: Archibald, Constable and Co., 1908), 49.

46 Thomas Cartwright, A Replye to an ansvvere made of M. Doctor VVhitgifte Agaynste the admonition to the Parliament (Hemel Hempstead?, 1573), 8.

47 Cartwright, A Replye, 220.
Commission, Thomas Edmunds describes Field as an instigator of violent disension and himself as a voice of caution, arguing for the potential harm of open antagonism:

I talked with him, what harme was already done … in beating this their new Reformation into the heads of the common people, … Whereunto hee answered, tush, holde your peace: seeing we cannot compass these things by suite nor dispute: it is the multitude and people that must bring them to passe.  

Whatever Field’s role in the Marprelate tracts, his level of frustration and potential for revolutionary vitriol marks his lack of confidence in the “suits and disputes” which had failed so many times before. He dismisses the potential factional backlash and the caution from Edmonds with a mere “tush.” The revolutionary favors action—however divisive—over more peaceable, but impotent, measures of appealing for reform.

Other Puritans, however, expressed anxiety over the bitter castigations of the Admonitions and Cartwright’s Replyes, in spite of the zeal with which their cause was defended. For example, Walter Travers’s Ecclesiasticae Disciplinae … Explicatio (1574) translated as A Full and Plaine Declaration out off the word of God, and William Fulke’s The Learned Discourse (1584) pointedly resist the ad hominem attack so often employed by

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48 Quoted in Richard Bancroft, Dangerous Positions and Proceedings, published and practiced within this Iland of Brytaine, under the pretence of Reformation, and for the Presbiteriall Discipline (London: John Wolfe, 1593), 135. That the majority of our knowledge about the years leading up to Martin Marprelate occurs from the vantage point of the orthodoxy is unfortunate—prisoners of the High Commission were often tortured into confession.

49 Whether or not Field had Marprelate in mind as the stirrer of the multitude towards Puritanism, we simply cannot know. A variety of contemporary sources link Field to the tracts’ author, from Nicholas Tomkins’s examination to Matthew Sutcliffe’s argument that “John Penry…John Udall, John Field; all Johns; and Job Throkmorton, all concurred in making Martin.” (In Edward Arber, An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy. 1588-1590. The English Scholar’s Library (New York: Burt Franklin, 1895), 175. Field’s death in March 1588 makes any direct role in the tracts’ construction or publication impossible, but modern scholars disagree as to his involvement in the inspiration or drafting of The Epistle. Gauging the similarities in language and tone between the two authors’ works, J. Dover Wilson has gone so far as to call Martin Marprelate the “spiritual son” of John Field. See J. Dover Wilson, “The Marprelate Tracts,” in The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. 3: Renascence and Reformation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 428.
the authors of the Admonitions. 50 By and large, these tracts appear to embrace a gentler, more supplicatory tone, diagnosing corruption, but refrain from attacking persons, thus attempting to shield the reformist cause from the charges of railing and sedition. The varying tenor of the petitions introduced into Parliament and brought before the Queen—from respectfully seeking compromise to unabashedly pursuing separation—suggest a Puritanism divided over the employment of vitriol and satire in religious discourse. 51 This house divided would soon come to both celebrate and condemn the vitriolic polemicist, Martin Marprelate.

**Martin Marprelate, Gentleman**

The first satires of Martin Marprelate demonstrate an unstable, madcap authorial presence. Marprelate switches personae, constructs parodic voices for his opponents, and even spills into the margins of his work to insert voices which alternately criticize and praise him for his satire. Raymond Anselment likens the interplay of these personae to that of an anti-rhetorician—Martin Marprelate is at once a “vociferous clown, country simpleton, and dissembling auditor” in his capacity as an innovator, transforming “sterile polemic into an elaborate parody of serious disputation.” 52 Ritchie Kendall notes Marprelate’s resemblance to the characters and dialogue of the theater, citing Marprelate’s “kaleidoscopic assembly of

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50 In his study, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman*, Carlson hypothesizes that the manuscript was probably written during the Admonition controversy (1572), remaining anonymous until it was published in 1584 without Fulke’s permission.

51 The division is clear. On one end, Puritans like Dr. Chapman urged compromise over defeat in 1586: he temperately moved “that a letter might be written to the godlie brethren in London, who though they were forward in furthering of discipline, yet a letter wold encourage them to be more zealous, and we shuld be moved the rather to write because some of them are of mynd to aske a full reformation and to accept of none if they had not all, but the judgment of the brethren was that some reformation might be accepted if it were granted” (qtd. in Pearson, 254-255). The more radical group might be demonstrated by the position of Mr. Tay, who argued for open and unflinching warfare: “Mr Tay moved in his exercise that the brethren wold consider whether the B[ishop]s were anie longer to be tolerated or noe: not delt in” (qtd. in Pearson, 264).

colorful characters, shifting settings, and varied incidents” which promote his satire of the Churchmen.\(^{53}\) Unlike Anselment, however, Kendall is careful to position this dramatic milieu in the service of Marprelate’s commitment to religion rather than rhetoric: he states that Marprelate’s “final allegiances lay … with the Holy Ghost rather than the Muses.”\(^{54}\) However, the tension between Martin’s commitment to religious reform and Marprelate’s love of satiric jest cannot easily be pieced out. Rather, Martin Marprelate constantly revises his authorial personae to accomplish what he perceives as his goal of earnest declamation. He begins as an unrepentant satirist.

Responding fiercely to the latest defense of the episcopacy, Marprelate issued his first satiric pamphlet, *The Epistle*, jesting and mocking John Bridges, Dean of Sarum for his longwinded *Defense of the Government Established*. Here, Marprelate mocks the language of supplicatory petitions, calling attention to both the impotence of such weak complaints and the author’s sense of his own wit and learning. Co-opting the official frame of the petition to denounce John Bridges for a dunce and a fool, Marprelate immediately attacks the Dean’s verbosity: “‘Most pitifully complaining,’ therefore, you are to understand that Dean Bridges hath written in your defence, a most senseless book, and I cannot very often at one breath come to a full point” (17).\(^{55}\) Marprelate also parodies Bridges sometimes colloquial style, shouting “So-ho, Brother Bridges!” and “Riddle me a riddle!” (31-32). Martin Marprelate aims to satirize the churchmen into reformation.


\(^{54}\) Ibid., 186

Self-conscious of his mirthful dismissal of Bridges, Marprelate pauses a moment at the beginning of his first tract to justify his playful satire, citing his need for decorum, and reaching back to scripture in order to defend himself more fully from a charge of improper jesting. At the opening of *The Epistle*, Marprelate cites *decorum personae* as his overriding theme: “give me leave to play the dunce for the nonce, as well as [Bridges], otherwise I cannot keep *decorum personae*…I could not deal with his book commendably, according to order, unless I should be sometimes tediously duncical and absurd” (17). Directly justifying himself through the confines of literary decorum, Marprelate also indirectly references the scriptural commandment to “Answere a foole according to his foolishness, lest he be wise in his owne conceite” (Proverbs 26:5). Marprelate will respond to Bridges with parody and satire, trading what he sees as Bridges’s slanders for his own. Potentially, Marprelate sees Bridges as the mere lapdog of the ecclesiastical regime, exempt from power; as such, he is dismissed as “no wiser then a Goose.”

Unlike the lapdog John Bridges, the Archbishop of Canterbury cannot be dismissed as irrelevant; rather, Marprelate must assault Whitgift with all the weapons in his arsenal. Marprelate sees any action or vice—however small or insignificant—as an available target with which to berate the bishop. Most prominently, Marprelate denounces Archbishop Whitgift as not only a “petty pope and a petty antichrist” (43) but also as a corrupt official in league with Catholic Spain against Elizabeth. Marprelate then moves from complaints against Whitgift’s office to attacking Whitgift’s status and moral efficacy as a man.

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56 All scriptural citations reference the Geneva Bible (1560).


58 Marprelate claims that the Catholics will steal Canterbury: “Alas my Masters, shall we lose our Metropolitan in this sort? Yet, the note is a good note: that we may take heed of the Spaniards and our other Popish enemies; because our Metropolitan’s religion and theirs differ not much” (56).
According to Marprelate, Whitgift is poor, both financially and morally: the Archbishop had
to work his way through Oxford by toting Dr. Perne’s belongings, and he swears too much.\textsuperscript{59}

Not satisfied with confining his satire to Archbishop Whitgift, Marprelate quickly
enlarges his attack to include the entire episcopal order. He charges John Alymer, the Bishop
of London, with advancing unlearned and even illiterate men to profitable livingis, but also
rebukes him for his obsession with outdoor recreation.\textsuperscript{60} He elides the weighty crimes of
simony and hypocrisy with Alymer’s apparent addition to playing at bowls. Marprelate
alternately dismisses and satirizes the bishop, taunting him through his irrelevancy: “(I will
spare John of London for this time, for it may be, he is at bowls, and it is pity to trouble my
good brother, lest he swear too bad)” (24). He cannot stay away for long, however.
Marprelate re-engages Alymer through a direct \textit{ad hominem} attack that plays upon his name:
Alymer had many trees removed from his estate and, for that crime, receives the moniker
“Mar-elm” (46), an insult with likens the bishop to Mar-prelate himself.\textsuperscript{61}

Another common target of Martin Marprelate, Bishop Cooper receives his worst
treatment for his shrewish and unfaithful wife. In \textit{The Epistle}, Marprelate dismisses Cooper
as a hypocrite (71); as ugly, (“his face is made of seasoned wainscot”) (72); as ignorant of
biblical languages (61); and, as a plagiarist who supposedly stole \textit{Cooper’s Dictionary} from

\textsuperscript{59} Relating to Whitgift, Marprelate states “all the world knoweth him to have been a poor scholar in that house. Yea, and his Grace hath often confessed that he, being there a poor scholar, was so poor as he had not a napkin to wipe his mouth...Judge you whether this be not a meaner state than to carry a cloak-bag; which is not spoken to upbraid any man’s poverty, but to pull the pride of God’s enemy an ace lower” (277-278). Marprelate pauses to clarify his intention, desiring no misinterpretation of his gossip: he speaks only to weaken Whitgift’s enormous pride, not to poke fun at a poor student with little option.

\textsuperscript{60} Marprelate denounces Bishop Alymer in many different sections of the tracts; his favorite castigations being theft, corruption and intemperateness: first, the Bishop’s theft of the Dyer’s cloth (29, 278), second, the bishop’s promotion of his blind porter to minister, (46-47, 278) and third, the Bishop’s indulgence in recreation.

\textsuperscript{61} Marprelate quotes Master Madox’s retort to the Bishop: “that the Bishop’s name, if it were descanted upon, did most significantly show his qualities ‘For,’ said he, ‘you are called Êlmar; but you may be better called Mar-elm, for you have marred all the elms in Fulham, having cut them all down” (49).
Robert Stephanus’s *Thesaurus* (91). Marprelate waits for his fourth tract, *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*, however, to hit the bishop squarely below the belt. In the tract meant to refute Cooper’s defense of the establishment, entitled *An Admonition to the People of England*, Marprelate routinely refers to the bishop emasculatingly as “Mistress Cooper’s Husband” and openly gossips about the lady’s many infamous indiscretions. In the tract, Marprelate rebukes Cooper as impotent not only in sexual intercourse, but in any normal human action or social congress.

Such rabidity in attacking his opponents made Martin Marprelate both an asset and a liability for his reformer contemporaries who were divided as to this method of personal attack. He boils down the ecclesiastical debate to its most essential elements and forefronts his tracts with character denunciation, *ad hominem* attack and lascivious gossip of the churchmen, strengthening his argument that they are corrupt. 62 Simply stated, Marprelate arraigns the bishops on a litany of charges, publishing their offences in such a manner as to increase Christ’s government:

I saw the cause of Christ’s government, and of the Bishop’s antichristian dealing to be hidden. The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defence of the one, and against the other, I bethought me, therefore of a way whereby men might be drawn to do both; perceiving the humours of men in these times to be given to mirth, I took that course. I might lawfully do it. (239)

Marprelate sees his mirthful rebuke of the bishops as the occupation of the righteous. Through his jest, he discovers sin in its hidden and secret confines, exposing it to the censure

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62 Raymond Anselment argues that in Marprelate’s quest for mere character denunciation, he abandons any attempt at gravity or a serious attempt at reformation: “Marprelate’s own answers [to Bridges], *The Epistle* and *The Epitome*, seem little more than stopgap measures designed to discredit Bridges while more serious replies were being prepared...his initial satires consider Bridges’s arguments only superficially and sporadically” See Raymond Anselment, *“Betwixt Jest and Earnest”: Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift and the Decorum of Religious Ridicule* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1979), 34.
of society. Through his mingling of gossip and moral denunciation, Marprelate will increase the numbers of the righteous on earth and retard the moral authority of the corrupted bishops. As long as “the worldes inhabitants / Sucke the infectious blood of sinnes sweete lip,” Marprelate will gaily deride their crimes as an effective strategy for sins’ overthrow.

Rhetorically, Marprelate is supported in his mixture of jest and earnest by the oratorical handbooks of Thomas Wright, Henry Peacham, and William Perkins. On the one hand, Wilson famously advises his reader to win over audiences with mirth and delight: “for except men find delite, they will not long abide: delite them, and winne them.” Citing preachers as the worst offenders of audiences for their boring and stern sermons, Wilson even urges the godly to “now and then play the fooles in the pulpit, to serve the tickle eares of their fleting audience, or els [the preachers] are like sometimes to preach to the bare walles.” Wilson applauds the intermixing of mirth and sobriety as a measure to enhance the audience’s delight and a weapon to stave off boredom or apathy. For Wilson, as well as for Marprelate, it is mirthful foolery which makes a grave message more palatable. Choosing to emphasize the rhetorical savvy of blending silliness with soteriology, Wilson leaves the potential ethical price for such jest poignantly unquestioned.

Representing a less secular approach to rhetoric, Henry Peacham and William Perkins cannot separate their interest in rhetoric from their occupations as ministers in the Church of

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63 Patrick Collinson asserts that the “genius” of the author of the Marprelate tracts was “to see that the Achilles heel of the establishment was the vulnerability to ridicule which high ecclesiastical dignitaries have seldom lacked, and to recognize that this comic aspect of the bishops’ enormities could be exploited to give them the widest currency. This was great satire.” See Patrick Collinson, Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkley: University of California Press, 1967), 392.


65 Wilson, The Arte of Rhetorique, 4.

66 Ibid., 5.
England. In *The Garden of Eloquence*, Peacham is more hesitant than Wilson regarding the indiscriminate stirring of emotions, particularly from the pulpit. He cautions his reader to err on the side of discretion, privileging the modesty of the orator over the benefit of moving the affections of the audience. In his description of *Pathopeia*, for example, Peacham notes that while laughter and gravity can be profitable, the orator must carefully gauge the audience: “for in divine Orations, and Sermons, to move laughter doth much diminish and oppose the modestie of so grave an action and so serious a cause.”\(^67\) In relation to the indiscriminate verbal assault upon one’s opponent, Peacham admits such a barrage may have a place in rhetoric, but also urges caution: “Wisdome and charity ought to direct the use of [Onedismus] lest it be used for every little displeasure as foolish persons are wont to do…which is an absurdity offending against good manners, a folly repugning wisdome and an effect of mallice opposed to charity.”\(^68\)

Writing in the same year as Peacham, William Perkins specifically engages the moral integrity of mixing jest and rebuke in the pulpit. In his 1593 tract *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue*, Perkins insists that “all speech must edifie and minister grace to the hearers,” but he stops short of condemning all jest as intolerable or unbefitting a minister. Rather, he makes room for the possibility that mirth may be soteriologically permissible, if not even useful: “when [the prophets] jested against wicked persons, … they sharply reproved their sins.”\(^69\) Here, both mirth and sharp rebuke are put in the service of God and his church, justifying both emotions as godly and with scriptural precedent. Perkins is


\(^68\) Ibid., 74.

careful not to allow mirth and jest to be taken too far, however. Like Peacham, he cautions that laughter itself must be “moderate and seldom” and should be used only when discretion permits. He notes that while scripture tells us that Christ wept three times, “we never read that hee laughed.”

“The Puritans only excepted”

Despite Marprelate’s insistence that his methods were godly and righteous, many of his Puritan contemporaries repudiated the satirist’s style, uniting against what they regarded as inappropriate vitriol. These Puritans recoiled at his scurrilous rebuke of the bishops, worried that he would sully their cause through his improper use of jest and indiscriminate ridicule. For example, Thomas Fuller condemned the tracts as “unbeseeming a pious spirit,” and Thomas Brightman thought the tracts fit for burning. Likewise, Richard Greenham asserted that the potential benefit of Marprelate’s muckraking did not outweigh the ugliness of its appearance. Henry Holland, Greenham’s friend and compiler of his works, captured the essence of Greenham’s objection: “these bookes helpe little to godliness, but rather fill the heads and hearts of men with a spirite of contradiction and contention.” On the other side of the Protestant religious spectrum, Francis Bacon condemned the scurrilous

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70 Ibid., 48.

71 The Puritan repudiation of Martin Marprelate is similar in nature to the reception of John Knox’s *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), considered by many of Knox’s contemporaries and modern scholars to be one of the most vitriolic texts of the reformation. Jean Calvin, Theodore Beza, Francis Hotman and John Foxe all condemned the tract and disassociated themselves from Knox. See Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 280-282.


73 Brightman states that if the Church were at all regarded by its citizens, men “would rather have cast those writings into the fire, than have worn them out with continual reading and handling of them” (qtd. in Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 392).

language being entertained on both sides of the debate, citing such satire as “a thing far from
the devout reverence of a Christian and scant beseeming the honest regard of a sober man.”
The future Lord Chancellor argued the Marprelate tracts negated the proper use of
compassion and indignation as weapons against sin and turned “religion into a comedy or
satire.”

According to his critics, Marprelate sullied his own righteousness by mixing the
sacred and the profane in his religious discourse. He did not raise jest to the level suited to
a godly debate, but rather, sank religion into the mud.

Despite this wide-ranging condemnation, a few authors spoke more ambivalently
regarding the benefit of a bitter style in general and Marprelate’s method of attack in
particular. While Francis Bacon does condemn the tenor of the Marprelate controversy itself,
he cautions that violent rebuke has a valued place in religious discourse. He argues that
“bitter and earnest writing must not hastily be condemned; for men cannot contend coldly,
and without affection, about things which they hold dear and precious…a feeling Christian
will express in his words a character of zeal or love.”

Bacon positions bitter argument in the service of God, contrasting the heat and zeal of a “feeling Christian” with the
dispassionate and cold argument of a “politic man” who may intelligently state his point, but
will rouse no emotion to his side.

75 Bacon may not be wholly unbiased in his view however; he may come to the defense of Whitgift, his tutor at
Cambridge. Francis Bacon, An Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England, in The
Pickering, 1827), 32.

76 Joseph Black argues that those who disagreed with Marprelate demonstrate an uneasiness over “the language
appropriate to religious controversy…and over who had the authority to participate in [religious] discussions.”
Joseph Black, “The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89), Anti-Martinism, and the

77 Bacon, An Advertisement, 32.
Similarly, Thomas Cartwright hesitates to condemn fully the tracts of Martin Marprelate after their publication, yet distances himself from the satirist’s “naughtie” verbal abuse in his text *A brief Apologie of Thomas Cartwright* (1596). Looking back to Marprelate’s vitriolic style at the close of his own career, Cartwright treats the mere suggestion of his complicity in the Marprelate affair as a slander: “For me, I am able to produce witnesses, that the first time that ever I heard of *Martin Marprelate*, I testified my great misliking & grief, for so naughtie, and so disorderly a course as that was. … when I was allowed to preach, I condemned all dealing in that kinde.”

Like his Puritan contemporaries who disapproved of Marprelate, Cartwright focuses his condemnation on Marprelate’s disruptive and contemptuous nature.

While Cartwright indeed “condemned all dealing in that kind,” shunning Marprelate’s ribaldry in what he perceived as a godly cause, his carefully chosen words subtly remind his audience of his own troubled relationship with rebuke. In point of fact, Matthew Sutcliffe, his accuser before the High Commission, notes the resemblance between the two scourgers of bishops: Cartwright “by his scoffes and flowers of railing traced out a way for Martin.” Sutcliffe also challenges Cartwright’s purported condemnation of Martin Marprelate, accusing him of applauding Marprelate for giving the bishops what they deserved. According to Sutcliffe, Cartwright had privately confessed that “it was no matter, if the Bishops were so handled [by Martin], seeing they would take no warning” and “it was the justice of God, that Bishops whose calling was unlawfull should be so handled by Martin.”

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80 Ibid., 47v, 48r.
Sutcliffe would have had ample evidence to implicate Cartwright through his own rebuke of the bishops.

After the publication of his *Replyes* to Whitgift, Cartwright apologized for his employment of personal rebuke. In his laudatory “Epistle to the Reader” prefaced to the English translation of Walter Travers’ *A Full and Plaine Declaration of Ecclesiasticall Discipline* (1584), Cartwright distanced himself from the aggressive use of rebuke and *ad hominem* attack as potentially harmful to a righteous cause. Cartwright praises Travers for resisting the temptation to grapple with his opponent, applauding him for achieving a level of focus Cartwright himself could not achieve: Travers, “havinge his minde bent onely on the cause, inveieth not against any mannnes person. Wherin having understood off some in part offended with me modestly answeringe an importunate man, and lightely stinginge him againe, which thruste others thorowe with most sharpe reproaches: surely as I am sory that they are displeased with me.” Cartwright’s apology here exhibits the same vexed relationship with rebuke and attack which colors his “condemnation” of Martin Marprelate: his apology is coupled with a blow that refocuses blame to Whitgift’s own hypocrisy. Recalling the language of his *Replyes*, Cartwright views himself as “modest” and his sting as “light,” while he regards Whitgift as “importunate” and eager for a literary fisticuffs.

Attempting to erase forcibly the tension between the end of reformation and the means of satiric rebuke, Marprelate responds to his Puritan critics by making them complicit in his crime. As a punishment for their hypocrisy, Marprelate threatens to involve all Puritans in the guilt of his crimes, arousing the suspicions of Whitgift’s pursuivants and unifying the Puritan cause in its culpability. As early as his second tract, Marprelate insists

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upon the interconnectedness of reform and rebuke, and castigates those who would question his means while doing nothing to promote reformation:

What! will the Puritans seek to keep out the Pope of Rome, and maintain the Pope at Lambeth? Because you will do this, I will tell the Bishops how they shall deal with you. Let them say that the hottest of you hath made a Martin, and that the rest of you were consenting thereunto. (118-119)

Marprelate’s threat of complicity here is palpable. Many Puritans were hauled before the High Commission to be questioned as to their role in the Marprelate controversy, where they were largely assumed guilty. John Udall and John Penry were arrested and imprisoned by the High Commission on suspicion of being authors of the Marprelate Tracts. Udall soon died in prison, and Penry—through never officially charged with any crimes associated with the controversy—was hanged the evening of May 29, 1593. The transcripts of their examinations and petitions drafted from prison reveal the political anxiety circulating around the Marprelate tracts. Both men affirm their loyalty to the Queen and deny authorship or knowledge of the tracts, but do so through the insistence that they disliked Marprelate’s method of personal attack. The satirist’s emphatic scurrility enables equally emphatic denial.

The transcript of John Udall’s examination before the High Commission attests to the minister’s anxiety surrounding the tracts’ use of ridicule and scurrility. He professes his ignorance as to the author of the tracts and his overall distaste for the style of polemic as denial of the tracts’ legitimacy:

for “Martin,” … they were never approved by the Godly learned: and I am fully perswaded, that those Books were not done by any Minister; and I think there is never a minister in this land, that doth know who “Martin” is. And I for my part, have been inquisitive, but I could never learn who he is.  

Although we can reasonably assume that Udall in some way was connected to the secret press that issued the Marprelate publications, he necessarily equivocates regarding his involvement and supports his disinterestedness with a round denouncement of the tracts’ style. Distancing himself from the condemned tracts, Udall considers them antithetical to godly reformation. He submits denial after denial, with each conjunction bringing forth a more specific denunciation: first, he speaks of the “Godly learned,” who disapprove of such scurrility, then he moves to “ministers,” who would not write such filth, and finally, he offers his own innocence as a synecdoche of the righteousness of all Puritan ministers. According to Udall’s protestation here, the Marprelate tracts were more likely to be condemned than held up as models of godly reform.

Another author linked to the secret press offered his own emphatic denial of Martin Marprelate’s vitriolic style. In his multiple pleas to Burghley for redress and release from the Poultry Compter and later the Queen’s Bench Prison, John Penry denies all connection with the “unjustifiable” and “yrksome” Marprelate. While he allows for the legitimacy of some of Marprelate’s content, Penry defends himself by taking obvious issue with Marprelate’s

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83 For the outline of John Udall’s connection to the secret press and the writings of Marprelate, see Pierce, An Historical Introduction, 212-214.

84 Although John Penry stood as the Puritan minister most widely linked with Martin Marprelate by his contemporaries, he was never officially indicted on charges related to the controversy. Penry was hanged after being convicted of “Publishing scandalous writings against the Church” under 1 Eliz. cap. 2, but was continually linked with the secret Martinist press throughout his life. (See William Pierce, John Penry, His Life, Times and Writings (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 467.) Penry is one of the few men directly implicated as an author of the Marprelate tracts by the book-binder-turned-informant, Henry Sharpe. Examined in October 1589, Sharpe linked Penry to the clandestine tracts through the similarity between Penry’s justification of religious jest and Marprelate’s own defense of his methods. Sharpe testified that he inquired of Penry “whether this were a lawful course, that Martin had taken in the two said Booke [The Epistle and The Epitome] to jest in such sorte, and to detect to the world such mens infirmities: He answered that godly men had taken heretofore the like course as Mr. Beza in his booke named Passavantius: the Author of the Bee hive, Pasquine ina traunce” (Lansdowne MS 830, 114-118).
He awkwardly states in a draft of a letter to Burghley that he is not Marprelate, and moreover he repudiates at least one of Marprelate’s *ad hominem* attacks:

> They say … that I am Marten. I answer that my name is John Penri and not Marten Marp. … I dislyked many thinges in Marten for his maner, and for his matter of writing … yf ever I read them it was so cursoryly that I greatly heeded them not. But this one thing for his maner I greatly dislyked, vz. That which hee sett downe touching him whome they call the Archb. of Canterbury. A long story or mome their is some wher in his writinges sett down of him, as touching his clocbagg caryng, his service done to D. Perne etc. … well I dislyked it and I do dislyke it and the rest of the thinges of that nature.\(^\text{85}\)

With his life on the line, Penry cites his distaste for the lampoon of Archbishop Whitgift’s economic status. While he remains silent on the *ad hominem* attacks addressed to the rest of the bishops, Penry does claim that this particular attack was unwarranted and unseemly. Penry dismisses Marprelate’s attack of Whitgift’s economic disadvantages as a “mome”—referencing Marprelate’s status as a “carping critic” but, more specifically, charging the satirist with an acute lack of self-awareness.\(^\text{86}\)

In response to the charge of authorship, Penry insists that, far from attacking the archbishop, he actually would defend Whitgift from attack, though he acknowledges him to be “a great enemy of god his sayntes and truth … hir maiesties soul [and] the soules of hir people.” Despite his obvious distaste for Whitgift, “yf at this very hour, his enemy assayled him in my presenc, I wold not only defend his lyf, but even his welfare, and that most willingly.”\(^\text{87}\)

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\(^{85}\) Peel, *Notebook*, 63-64

\(^{86}\) The OED records no mention of “mome” as synonymous with a “long story.” Penry may be distancing himself—as a person—from the *documents* of the Marprelate scandal by referencing “mome.” In the OED, the closest definition, “a carping critic” is pulled from the *Mirror for Magistrates* and implies a strong sense of hypocrisy: “I dare be bold a while to play the mome, out of my sacke some others faultes to lease, And let my owne behinde my backe to peyse.” The reference indicates the most common charge against the satirist—that he politicly ignores the beam in his own eye.

\(^{87}\) Peel, *Notebook*, 64.
hollow. Despite his pronouncement of his “dislike” of Marprelate’s “manner, and for his matter of writing,” Penry is linked with the secret press until his death. Penry’s last petition to Burghley for redress against the charges of sedition is labeled “1593, Marprelate” by a contemporary hand, regardless of its contents—nowhere else in the petition is Marprelate ever mentioned.  

**Martin Marprelate’s Refashioning of Thomas Cartwright**

While many Puritan readers repudiated the style of Martin Marprelate’s *The Epistle* and self-consciously distanced themselves from his personal attack of the episcopacy, Marprelate styled himself the best hope for Puritanism’s future and the appropriate, albeit extreme, extension of the bitter castigations tossed about by reputable men in the well-regarded *Admonition* controversy. Marprelate lauds the *Admonition* tracts as the first to sting the bishops successfully, and he sees himself continuing their fight. He elaborates upon many of the rebukes used in the *Admonitions* and *Replyes* by both assuming the authority of their reverend authors and refashioning that authority to suit his own vitriolic ends.

The rhetorical likeness between Marprelate and the authors of the *Admonition* controversy has its limits, however. Marprelate recognizes that he lacks the innate moral authority of the authors of the *Admonitions*, and must construct such authorial legitimacy in order to defend himself as a polemicist. For this, he assumes the legitimacy of the reverend Thomas Cartwright. In *The Epistle*, Marprelate repeatedly draws comparisons between himself and Cartwright, attempting to align himself with someone of irreproachable character and reputation. Cartwright makes a fit champion; he had achieved the very goal Marprelate set out to accomplish, thrashing the episcopal regime into silence. Kendall convincingly

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88 Egerton, MS 2603, 49.
reads this homage as Marprelate’s need to justify his banter and wit, for which he “sought an external repository of work, earnestness, and respectability.” 89 As a testament to Marprelate’s admiration of Cartwright’s achievement over the bishops, Marprelate finds occasion to praise the author in five separate instances in The Epistle and cites Cartwright’s achievement over Whitgift predominantly, as early as the second page of the text.

While he assumes the respected authority of Cartwright, Marprelate also is able to refashion his Cartwright to fit his own ends. He taunts Whitgift with his loss to the Puritan, transforming Cartwright’s Replyes into violent and abusive pamphlet warfare: “Well fare, old Mother Experience, yet! The burnt child dreads the fire. His Grace will carry to his grave, I warrant you, the blows which Master Cartwright gave him in this cause; and therefore no marvel though he was loth to have any other so banged as he was, to his woe.” (18-19). For Martin, Cartwright did not merely win the war for the Puritans, he violently attacked Whitgift with what Marprelate perceives to be justifiable and righteous ridicule. Cartwright had succeeded where Marprelate aimed. As Kendall has asserted, Marprelate implicitly argues for the righteousness of his taunts against Bridges and Whitgift by likening his sense of compulsion to Cartwright’s previous rebuke of the Archbishop. Marprelate has been called to arms like Cartwright before him.90 Assuming Cartwright’s imprimatur, Marprelate intensifies the fight and heckles Whitgift with his loss to Cartwright throughout The Epistle, ironically condemning him for not escalating the fight. He calls Whitgift a coward and too ignorant to defend the establishment against a man as learned as Cartwright.

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89 See Kendall, Drama of Dissent, 199-203.

90 A few contemporaries of the controversy have noted the resemblances between Cartwright and Marprelate. The author of An Almond for a Parrat denounces Cartwright’s role in the Marprelate controversy, counting the well-established Puritan as an instrumental influence on the satirist: the author threatens, “I am eagerly bent to revenge, & not one of them shall escape, no not T.C. himselfe” (III, 350). He goes on to blame Cartwright for “this violent innovation” of malcontented railing. See McKerrow, The Works of Thomas Nashe, III: 359.
He continues to insult Whitgift by threatening Bridges: “You shall not deal with my Worship as John with his Canterburyness did with Thomas Cartwright; which John left the cause you defend, in the plain field, and for shame threw down his weapons … like a coward” (48). His desperation and his cowardice makes Whitgift incapable of responding to Cartwright. According to Marprelate, Cartwright had bested Whitgift, as he himself would best Bridges and all the rest of the churchmen. As he nears the conclusion of The Epistle, however, Marprelate slowly begins to move away from the image of Cartwright as a violent satirist and reinstalls his would-be mentor as a writer prominent for his theological scholarship.

As if suddenly concerned that his previous portrayal of the Puritan might not be well-received, Marprelate replaces his initial reliance on harsh words meant to denote physical brutality with those emphasizing Cartwright’s virtue and learning. He turns to direct praise of Cartwright and his theological work, championing the English printing of Cartwright’s Confutation of the Rhemists Translation as his second condition of peace with the bishops, breaking off from his satiric jabs at the unlearned ministry in order to genuinely praise the work. He calmly states: “My second suit is a more earnest request unto you, that are hinderers of the publishing of [it, that] the Confutation of the Rhemish Testament by Master Cartwright may be published. A reasonable request, the granting whereof I dare assure you, would be most acceptable unto all that fear God” (63). Marprelate carefully tempers his language in this “reasonable request” to the bishops, guarding his portrayal of Cartwright as one powerful and learned enough to confute any English Catholic who might read his work. Marprelate esteemed Cartwright very highly indeed; enough to posit himself as the work’s English champion and inflate his own prestige by his association with the well-regarded translation.
Unfortunately for Marprelate, this esteem was one-sided, and Marprelate’s second tract demonstrates a new tension between the author and his disapproving “precise brethren.” Having been publicly repudiated by his professed mentor, Marprelate obviously cannot go to the same well again; he can no longer legitimize himself solely according to his likeness to his Puritan contemporaries. In point of fact, Cartwright himself is conspicuously absent from the second tract, which Kendall reads as Marprelate’s hurt resonating from the recent repudiation.

Although Cartwright does substantially diminish in prominence in Marprelate’s later works, Marprelate continues to rely on the preeminent Puritan author as a model for his reformist writings. Instead of directly praising his predecessor’s achievements and thereby likening himself to the more established Puritan, Marprelate traces Cartwright’s reasoning back to the very scripture he cites. Distancing himself from a direct address to Cartwright which could elicit reproof and rebuttal, Marprelate relies on Cartwright’s argumentation to bolster his moral authority. He more subtly imitates Cartwright’s scriptural reasoning to liken himself to the godly man. Cartwright annotates his own argument against the bishops with frequent scriptural citation, with Saint Paul’s Epistles—particularly First and Second Timothy—figuring prominently. Cartwright employs such references most often in connection with his argument for a return to the apostolic government of the Church or in his

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91 Cartwright reappears in the fourth tract *Hay Any Worke for Cooper* in a very prominent way, acting as a foil for Thomas Cooper or, as he signs his *Admonition to the People of England*, T.C. According to Kendall, Marprelate cannot resist the temptation: “Amused by the chance equation of two men whom he regards as spiritual opposites, Martin exploits the contrast between the ‘holy’ T.C. and the ‘prophane’ T.C. … Throughout the satire, the enmity between the two T.C.’s is employed by Martin as a means of identifying himself with Cartwright’s righteous cause” (201).

92 Kendall goes on to assert that Cartwright is replaced with the safer—read dead—William Tyndale (203).

93 References to First and Second Timothy occur over 32 times in *A Replye to an Answere made of M. Doctor Whitgifte, Against the Admonition to the Parliament*.
challenges to Whitgift regarding proper rebuke and godly castigation. Marprelate follows suit: in his work completed after the Puritan repudiation, Marprelate begins to replace his reliance upon gossip and mockery with the moral commandments outlined in First and Second Timothy, allowing him to claim a profound authority for rebuke.

**Pauline Rebuke**

Like Cartwright, the later Marprelate attempts to install himself in the tradition of godly rebuke, measuring his sense of his own castigation by the reformers’ Pauline ruler. His direct appeals to the Paul’s Epistles to Timothy occur most often in *The Epitome* and *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*, the two most self-conscious tracts in Marprelate’s repertoire, and are treated with a sense of decorum unusual for Marprelate. In *The Epitome*, Marprelate breaks from his ribaldry to enter into a serious debate over the fundamental tenet of English Puritanism, namely the scripturally prescribed form of church government. Prior to this reverend discussion, he had labeled John Bridges a fool, a lap-dog of the Bishop of Winchester, and a coxcomb (125), but he suddenly halts his jocular attack on Bridges in order to set out clearly the fundamental incongruity between the bishops and the Puritans who write against them. As if suddenly reminded of the seriousness of his cause, Marprelate abruptly switches from satiric attack to grave polemic, changing tones and even personae:

To the matter. The state of the whole controversy between my brethren Bishops and my brethren Puritans, and so, between this worthy Doctor and these Discourses is, whether the external government of the Church of Christ be a thing so prescribed by the Lord in the New Testament, as it is not lawful for any man to alter the same, any more than it is lawful to alter the form of regiment prescribed under the Law in the Old Testament. (126)
He uses this opportunity to refute Bridges’ claim that the government of the church is a “thing indifferent,” or something which Christ has left up to the leaders of the Church to determine.\footnote{\textit{A Replye} (1573), 82-131; Cartwright makes specific citation of these verses on pages 39, 40-41, 70, 160. In one instance, Cartwright uses the verse to castigate Whitgift for his unlearned ministry, reminding him of the need for a preacher of the Word in every parish: “But seeing that S. Paule hathe commaunded expressly that he should bee able to teache and to convince the gaynesayers I woulde learne of you gladly what necessitie there is which can cause a man to breake the morall law of God to bring in a tradition of man. You may as well breake any other commaundement of God for necessytics sake as breake thys being comprehended in the first table” (70).} Rather, Marprelate sees the apostolic model of government as the most scripturally authentic and divinely-sanctioned form of church government. When he describes his plan for a true government based on the New Testament, Marprelate turns decisively to Paul, marginally citing various epistles a dozen times in an oddly calm selection of \textit{The Epitome}. He refutes Bridges, tracing the apostolic model of government throughout the New Testament and inserting citation of relevant scripture to bolster his own ethos. Acknowledging the decorum of scriptural paraphrase, Marprelate clearly and somberly outlines each position in the apostolic model, from pastor and doctor to deacon, enumerating the qualifications and duties of each. He paraphrases Paul’s first Epistle to Timothy, citing the role of the deacon as the guardian and protector of the poor, of widows and orphans, and insisting that Paul ordained “that before these officers should be instituted, and as it were invested into their offices, there should be had due examination of their fitness to execute the same, and their unreproveable life” (127-128). This Pauline reliance upon the examination of Pastors continues throughout \textit{The Epitome}, justifying his rebuke of the corrupt officials whom Marprelate judges morally unfit to serve as ministers of God.\footnote{As abruptly as he changed tones from character assassin to scriptural scholar, however, Marprelate switches back, railing against Bridges for his ignorance of scripture and his lazy scholarship. He parodies Bridges, and marginally notes, “Now, good Doctor, send me the measure of thy head, that I may provide thee a good nightcap” (129). Marprelate ends where he began, pausing just a moment for the grave cause of reformation.}
More than simply a tool of the “reformist” Martin Marprelate, the Pauline scripture referenced above actually underwrites much of Marprelate’s scorn towards the bishops and their men. Marprelate assumes the apostle’s argument of godly reprimand in order to rebuke the bishops zealously for their unchristian lifestyles and their proclivity towards vice. If Paul states that a bishop should demonstrate his moral authority by keeping his house in order and avoiding even the appearance of sin and debauchery, Marprelate is authorized, in turn, to denounce a bishop for demonstrating his lack of moral standing through his choice of wife. In I Timothy 3, Paul exhorts Timothy towards a conception of an ecclesiastical official that exemplifies the moral authority of a Christian minister:

A bishop therefore must be unreprouveable, … One that can rule his own house honestly…For if any can not rule his owne house, how shal he care for the Church of God? … He must be well reported of, even of them which are without, lest he fall into rebuke, and the snare of the devil. (I Tim. 3:2-7)

The standing of a bishop, for Paul, and, to a certain extent, for Marprelate, is located in his character and his moral authority. If a bishop were to tarnish that moral authority, he would diminish the value of his office and compromise his ability to minister God’s word. For the Puritans arguing for a reformation of the ministry and a return to the apostolic model of church government, few verses were more important than Paul’s exhortation to Timothy insisting that a bishop should be “proved” as an upstanding and untarnished man prior to being granted his ministry—a point that Marprelate also uses as the cornerstone for ousting the bishops from power. More than merely a criterion for separating the wheat from the chaff, however, Paul’s Epistle to Timothy is predicated upon the belief that a bishop’s moral

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96 At its most general level, Marprelate argues against the appointment of ministers by bishops because the bishops are likely to appoint unqualified ministers (e.g. Bishop Alymer’s appointment of his porter to the ministry)—if the congregation must ordain their own ministers, then the flock are more likely to choose a man of upstanding moral character.
standing is essential to his calling. Marprelate takes Paul’s rubric to its logical conclusion in insisting that if the bishop is found wanting—as all lord bishops are—he should be rebuked until he gains repentance or, failing that, he should be removed from power.

Much like Paul, Martin Marprelate attempts to balance his zeal for satiric correction with a godly sense of righteousness. For Paul, rebuke is an intricate and essential part of his Christian calling, but not one without complications. At the core of rebuke stands love, manifested in the idea of moral correction; for example, in II Timothy 4:2-4, Paul calls for Timothy to rebuke his people in order to keep them on the straight and narrow path towards salvation:

Preach the worde: be instant, in season and out of season: improve, rebuke, exhorte with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time wil come, when they wil not suffer wholesome doctrine: but having their ears itching, shal after their owne lustes get them an heape of teachers, And shal turne their eares from the truth, and shal be given unto fable. But watch thou in all things: suffer adversitie: do the worke of an Evangeliste: make thy ministerie fully knowen. (II Tim. 4:2-5)

For Paul, rebuke is instrumental in making better Christians. He encourages Timothy to use all means at his disposal to keep his people from the false prophets and the possibility of factional dissention. While the passage is clearly marked by an earnest desire to protect the congregation from harm, Paul seems to leave open the possibility that such admonition may be difficult to administer and may be misinterpreted. In fact, the Renaissance commentators of the Geneva Bible gloss Paul’s last statement in the passage, attempting to clarify its nebulous meaning. Warning Renaissance readers of the possibility of a tarnished reputation, the glossators urge, “So behave thy self in this office, that men may be able to charge thee nothing, but rather approve thee in all things.” In other words, he who rebukes must do so from a position of moral authority. The editorial comment here emphasizes the action of
accusing one of a crime, warning that the satirist should be above reproach. For Paul, the apostle must possess the innate moral authority to urge correction upon the congregation; that this correction will be met with antipathy on the part of the reproved seems certain.\textsuperscript{97}

In addition to the possible retaliation against rebuke in general and his style of ribaldry in particular, Marprelate must also contend with the allegation that he delights in casting aspersion upon the bishops. In an effort to dismiss suspicion, Marprelate adapts his persona to demonstrate his reluctance as a satirist. Like Paul, who utilizes rebuke in the service of moral correction, Marprelate attempts to balance the urgency of scorn with a sense of moral righteousness. Unlike Paul, though, Marprelate finds authority for his rebuke in secular, rather than exclusively religious powers. Working to meliorate the possible criticism of himself as solely a railer, he insists that his rebuke is compelled by both the sins he sees and the love he bears the people of England. In \textit{Hay any Worke for Cooper}, Marprelate grounds his denunciation of the ungodly bishops specifically in his love and his loyalty to the Queen:

\begin{quote}

shall I, being a Christian English Subject, abide to hear a wicked crew of ungodly Bishops … and in the love I owe unto God’s religion and her Majesty say nothing? I cannot; I will not; … The love of a Christian Church, Prince and State shall work more in me than the love of a heathen empire and state should do. (250)
\end{quote}

He is compelled, as both a satirist and a reformer, to castigate the vice in front of him in order to promote reformation and an improved commonwealth.

\textsuperscript{97} Bishop Cooper cites this verse as evidence that Marprelate slanders the bishops out of spite and malice, not godly correction. He states in \textit{An Admonition to the People of England} that “who knoweth not that they which have the office of judging, correcting, and reprooving other, bee their doinges never so sincere, shall often light into the displeasure and misliking of manie and thereby gette misreport?” He directly references Paul’s Epistle to Timothy later, stating that Paul “did see that the office of teachers and reproovers, judges and governors, lieth in great daunger of evil speech and false accusations, and therefore would not have them rashly condemned, either in private or publike judgement, much less to be defaced and contemned, to be disobeyed and resisted, yea, though they were more grieuous offenders, then standeth with the worthinesse of their offices” See Bishop Cooper, \textit{An Admonition to the People of England} (London, 1589), 13.
While he can legitimately construct himself as a reluctant satirist, Marprelate must also contend with the most common indictment of satire: that it is fundamentally uncharitable. Later in *Hay Any Worke*, Marprelate spurns Bishop Cooper’s charge that he lacks charity in ranting against the bishops. Assuming the popular perception of satire as libel, Bishop Cooper posits that Marprelate’s attacks have more in common with revenge than moral correction, dismissing the rebuke of the satirist as malicious and unnatural back-biting in *An Admonition to the People of England*. Liking the administration of rebuke with paternal care, Cooper argues that Marprelate is unnatural and lacks patience: “a naturall childe, … [should] not therefore undutifully chide his father, but by such meanes as he can … with his best indeavour, wipe away the filth, that he gathered by his oft falling.”

Marprelate responds to this charge by redefining filial duty, putting it in the service of moral reformation and salvation rather than worldly reputation. He castigates Cooper for misinterpreting the meaning of charity, potentially sacrificing his parishioners’ salvation for fear of earthly shame. Adhering to a more strictly Pauline notion of rebuke born out of Christian love, Marprelate objects to brushing vice under the rug, claiming that covering up such fault will merely exacerbate sin. Marprelate, like the minister Hyperius, makes no room for exceptions: “There is no kinde of sinnes, in which the Preacher ought to wincke and be tongue-tied, or that may be permitted without reproofe.”

For Marprelate, reproof carries real power; when sin is made public, shame compels the perpetrator towards reformation. Marprelate mocks the bishop’s supposed concern for charity, arguing that the satirist’s “charitable” unwillingness to shame the perpetrator benefits no one and may actually

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99 Andreas Hyperius, *The practis of preaching, otherwise called The pathway to the pulpet* (London, 1577), 161v.
legitimize the sin in covering it up.\textsuperscript{100} He argues that such charity lessens the moral offense of the perpetrator, thereby lessening the potential for reformation of either the sinner or society.\textsuperscript{101} Marprelate runs in the other direction, exposing the sins of mankind and appealing for the shame of discovery to have some sort of transformative effect on the bishops.

Such reformation will not come easily for the bishops according to Marprelate; continuing to align himself with the Pauline notion of rebuke’s difficult administration, Martin emphasizes the caustic nature of the bishops’ purgation. Similar to Paul’s severe administration of rebuke to the Corinthians, Marprelate must be sharp and bold in his castigation of the unchristian episcopal hierarchy. He admonishes Cooper, “I told you, T.C. that you should be thumped for defending Bishops. Take heed of me while you live!” (231). Marprelate acknowledges the need for harsh and even violent rebuke of such ungodly corruption and even delights in his more severe blows to the bishops. As if to prove his righteousness in violently rebuking the bishops, Marprelate mocks the very concept of gentle reformation, calling out such pleading as obviously impotent of any real force. He sardonically whines, “good John of Canterbury, leave thy popedom; good father John of London, be no more a bishop of the devil, be no more a traitor to God! … And good, sweet boys, all of you, become honest men; maim and deform the Church no longer” (263). Rather

\textsuperscript{100} Martin Marprelate summarizes Cooper’s argument from scripture for a charitable obfuscation of vice, mimicking the bishop: “Reverend T.C.: Though the Bishops should offend as Noah did in drunkenness, yet good children should cover their father’s faults. For natural children, though they suffer injuries at their father’s hand, yet they take their griefs very mildly.” Marprelate responds, jeering that if children come upon their father drunk, they should naturally shout “Red Nose! Red Nose!” (262-263).

\textsuperscript{101} Marprelate’s argument in this passage resembles that of Hyperius, who situates rebuke as one of the foremost duties of a minister and not innately in conflict with the duties of charity. Hyperius states that when rebuke is not utilized by a minister, and by his “silence, enormities are not onely not rooted up, but all things also become worse and worse, then it is necessary, that hee goe forwarde in reprovinge so much as hee may doe. For hee that sharply rebuketh sinners albeit he doth nothing els, yet thus much bringeth he to passé, that he suffereth not the mischiefe to growe any further” (161r).
than hope for such weak admonitions to work, Martin Marprelate intends to verbally pummel
the bishops into their reformation. For Marprelate, it is apparent that the bishops will never
reform if they are dealt with kindly. They must be thrashed.

With his obvious joy in castigating the bishops, Marprelate explores the grey area of
religious polemic. While Paul commits to a rubric of rebuke contingent upon anxiety,
sadness and regret, Marprelate momentarily elides rhetorical violence with play. Paul
approaches the Corinthians nervously, measuring his rebuke of their unchristian sin by his
love of the people, so that they may be left in no doubt as to his desire for their reformation.
He balances his sharp rebuke with his own sadness at the necessity of such admonition: “For
though I made you sore with a letter, I repent not, though I did repent: for I perceive that the
same epistle made you sore…I now rejoice, not that ye were sore, but that ye sorrowed to
repentance: for ye sorrowed godly, so that in nothing ye were hurt by us” (2 Cor 7:8-9). Paul
qualifies every claim which he makes, marginalizing any hurt he may have caused in an
attempt to lessen the blow and explain his actions. Born out of Christian love, rebuke is a
necessity; it is never a delight. By contrast, Marprelate routinely couples impulses of
violence and play, aligning earnest appeals to radical reformation with a witty or even
flippant ridicule of the bishops. As his opponents asserted, these juxtacpositions occasionally
work to undermine Marprelate’s more earnest demands for reformation; but, read in the light
of Pauline qualification, Marprelate’s sense of play more often supplies a necessary lightness
to his threats and denunciations. In one instance, for example, Marprelate comes close to
implying resistance against the government of the bishops, deriding the bishops and their
defenders as “not only traitors to God and His Word, but enemies to her Majesty and the
State” (238). But, Marprelate carefully recasts what could be interpreted as a call for
resistance into a playful taunt. He immediately follows up his denunciation with a giddy jab at Canterbury: “Like you any of these nuts, John Canterbury?” (238).

In carefully avoiding any direct claim to resistance in *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*, Marprelate is able to cast himself as the defendant threatened by the bishops, who, in turn, act as the aggressors. He warns the bishops to expect his revenge for the warrant-less ill-treatment he has suffered: “I will have my pennysworths of all of you brethren, ere I have done with you, for this pains which your T.C. hath taken with me” (215). Imitating Paul’s reluctance to rebuke the Corinthians, Marprelate here showcases himself as reluctant participant in the battle, provoked to ire by the corruption of the bishops, whose ungodliness began the fray. Instead, he portrays himself as a violent substitute for Cooper’s failed conscience, which is no longer a trustworthy measure of righteousness. Marprelate, like Paul, will step in when the bishop veers off course—as he does when he defends the episcopal hierarchy. Moreover, Marprelate attempts to construct his violence as a godly act of judgment imposed upon Cooper for his moral failings.

As he enlarges the corruption of the bishops with the scope of their power, Marprelate once again alters the register of his rebuke, with playful threats of violence giving way to the language of divine wrath. Marprelate charges the bishops with pulling the state towards spiritual ruin and forcing Elizabeth to wage an unnatural war against God: “God, with whom our bishops have, and do make our Prince, and our governors to wage war, who is able to stand against Him?” (240). Against such power, Marprelate is only able to voice the warning and admonition of a prophet:

Repent, caitiffs, while you have time. … Take heed you be not carried away with slanders. Christ’s government is neither Mar-Prince, Mar-State, Mar-Law, nor Mar-Magistrate. The
living God, whose cause is pleaded for will be revenged of you. (241)

Marp relate here urges the bishops towards repentance under the threat of total annihilation, warning the Queen and the Parliament to truly consider the controversy before them. While the tone of violence is undeniably present in this passage, Marprelate carefully shapes the threat to originate in the wrong committed against God, not himself. He largely erases himself from this condemnation, mentioning himself only tangentially through the words of Cooper charging Marprelate—and the Puritans as a whole—with seeking to overthrow the kingdom. Using the language of Cooper’s own *Admonition* against him, Marprelate denies any subversive intent towards the institutions of the state, and pleads with the bishops to amend their faults. If they fail to do so, it will not be Marprelate who revenges himself upon the bishops, but God himself.

“A Martin in Every Parish”

In order to mount a more urgent resistance to the bishops’ corrupt government, Marprelate realizes the threat promised in *the Epistle*; because the bishops had violated the conditions of peace outlined by Marprelate, they will be met with the sons who will carry on their father’s work. In his first tract, Marprelate threatens the bishops with an familial army of reformers and satirists: “I will place a young Martin in every diocese, which may take notice of [the bishops’] practices…I will place a Martin in every parish. In part of Suffolk and Essex I think I were best to have two in a parish. I hope, in time, they shall be as worthy Martins as their Father is, every one of them able to mar-a- prelate” (82). On July 22, 1589, the bishops met the first of Martin’s sons. A new tract, *Theses Martinianae*, appeared “published and set forth as an after-birth of the noble Gentleman Himself by a pretty stripling
of his, Martin Junior” (349). *Theses Martinianae* offers the voice of another Martin, yet immature in the ways of reformation and syllogism but eager to follow in his father’s steps. To promote the legitimacy of the new Martin as the rightful heir of Martin Marprelate, the text constructs the fiction of duality and even partnership. The unpublished work of the original Martin Marprelate is combined with an epilogue penned by Martin’s young son. He, quite literally, takes on the work of his father, publishing and augmenting that which otherwise would have remained unknown. The multifarious avenues of such a family and such sons are even more fully realized with the publication of the next tract, purportedly penned by Martin Junior’s older brother, an author who called himself Martin Senior. The tract was entitled *A Just Censure and Reproofe of Martin Junior: Wherein the rash and undiscreet headiness of the foolish youth is sharply met with, and the boy hath his lesson taught him, I warrant you, by his reverend and elder brother, Martin Senior.* Fully exploring the sibling dynamic and enlarging the army of filial supporters, the author claiming to be Martin Marprelate engages the possible benefits and criticisms of employing satire as a means of reformation.

The constructed masks of Martin Junior and Martin Senior enable the satire of Martin Marprelate to rework itself amid the ambivalent tensions of the English reformation. Rather than enlarge Marprelate’s playful banter and ridicule of the bishops, the new tracts are characterized by a heightened sense of scriptural authority and an increased confidence of Marprelate’s place in the canon of the reformation tradition. The madcap Martin Marprelate of *The Epistle* has been replaced by a more orderly, godly, and legitimate reformation author. The acerbic word-play, satiric wit, and threats of violence to his enemies still appear occasionally in the latter tracts, but are put in the service of scriptural reformation rather than
in the service of Martin’s own delight. In his many different forms, Marprelate will scourge the bishops into reformation for the love he bears the people of England. Through the construction of his reformation family, Martin Marprelate is able to revise his authorial presence into a more strict—yet still permissive—adoption of a Pauline voice.

In the prefatory material appended to the *Theses Martinianae*, Martin Marprelate—in his own voice—revisits his previous threats of violence against the bishops, but reframes such physical brutality in the language of curative satire. No longer will he look to engage a bishop in either a literary duel or an apocalyptic battle as he did in *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*; now he will medicinally bleed the bishops into reformation or let them be. In a moment of clear self-assessment which begins the fifth tract of the controversy, Marprelate acknowledges that he is disliked on both sides of the ecclesiastical fray. On the one hand are the Puritans who “mislike” Martin’s methods—“Those whom foolishly men call Puritans, like (of) the matter I have handled, but the form they cannot brook” (304). On the other hand are the unchristian bishops, who “though they stumble at the cause, yet especially mislike my manner of writing” (304). While there is still possibility for the Puritans to become inspired through the righteousness of the godly, the bishops are beyond all hope. Having exhausted his arsenal of satire, godly admonition, and even prophetic warning, Marprelate resigns himself to the damning of the bishops in the next life. In this life, Marprelate can only wish for their moral correction; he is unable to make it happen: “The bishops, I fear, are past my cure, and …with this farewell unto them, I wish them a better surgeon” (304). Marprelate acknowledges his limited resources in aiding the bishops’ reformation and salvation, counting his previous strategies as all but impotent in the face of such corruption. He can no
longer help them by bitterly admonishing their unchristian government. Another reformer, he hopes, may be more successful.

Marprelate goes on to demand that the bishops reconcile themselves to the true Church, promoting the unity of its members and the peaceful resolution of dissention. He urges the bishops to mend the corruption and discontent which has plagued the Church, arguing for a return to scripture: “if, then, they have, indeed, any purpose at all, to quiet the contentions of our Church, let them bring unto us, not these babbles, … but some sound warrant from the Word” (306). This desire to promote quietness within the Church is the first step towards reconciling the bitter pamphlet feud which has begun. Derived almost straight from Paul’s insistence upon the unity of the Church and the easing of dissension, Marprelate earnestly calls for peace.

Marprelate expects the bishops to counter his new, peaceable course with violence rather than unity. According to Marprelate, the bishops are incapable of putting the unity of the Church above their zealous need to avenge themselves on the author of the dissident publications. Attributing to the bishops the very weapons of brutality and satire they had once attributed to him, Marprelate identifies the violent instruments of the bishops as satire and execution: “Fire and faggot, bands and blows, railing and reviling, are, and have been hitherto, their common weapons. As for slandering and lying, it is the greatest piece of their holy profession” (305). While Marprelate promises to employ only medicinal tools in purging the bishops of their corruption, the bishops will use the instruments of corporal punishment. Seeing his future in the bishops’ brutality, Marprelate resigns himself to their inevitable judgment against him and prepares for the fires of martyrdom.
Literally marginalizing the text of violence and resignation as prefatory material, Marprelate casts the theses themselves as scripturally sanctioned arguments against the bishops’ corruption. *Theses Martinianae* presents Martin Marprelate’s 110 theses, or “Certaine Demonstrative Conclusions,” that would show the prelates of the Church of England to be anti-Christian bishops in the service of the Antichrist (301). The theses are supported with scriptural citation and largely refrain from the secular *ad hominem* attacks which characterized Marprelate’s previous tracts. While Marprelate is unwilling to exchange all his vitriol for temperate and godly rebuke, the charges levied in the *Theses* are framed more directly to urge moral reformation than mere antagonism. The great majority of the theses come from Pauline scripture, namely his letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans and Timothy, while some continue to charge the bishops directly: Marprelate accuses the bishops of treason against the Queen (theses 29, 40, 50, 109); he dubs them “false prophets” and “minions” of the Antichrist (33, 62, 63, 90); and lastly, he compares the bishops’ offices with the occupation of prostitutes in the Southwark stews (34). Although these charges offer harsh critique of the bishops, they adhere more strictly to a scriptural rubric. He argues morality based upon Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to rebuke in order to save. Marprelate exerts greater self-control over his writing, turning from *ad hominem* attack to godly admonition justified by scripture.

While Martin Marprelate marginalizes his previous satiric tendencies in favor of a more appropriate scriptural rebuke in the *Theses*, Martin Junior continues to promote his father’s cause against the bishops by attempting to increase his father’s ethical credibility. Martin Junior proposes a series of possible explanations to account for Martin Marprelate’s recent epistolary silence. First, he speculates that his father is furiously engaged in
answering the bishops in a new tract; secondly, he hypothesizes that Martin Marprelate has enlisted in the Queen’s Army and is fighting at the Groine; and lastly, the son raises the possibility that his father has been captured and even executed by Archbishop Canterbury’s pursuivants. With each of these scenarios, Marprelate is lauded as righteous and deserving of acclaim. If he were preoccupied in answering the bishops, Martin Marprelate would be praised as stalwart and unyielding in his cause of reformation, undaunted by the bishops’ threats. If he were fighting on the Continent, Marprelate would be deemed a patriot—the very opposite of a traitor who would “mar-state” or “mar-prince.” If he were being held by the Archbishop’s pursuivants, then he would be considered a martyr for the cause. This last possibility enables Martin Junior to position the godly work of his father in opposition to the corrupt and unjust bishops. He charges the bishops with the possible torture and even murder of his father, under the guise of seeking after him: “Speake then, good nuncles, have you closely murdered the gentleman in some of your prisons? Have you strangled him? Have you given him an Italian fig? Or, what have you done unto him?” (323). The bishops here are portrayed as employing every underhanded and unjust means of dispatching Martin Marprelate; he is killed in prison, strangled without trial, or slipped a poisonous fruit. Martin Junior submits that it is the bishops—not Marprelate—who are the scourge of God, placed in England “to chastise His church, and then to be burnt in hell” (326). While Martin Junior does not elaborate on the possible sin for which the bishops are visited upon England, he redoubles the charge that the bishops resort to dubious satiric means, while he portrays Martin Marprelate as “a great blessing of God” and a zealot in the vein of Tyndale, Fryth, Barnes, Hooper, Knox and Lambert.
The fiction of Martin Marprelate continues to prove inwardly conflicted and self-regulatory, however. While Martin Junior uses accusation and attack to promote the image of his father as a reformer and martyr, his elder brother Martin Senior complicates the legitimacy of such means, objecting to his younger brother’s emergence as his father’s champion. Martin Senior castigates Martin Junior’s “rash and undiscreeet headiness,” calling him a “springal” whose youth prevents discretion. Specifically, Martin Senior objects to the hasty publication of his father’s imperfect works on the grounds that Martin Junior has disrupted his father’s quietness by reigniting the pursuivants’ search for his secret press. In an attempt to argue his own legitimacy as Martin Marprelate’s true heir, Martin Senior assumes one of the personae appearing in the first Marprelate tract, beginning his own tract in the voice of the imitative rustic; he starts: “Wo-Ho then! And boys will now be a ‘Pistle-making, either without their father’s leave, or their elder brother’s advice” (351). Martin Senior berates his younger brother with the possibility that his father has deliberately chosen retirement and ease:

What if he had in purpose to write no more, seeing the danger and trouble that comes of it? Will this be any means to work the old man’s quietness, for a foolish and heady springal to go set abroad his papers? (351-352)

Martin Senior portrays his father as abandoning his satiric occupation for a life removed and safe. For the eldest Marprelate, the Theses will not only bother the bishops and the Puritans, they will also unsettle the author, who never meant them for publication.

Martin Senior argues that the satiric tracts of Martin Marprelate were safely marginalized by their very sauciness—the very reason many Puritans repudiated his writings and the bishops were so offended. Here, the charge of improper jesting is constructed as Marprelate’s rescue and protection from bodily harm at the hands of the pursuivants. Prior to
the publication of the *Theses*, the bishops, according to Martin Senior, perhaps could have dismissed Marprelate as an insignificant concern of the past:

> Thou sawest well enough that Martin’s doings were almost forgot and husht. And the men of sin themselves, I mean the Canterbury Caiaphas and the rest of his antichristian beasts, who bear his abominable mark, were content, in a manner, to turn his purposes from a serious matter to a point of jesting; wherewith they would have only rhymers and stage-players (that is plain rogues, as thou hast well noted) to deal. … it may be that the syllogisms, whereby our father hath cracked the crown of Canterbury, should have had no other answer, or he himself none other punishment, but this: “I’ faith let him go—Martin is a mad knave.” (352)

Martin Senior embraces the perception that the earlier Marprelate tracts were below rebuke, aligning such madcap railings are mere jest, more fitting of a court fool than a dangerous reformer. Qualification is key, however. Martin Senior carefully implies that only the anti-Christian bishops regard his father’s writings as mere jokes, qualifying his statement to that effect: the bishops “were content, in a manner, *to turn* his purposes from a serious matter to a point of jesting” (352 my emphasis). It is the bishops’ misinterpretation of the tracts which will free Marprelate, not the nature of the tracts themselves. In his rebuke to his younger brother, Martin Senior turns from the bishops’ possible underestimation of Martin Marprelate to engage the very real threat of their father’s martyrdom. If the pursuivants are re-energized in their pursuit of Martin Marprelate, Martin Senior laments that his father will be unable to build his kingdom of godly men and women.\(^{102}\) He portrays his father as having willfully abandoned his satiric “pistle-making” for a more godly life of promoting reform.

Martin Senior argues for the complete abandonment of the satiric occupation in the face of the extreme corruption of Whitgift and the other bishops. According to the eldest son

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\(^{102}\) Martin Senior states: “Dost thou think that the kingdom of Christ which thy father seeketh to build shall be able to stand, seeing John of Canterbury with so many men rideth about the country, to proclaim nothing else but fire and sword unto as many as profess themselves to be the true subjects thereof?” (360).
of Marprelate, the past satiric pamphlets have proven impotent in the task of the bishops’ moral or ecclesiastical reformation, and their continued publication should be discarded. He admonishes Martin Junior to consider realistically his desired result: “Dost thou persuade thyself, silly stripling, that there is any good to be done in sending an ‘Pistle unto him[?]’” (361). Indeed, John Whitgift is beyond the help of even the great Martin Marprelate. Martin Senior asserts that the Archbishop “by great likelihood, … is so finally hardened in his heinous sins against God and His Church; that as he cannot be reclaimed” (366). With his heart hardened with his sin against God, Whitgift cannot be helped by an earthly force. He is damned by God for his crimes against the Church and against the godly. According to his elder brother, Martin Junior, along with the rest of the Puritans, should no longer waste his effort on the redemption of Whitgift and the other minions of the Antichrist. Rather, Puritan gentlemen should appeal to the Queen herself for reformation. For Martin Senior, the satiric means simply cannot accomplish the ends of reformation.

Once satire is invalidated as a means of promoting reformation, Martin Senior urges a return to the more peaceable language and style of the royal supplication and petition. Martin Senior urges the Puritan gentlemen to motivate reform through reason; specifically, he asks the gentry to counsel Elizabeth to a more godly ecclesiastical rubric. The suit to the Queen should encourage a learned ministry, should denounce the offices of lord bishops and archbishops, and should promote only those ecclesiastical offices found in scripture. These requests rehearse the same demands enumerated by William Fulke in The Learned Discourse and the “conditions for peace” set out by Martin Marprelate in his Epistle and mark a turn away from the angry and disorderly satire of the previous tracts. Keeping with

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103 See Anselment, “Betwixt Jest and Earnest,” 34.
the trend of quiet supplication, Martin Senior adds a final request to the list, emphasizing reconciliation and compromise over satiric attack and threats of violence. He asserts the benefits of a coming together in the search of truth:

that for the quiet and orderly taking up of these controversies which are risen in our Church, … between our prelates and those learned men which are contrary-minded unto them, there might be had a quiet meeting of both parties, and the controversies determined on their side, who shall be found to deal for (and not against) the truth. (371)

Martin Senior promotes the quietness and orderliness of the process and the meeting, emphasizing such conference as compromise rather than public disputation. In this final moment of the tract, Martin Senior abandons the dubious employment of *ad hominem* attack in favor of quiet and orderly means of reconciliation. Such conciliatory aims would be quashed, however, with what Martin Marprelate would see as the aggression of the bishops and the willful dismissal of peace through their seizure of the secret press and the imprisonment of the printers.  

**The Revolutionary Martin**

After his sons have quarreled, Martin Marprelate re-emerges, publishing a self-conflicted last tract which fashions its author as both an aggressor, ever-ready to berate the bishops, and as a passive martyr, resigned to burn. In *The Protestatyon of Martin Marprelate*, the author demonstrates urgency and impassioned defiance against the force and power of the bishops. According to the promises of the title page, Marprelate will continue

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104 On Thursday, August 14th, 1589, the secret press and the manuscript copy of *More Worke for Cooper* (not extant) were confiscated and the printers commissioned to print the newest tract condemning the Bishops were arrested. William Pierce argues that “the seizure of the printers and the Marprelate manuscript was the first serious blow sustained by the secret press,” which had enjoyed a relatively uneventful sequestering (Pierce, *An Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts*, 191).
his epistolary pummeling of the bishops if they do not agree to public disputation. *The Protestatyon’s* frontispiece is the most violent and ridiculing aspect of the tract, pledging a return to the violent rebuke and *ad hominem* attack of Marprelate’s previous tracts and embodying the very rationale provided in *Hay Any Worke for Cooper*. In *The Protestatyon*, satire and ridicule are advertisement, “used as a covert, wherein [he] might bring the truth to light” (239) but remain undelivered in the text itself. Although he asserts the same violent promises of his previous works, Marprelate lessens his characteristic sense of play in his last tract, not bothering in his urgency to adorn his charges in witty syllogisms and puns. Rather, the oration is bold, messy, and without artifice. The result is almost illegible:

> he maketh it known unto the world that he feareth neither proud priest, Antichristian pope, tyrannous prelate, nor godlesse catercap: but defieth all the race of them by these presents and offereth conditionally, as is farther expressed hearin by open disputation to apear in the defence of his caus against them and theirs.

> Which chaleng if they dare not maintaine against him: then doth he alsoe publishe that he never meaneth by the assitaunce of god to leave the a flayling of them and their generation untill they be uterly extinguised out of our church. (393)

In this announcement of defiance, Marprelate returns to some of the very name-calling employed in his previous tracts—proud priest, anti-Christian pope, tyrannous prelate, and godless catercap—in order to provoke the bishops into open disputation. If the litany of insult is not enough to incite them to public demonstration, then Marprelate is sure to add the threat of continued harassment. Even while employing such bully tactics, however, Marprelate continues to position himself on the godly defensive, offering to “apear in the defence of his caus against them” and to only fight the bishops with “the assituance of god.” Sandwiched between unadorned name-calling and threats of annihilation, Marprelate
momentarily portrays himself as a lamb before the lions of the church. This juxtaposition of persons—of both indignant aggressor and of slandered party—is hardly new to the tracts of Martin Marprelate, but the rapidity and placement of this prominent exchange highlight the tension between the author’s voices.

Marprelate exerts more control over his own voice in the tract itself, however, retreating from the language of ridicule and assuming the language of spiritual reflection and reformation. The remainder of the tract judges satiric jest to be an inadequate earthly substitute for reason and contemplation. The tone of reflection resonates throughout the tract as Marprelate takes stock of his moral standing before his Maker. He acknowledges the ominous seizure of the press and printers, and pauses to reflect: “These events I confess do strike me and give me just cause to enter more narrowly into myself to see whether I be at peace with God or no” (397). Faced with the very real possibility of capture and execution, Marprelate reasons his salvation through his continued fight for truth, and invigorates his zeal as he casts the bishops as eternally damned for their crimes against God. While Marprelate portrays himself on God’s errand and within a long line of reformers, the bishops ally themselves only with violence and persecution. 105

At one point in the tract, Marprelate urges a more active resistance while simultaneously distancing himself from any potential bloodshed that could result from a possibly violent upheaval. He accomplishes this by reminding his audience that the violence

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105 Of the disparity between the previous urgers of reformation and the unholy bishops, Marprelate states: “Be it known unto all states, churches, and universities under heaven, and unto all men, either present or to come, of what estate or condition soever; that, inasmuch as Master Fenner’s and Master Penry’s syllogism, whereby Dr. Bridges’ book is confuted, and the cause of reformation unanswerably proved; Master Travers’s, Master Cartwright’s and Master Gilbey’s [writings], the Demonstration of Discipline, the Abstract, the Counterpoison, Master Tyndale’s, Master Frith’s, Master Barnes’, Master Hooper’s, Master Pilkington’s, Master Foxe’s and Master Martin Marprelate’s writings, … are as yet unanswered; and likely to be no otherwise confuted than with slanders, ribaldry, scurrility, reviling, imprisonment and torture” (402-404).
of the reformation is controlled by the bishops, who cast themselves as “butchers and horseleeches” when they insist reformers die for Christ’s true church. Marprelate absents himself entirely from responsibility and portrays the violence of the controversy as fundamentally avoidable if only the bishops would resign peacefully. He inserts himself only with his distanced plea to “tell them from me” that the godly cause will continue to promote the laws of God, not men. In adopting such language, Marprelate adheres to the theories of disobedience outlined by his name-sake, Martin Luther, and by John Calvin. Paraphrasing Calvin, Marprelate insists that the bishops, because they act against the laws of God, forsake their godly sovereignty and may be disobeyed.\(^\text{106}\)

Quoting Christ’s exhortation to his apostles, he encourages his readers to resist the soul-killing laws that might hinder salvation: “And feare ye not them which kil the bodie, but are not able to kil the soule, but rather feare him, which is able to destroye bothe soule and bodie in hel” (398). Aligning himself with the Protestants from the Continent, Marprelate argues that loyalty to God prohibits the population from adhering to the ecclesiastical laws ordered by the bishops of the Church of England.

In positioning the laws of man as antagonistic to the commandments of God, Marprelate questions one of the more important tenets of Pauline literature, that of theological unity and peace. Even the mild theories of disobedience of Luther and Calvin jar with the very elements of Pauline theory previously employed by Marprelate in his tracts. Paul states in his Epistle to the Romans that earthly magistrates are appointed by God and must be obeyed: “there is no power but of God: & the powers that be, are oderained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth ye power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shal receive to them selves judgement” (13:1-2). Such a commandment is not without equivocation, however. Many Protestant reformers interpreted Romans 13’s insistence upon a subject’s unquestioning obedience to be merited by only a truly godly government. If the government—in this case of bishops rather than of monarchs—were to fail to execute their righteousness duty towards God, then disobedience is permitted. In his Warning to his Dear German People (1531), Luther concedes that a subject should disobey a magistrate if the earthly power presumes to ordain laws contrary to the word of God.107 Likewise, in the Latin edition of his Institutes (1559), Calvin references the book of Daniel to argue that quia excesserat ille fines suos: nec modo iniurius fuerat in hominess, sed cornua tollendo adversus Deum, potestatem sibi ipse abrogaverat108 Calvin strengthens his argument for disobedience in his Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (1552), referencing Peter’s injunction that “it is better to obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29), forming what has become known as the Petrine Exception.109 According to Calvin, once a magistrate turns from God, the subject’s duty to obey disappears. Martin Marprelate transfers these arguments to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of England and builds up his arguments from Paul’s Epistle to Timothy. Given the bishops’ moral failures to execute the

107 Martin Luther, Dr. Martin Luther’s Warning to his Dear German People, in Luther: Selected Political Writings, trans. and ed. J. M. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 136.

108 John Calvin, Institutio Christianae religionis nunc uere demum suo titulo respondens, Strasburg: Vuendelinus Rihelius, 1545, IV. xx. 32. [for the King had exceeded his limits, and had not merely been a wrongdoer against men, but, in lifting up his horns against God, had himself abrogated his power]. Translation provided in Calvin, Institutes, trans. Ford Battles, IV, xx, 32.

standards prescribed in scripture, Marprelate argues that they are no longer worthy of obedience.

While Marprelate’s impetus for resistance is rooted in the theories of disobedience from the Continent, he enlarges such claims by empowering the populace to rise up against the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Both Luther and Calvin are careful never to condone popular revolt, choosing, like the Apostle Paul, to favor unity over dissension. In contrast, Marprelate urges dissension and disobedience, although which precise form of resistance he envisions, he does not say. The language is often bloody, calling for an overthrow of the bishops by any means necessary; at other times, however, such language appears to threaten little more than name-calling and epistolary taunts.

Whether dealing in blows or libel, Marprelate posits that far-reaching, popular reformation is coming. He finds historical and spiritual warrant for popular rebellion in the religious wars in the Low Countries and the Huguenot rebellion in France, comparing the bishops’ unjust seizure of the secret press and inevitable torture of the printers to the events which provoked such revolutions on the Continent. While he acknowledges the failure of these revolts, Marprelate promises his readers success:

I would not have thee discouraged at this, that has lately fallen out. … If, in beholding the state of the Low Countries and of France, thou wouldst have so reasoned with thyself, thou mightest easily have given the holy religion the slip, … Nay, let them know that, by the grace of God, the last year of Martinism, that is, the descrying and displaying of lord bishops, shall not be till full two years after the last year of Lambethism. (398-399)

For Marprelate, the violent religious wars of the Continent pave the way for the overthrow of the bishops in England. While the impetus to war in France was overtly bloody, taking the form of massacre, Marprelate implies that the crimes of the bishops against his compatriots
in printing may be equated with such exercises of unjust power. Again, however, Marprelate hesitates before arguing for open revolution; he relies on implication over direct announcement and on deflation over incitement. In the end, Marprelate overtly promises only the continuation of his epistolary occupation. He and his followers will not abandon the “descrying and displaying of lord bishops” until the bishops resign their offices.

As if anxious regarding his revolutionary implications, Marprelate is sure to close his final tract with a proclamation of loyalty to the Queen, again distancing himself from the charge of treachery. His fight is with the bishops, who have trespassed on the godliness of the Queen and have hindered her salvation. In contrast to their wickedness, Marprelate positions himself and his followers as opposed to all threats to God and Queen Elizabeth. Defending himself against many of the charges previously levied at him, Marprelate distances himself from the more aggressive and politically dangerous sects of Protestantism and enemies to the state. He embraces the perception of the satirist as fundamentally apart, claiming to be “at defiance with all men,” but only as far as they are enemies to the highest orthodoxy (411). In fact, Marprelate ends the tract hopefully, aligning himself with the godly English and recasting Martinism as a mark of achievement and prestige. In his last epistolary moments, Marprelate redefines what it means to be orthodox.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to unpack the very deliberate and dynamic authorial fiction constructed by whomever the author of the Marprelate tracts was. As an author unhindered by factual biography, Martin Marprelate adopts different masks throughout his tracts as his aims and means evolve. What emerges from the sequence of pamphlets is a malleable
authorial entity, one at times in conflict with itself, at other times self-regulatory and eager to please leading Puritans such as Thomas Cartwright. Consequently, his language subtly transforms from the bitter satire characteristic of the *First and Second Admonitions* and that of Thomas Cartwright’s *Replyes*, to the more godly scriptural language utilized by the Apostle Paul in First and Second Timothy. Yet he neither parrots other’s words nor ever rests fully contented with his own mode of discourse. Splintering his identity into a family, his personae are never static but rather are dynamic and complex engagements with the rhetorical conventions and righteous authorities of contemporary religious culture. The authorial fiction created by “Martin Marprelate” demonstrates that the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable religious discourse were not clear or definitive during the formation of the Elizabethan Settlement.

Soon, the authorial mask of “Martin Marprelate” would prepare the way for the arrival of more well-known literary personae, namely Thomas Nashe’s Pierce Penilesse and Jack Wilton. While the authorial mask constructed by the author claiming to be Martin Marprelate endeavored to portray the author amidst godly readers and to argue for the righteous cause of reformation, the personae born out of such a fiction would run in the other direction. Unlike the fiction of his literary nemesis, Thomas Nashe deliberately constructs his various personae as “below rebuke,” muddying the satirist’s moral authority in order to interrogate the profit of the satiric occupation.
CHAPTER TWO

“In those vaines here-to-fore have I mispent my spirite”: Nashe’s Prodigal Satire

On September 8, 1593, Thomas Nashe published his *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* and bid “a hundred unfortunate farewels to fantastical Satirisme” (II: 13). In this text, Nashe rejects his previous satires, positioning them as a prodigal waste of time and wit. Referring perhaps to earlier tracts, *An Anatomie of Absurditie, An Almond for a Parrot*, and *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, Nashe apologizes for his wasted youth: “In those vaines heere-to-fore have I mispent my spirite, and prodigally conspir’d against good houres” (II: 12). To this end, Nashe professes his “unfained conversion” to a more worthy literature which lauds Christ and promises his reader moral edification (II: 13). Through this latest tract, he will make up for his previous works: “Those that have beene perverted by any of my workes, let them reade this, and it shall thrice more benefite them” (II: 13). By positioning the moral education promised by *Christ’s Teares* in opposition to the misspent energies of his previous works, Nashe casts satiric literature as an unprofitable occupation for an author and unworthy of serious endeavor for a reader. When *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* was reissued the following year, however, this concern for his readership was omitted, replaced with Nashe’s confidence in the strength and applicability of satire:

> of diverse great divines I askt counsel, and made it a matter of conscience whether it were lawfull to rap a foole with his owne bable and teach him to know him selfe, and they expressly certified me it was everie way as allowable as the punishing of malefactors and offenders. Indeede I have heard there are mad men whipt in Bedlam, and lazie vagabonds in Bridewell;

110 All parenthetical references refer to McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*. 
wherefore me seemeth there should be no more differece betwixt the displing of this vaine Braggadochio, then the whipping of a mad man or a vagabond. (II: 181)

Here, the purpose of his previous satire of Gabriel Harvey is cast as educational. The lawfulness of Nashe’s satire is affirmed by “diverse great divines” who assert the task of satire to be one of reformation, that of teaching a fool to “know him selfe.” In addition to its educational goals, satire here is marked by a punitive element: it is associated with the state’s administration of discipline and the admonition of malefactors. Indeed, Nashe questions the legitimacy of satire throughout his career, torn between a conception of the mode as the most profitable form of literature, one that urges the reformation of society and the edification of its readers, and the fundamental prodigality of satire, demonstrating its status as morally impotent to cleanse individuals of their sins.

The Prodigal Motif in the Renaissance

Nashe’s concern for the “literary profit” of satire reflects an anxiety prevalent in the last decade of the sixteenth century concerning the artistic merit of fiction and poetry. Richard Helgerson argues that authors of fiction and poetry were ambivalent as to the value of their own artistic occupations, pulled between the commercial success promised by narratives of vice and the moral satisfaction of narratives of virtue:

unable to ignore the suspicion that poetry was morally harmful, and equally unwilling to forgo it, they had to prove again and again that it might be made beneficial. They were thus forced to argue that their work, rightly understood, warns against the very wantonness it portrays, but such arguments only involved them in a maze of self-contradiction.111

Specifically, these authors were concerned with the moral ambiguity aroused by their narratives. Composed largely of their protagonists’ indulgence in vice, repentance narratives attempted to christianize the youthful rebellion of their protagonists through the interpretive guards of admonition and repentance.\textsuperscript{112} According to Helgerson, this model offered Elizabethan prose writers a safety valve for social and political grievances through its pattern of the protagonist’s initial admonition by an elder, his resultant youthful rebellion and, lastly, his sorrowful repentance and conversion from folly.\textsuperscript{113} Authors who wanted to satisfy their readers’ demands for romantic and roguish protagonists—the stuff of commercial success—and to promise the moral profit of the protagonist’s repentance, turned for inspiration to the story of the prodigal son. While the sixteenth-century adaptations of the prodigal son parable differ in important ways from their scriptural source, the interpretive anxiety of sixteenth-century adaptors may arise from the parable itself.

The scriptural parable of the prodigal son occurs only in the Gospel of Luke (15: 11-31), and stands as one of the most well known of Christ’s three parables to the Pharisees: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, respectively. Renaissance commentaries of the prodigal son parable largely concentrate their exegesis upon the later events of the story, first upon the repentance of the prodigal, which grows with his debasement, and the overwhelming love of the father, who unconditionally welcomes back his contrite son, who “was dead, and is alive again.”\textsuperscript{114} In emphasizing the prodigal’s

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{113} Helgerson confines his study to the prose fiction of 1580s, concentrating his argument on the narratives of rebellion and repentance popularized by authors such as George Gascoigne, Philip Sidney and Nashe’s acquaintance, Robert Greene (12-15).

\textsuperscript{114} For example, in his \textit{Paraphrases of the Newe Testamente}, Erasmus offers four times as much commentary relating to the prodigal’s repentance and homecoming than to his original fall from grace. See Desiderius
suffering and repentance rather than his rebellion, Renaissance commentators harness the parable’s didactic qualities, offering moral lessons to their readers by preserving the negative example of rebellion followed by repentance. In their hands, the parable is made a didactic testament to humanity’s sinfulness and Christ’s merciful forgiveness. In order to accomplish this didactic lesson, however, biblical commentators must gloss quickly the rebellion of the prodigal, subordinating his “riotous living” to the importance of his conversion.\textsuperscript{115} Deflating the time devoted to prodigal’s rebellion, glossators attempt to negate the possibility of the reader’s dangerous misinterpretation of the parable.\textsuperscript{116} Elements of the parable continue to pose interpretive problems, however. Many commentators accentuate the problematic confrontation between the elder brother, who is unwilling to celebrate the return of his profligate brother, and the loving father, who opens his arms to his repentant son. Such glosses often pit the elder brother against the prodigal, running the risk of actually encouraging prodigality.\textsuperscript{117} The commentators of the Geneva Bible gloss the prodigal’s

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\item[115] Erasmus, \textit{The First Tome or Volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the Newe Testamente}, 1548 (Delmar, New York: Scholars’ Facsimile and Reprints, 1975), 130-133.
\item[116] The Bishops Bible (1568) states, “And not long after, when the yonger sonne had gathered all that he had together, hee toke his iourney into a farre countre y, and there hee wasted his goodes with riotous livin” (15:13). The nature of the prodigal’s “riotous living” is not elaborated upon by Luke, who positions the elder brother’s version of events as unreliable. The elder brother angrily tells his father, “thou neuer gau est me a kidde to make mery with my friendes: But assoone as this thy sonne was come, which hath deououred thy goodes with harlottes, thou hast for his pleasure kylled that fat calfe” (15:29-30). It is not until Erasmus’ \textit{Paraphrases of the Newe Testamente} that the prodigal’s riotous living is fleshed out: “He spente and wastefully consumed among straungiers all the substaunce, not of his owne, (for nothing it was that he had of his owne) but of his fathers. And he spent it out riottously at dyce, on harlottes, and in feastynge and banquetyng. For plaine it is, whatsoever is spent about the inordinate lustes of ye body without necessitie” (130).
\item[117] In order to avoid such “misinterpretation,” Samuel Gardiner, in the first full-length exegesis of the prodigal son parable in English, interprets the parable as “the Epitome of the Gospell, the abstract and compendium of the whole worke of our redemption,” but omits the elder brother from the prodigal’s reunion. See Samuel Gardiner, \textit{Portraiture of the Prodigal Sonne} (London, 1599).
\end{enumerate}
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conversion as more righteous than the untried virtue of the elder brother, who does not indulge in the prodigal’s experience and thus does not enjoy his rebirth. Even to modern audiences, the parable continues to jar with our sense of fairness: the brother who dutifully remains home is condemned as stubborn and unrighteous while the prodigal is celebrated. To mollify the tension within the parable itself, many commentators read much of the parable literally, but turn to allegory in their treatment of the elder brother to avoid the problematic confrontation. For example, in his *Paraphrases of the New Testament*, Erasmus complicates the parable’s tension between experience and precept by interpreting the younger brother as a type: his fall is characteristic of wayward youth. On the other hand, Erasmus reads the rigid elder brother as historical allegory, representing the Pharisees whom Christ rebukes. Erasmus describes the two brothers:

> For ignoraunce and lacke of thynkyng and casting afore what wil come after, is always for the moste parte joined and coupled with youth. And therfore so muche the more willingly we dooe forgive youth, and beare the more with this age whan it doeth offende. But the Jewe, which to hymselfe semeth just, and standeth muche in his owne conceypte for fulfilling of the lawe, dooeth trespace more grievously with envying against his brother, then the other had synned by sweruyng and strayghyng out of the right way. (133)

While Erasmus characterizes the prodigal’s wandering experience as benignly “swerving and straying” from the righteous path, he counts the elder brother’s sin as more “grievous” than such indiscretion. He calls for patience in dealing with youthful rashness, but demands condemnation for the elder brother’s rigid adherence to precept or “lawe.” The parable’s ambivalence between the value of precept and the value of experience is not easily pieced out.
In contrast to the glossators, the authors of prose fiction who adapted the prodigal son parable in the sixteenth century seem to have embraced the possibility of the reader’s misinterpretation. Although authors such as Robert Greene, John Lyly and even Philip Sidney retain the didactic paradigm of admonition, rebellion and repentance, they belabor the scenes of the prodigal’s dissolute lifestyle, weighing more heavily the prodigal’s rebellion than his conversion. In these texts, the episodes of rebellion take center stage, book-ended by aged admonition and the prodigal’s repentance on the other. By way of affirming their loyalty to conservative morals, these authors attempt to christianize their texts against the criticism that, in demonstrating such scenes of debauchery, they actually encourage the vice their texts profess to admonish. Adopting the prodigal paradigm, they justify publishing pleasurable and even licentious texts as didactic literature, thereby enjoying the best of both worlds: they benefit from the commercial success that comes with printing narratives of vice and corruption, all the while embracing a posture of moral didacticism. One of these authors, Robert Greene, Nashe’s friend and literary colleague, professes his commitment to a patriotic didacticism, adorning his licentious and prodigal conny-catching pamphlets with the Ciceronian motto, *nascimur pro patria*, “we are born to serve our country.”

**Nashe’s Satiric Career**

Like these prose adaptors, Thomas Nashe returns to the prodigal paradigm at various points throughout his career, adapting the construction of admonition, rebellion and

118 The story of the prodigal son does not act solely as source material; many authors of the 1580s also adapted the parable as a pattern for their own careers, transposing the parable’s pattern of the protagonist’s indulgence in vice and his resultant repentance to their notions of authorship itself. For these writers, fiction writing represented idleness and the waste of resources, necessitating that such authors publicly recant their sonnet sequences and romances as experiments in youthful folly, fit only for mere recreation. As recreational texts, romances and sonnet sequences were safely marginalized and excused from the paradigm of profit. However, modern audiences need not take such professions of prodigality strictly at face value; despite their authors’ claims of repentance, romances and sonnet sequences continued to be published at an alarming rate.
repentance to suit his own ends. At first, his sense of his career and the power of didactic admonition is seemingly indistinguishable from those of his literary colleagues. In *An Anatomie of Absurditie* (1589), Nashe professes the ability of didactic literature to build up readers’ discretion and of admonition to reform society. In his first major publication, Nashe acknowledges the problems inherent in satire: he recognizes that the satirist must strengthen his ethos in order to admonish the ills of society, but also that he must contend with the charge of arrogance. To counter these two criticisms, Nashe constructs a hybrid ethos in *An Anatomie*, assuming both the godly authority of a fatherly admonisher and the experienced, ironic authority of the prodigal son to argue for reform of England’s educational program.

Unlike the authors discussed by Helgerson, however, Nashe later employs the prodigal persona and paradigm in order to question the nature and efficacy of didacticism itself. Confronted with the arbitrariness of authority and power early in his career through his association with and subsequent repudiation by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Nashe turns to attack didacticism, interrogating the ability of admonitory literature to reform humanity. Brought into the bishops’ response to the Martin Marprelate tracts along with John Lyly, Robert Greene and Anthony Munday, Nashe represented the conservative views of the

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119 Many modern critics seem to take their cue from Nashe himself in largely ignoring the existence of *An Anatomie of Absurditie*. In his *Works*, McKerrow observes that neither Nashe nor Gabriel Harvey ever mentions its existence after its publication, leaving its only public mention that of Nashe’s advertisement for the work in the “Preface to the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities” appended to Robert Greene’s *Menaphon*: “It may be, my Anatomie of Absurdities may acquaint you ere long with my skill in surgery, wherein the disease of Art more merrily discovered may make our maimed Poets put together their blankes unto the building of an Hospitall” (III: 324).

120 Although not printed until 1589, *An Anatomie of Absurditie* was written presumably while Nashe was either at Cambridge or when he first arrived in London in 1588.
ecclesiastical hierarchy against their froward epistolary opponent. According to Archbishop Whitgift, it was Richard Bancroft who advised that Martin Marprelate be answered in his own style. And while the tactic enjoyed popularity with London audiences eager for the stage-shows like *The Maygame of Martinisme* and for the pamphlets issued like *A Whip for an Ape*, the authorities quickly began expressing their anxiety with their strategy of rebuke.

By October, less than four months after the bishops had begun answering the author(s) of the Marprelate tracts “after their own vein,” the authorities began to doubt the godliness of engaging in such a dirty fight. According to “Pasquill” and “Double V,” the authorities began by suppressing the stage-shows. Pasquill claims that one anti-Martinist play has been censored by the authorities, asserting to his companion, “I have a tale to tell…of the sly practice that was used in restraining” them from being performed.

The anti-Martinist responses are numerous, beginning with now lost stage plays that pilloried Martin Marprelate but quickly turning to the popular pamphlet medium that suited Marprelate himself. Several tracts were issued: first were the contentious and spurious *Mar-Martine* (July 1589) and *A Whip for an Ape* (July 1589), both presumably penned by Munday; more mild admonitions were also published, including Leonard Wright’s *A Friendly Admonicion to Martin Marprelat* and Tobias Bland’s *Baite for Momus*. A month later, *A Countercuffe given to Martin Junior* appeared, claiming to be by “the virtuous, hardie and renowned Pasquill of England, Cavaliere.” The success of this pamphlet provoked two sequels, *The Returne of Pasquill* (October 1589) and *Pasquill’s Apologie* (July 1590). It is now assumed that Pasquill was, in the first two incarnations, Robert Greene, who penned the tracts in Marprelate’s saucy style, informed by the leg-work and research of Thomas Nashe. It is largely accepted that the last Pasquill tract, *The Apologie*, was penned by a different author, maybe Munday. At the same time of Greene’s *The Returne of Pasquill*, the tract *Pappe with a Hatchet* (October 1589) arrived at bookstalls, most commonly attributed to John Lyly who wrote it under the pseudonym “Double V,” as well as *Martins Months Minde*, penned by the anonymous Marforius. While Nashe may have contributed directly to other tracts (most probably those authored by Greene), he does not officially enter the Marprelate fray as an author until *An Almond for a Parrat* (probably written during November of 1589).

The stage shows went on tour, according to Pasquill, who claims that the actors had been “long in the Country,” and *A Whip for an Ape* quickly enjoyed a second printing. See McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, I: 100.


McKerrow, I: 100.
Likewise, “Double V” laments, “Would those Comedies might be allowed to be plaid that are pend, and then I am sure [Martin] would be decyphered and so perhaps discouraged.”

The anti-Martinist pamphlets, supposedly representing the interests of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, are threatened with censorship by those they aimed to help. In his later pamphlets, Pasquill notes that the anti-Martinists, like Martin himself, are disliked on all sides: in *The Returne*, he asserts “Peace, Cavaliero, your tongue will be slitte if you take not heede: I have heard some say you should wring for this geare.”

Later, in *The Apologie*, he more overtly documents the cool feelings towards the pamphleteers, arguing that their audiences find it abhorrent to “see us runne one at another like furious Bulles, foming and casting out those reproaches, which hereafter we shall never be able to wipe away.”

Here, the threat is not only from the political and religious forces at work in early modern London, but also from within: the railing fray that has ensued between the Martinists and the anti-Martinists will taint the soul of each party. Gabriel Harvey also denounced the anti-Martinists for indulging in such scurrilous pamphleteering, though his motives are perhaps not as pure as he would attest:

> What scholler or gentleman can reade such alehouse and tinkerly stuffe without blushing? … What good could grow out of it, but to make every man madbrayned, and desperate; but a generall contempt of all good order in Saying and Dooing; but an Universall Topsy-Turvy?

It is in this volatile epistolary environment that Nashe pens the most famous, and by many accounts the most successful, anti-Marp relate tract, *An Almond for a Parrat*.

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125 *Pappe with a Hatchet*, (London, 1589), D2v.

126 McKerrow, I: 83.

127 McKerrow, I: 110.

An Almond for a Parrat more fully answers Martin Marprelate’s scurrilous jests and *ad hominem* attacks than the previous anti-Marprelate pamphlets, mimicking the style of the forward pamphleteer. As is the case with the later anti-Martinist tracts, Nashe’s tract references the unease of the bishops, who kept the tract from being published until 1590, well after Marprelate had ceased to write. In his dedication to the soul of Dick Tarleton, Nashe laments the authorities’ current crack-down on the press:

> for now a dayes a man cannot have a bout with a Balletter, or write Midas habet aures asininas in great Romaine letters, but hee shall bee in daunger of further displeasure. Well, come on it what will, Martin and I will allow of no such doinge; we shall cracke half a score blades in a backe-lane though a Constable come not to part us. (III: 341-2)

Nashe’s literary bout with Marprelate will occur whether the bishops like it or not. In the text of his tract, Nashe continues to threaten his epistolary enemy with a clandestine beating, reflecting his own strained relationship with the ecclesiastical hierarchy that sponsored him:

> “If authority do not moderate the fiery fervence of my enflamed zeale, ile assaile thee from terme to terme” (III: 369); later, he goes further, arguing “O God, that *we two might bee permitted* but one quarter, to try it out by the teeth for the best benefice in England, then would I distill my wit into incke, and my soule inot arguments, but I would drive this Danus from his dunghill, and make him faune like a dog for favour at the magistrates feete” (my emphasis, III: 369). His tract demonstrates Nashe’s tense relationship with his sponsors, as well as his sense of camaraderie with his enemy. 

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129 According to Charles Nicholl, Nashe’s tract, for reasons of timing and style, “has the feel of being the anti-Martinists’ coup de grace” (*Cup of News*, 75)

130 It has been argued multiple times that Nashe was heavily influenced by the style of Martin Marprelate. Charles Nicholl observes, “As one reads into the *Almond* one glimpses a kind of covert allegiance between the antagonists. They speak the same language – ‘M. Martin, how like you my stile, am I not old Ille ego qui quondam at ye besleeving of a sichophant?’ In the outlaw Martin, the budding satirist finds his own venturings beyond the pale of propriety writ large” (*Cup of News*, 77).
It is this strained relationship with moral and political authority which would inform Nashe’s own persona throughout his literary career. After his involvement in the anti-Martinist circle, Nashe develops a more cynical perception of his satiric occupation, questioning not only the ability of admonition to reform the world, but also the constructed nature of authority. In his most famous tract among early modern audiences, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, Nashe divorces satire from its claims of moral authority. He trades in the voice of the godly father for that of the unrepentant prodigal, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of didactic admonition. Despite his cynicism regarding his own artistic occupation, Nashe cannot give up on didacticism completely. In *Pierce Penilesse*, he still holds out hope that the righteous poetry and drama of others can inspire and instill virtue in society.

By the time he publishes *The Unfortunate Traveller, or The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594), Nashe’s cynicism has quickly expanded, causing him to reject the premise that published literature could instill virtue in its audience. Having suffered repeatedly at the hands of the literary censures, Nashe disavows his own moral authority as a satirist, choosing again to adopt self-consciously the pose of the prodigal. In contrast to his *Anatomie*, which posits the legitimate moral goal of satire and admonition, *The Unfortunate Traveller* argues for a reconsideration of the mode. Replacing the conventional moral authority of the

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131 As we have seen, Nashe’s *Almond for a Parrat* was temporarily suppressed. His next work, the “Preface” to the pirated edition of Philip Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella* was called in by Burghley himself and was excised from all subsequent editions. Entered into the Stationer’s Register the same month as *The Unfortunate Traveller, Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* landed Nashe temporarily in prison. In the summer of 1597, he was in trouble again, this time for his contributions to *The Isle of Dogs*. He escaped prison (the punishment of Ben Jonson) only by fleeing the city. On August 15, 1597, the Privy Council ordered Richard Topcliffe to follow up evidence from a search of Nashe’s chambers—“peruse such papers as were found in Nash his lodging, which Ferrys, a Messenger of the Chamber, will deliver” (qtd. in Nicholl, 244). Finally, but perhaps not surprisingly, the entirety of Nashe’s works were called in on the first of June, 1599, in the bishops’ ban.
satirist with the low repute of the criminal Jack Wilton, Nashe reveals the constructed nature of authority, emptying satire of its hollow promises of reformation and virtuous action.

An Anatomie of Absurditie

In his first major publication, Nashe argues for satire’s place as the most profitable form of literature. Eliciting the reformation of its audience, conventional satire argues from precepts of good living to admonish the vice of corrupt society. In short, satire tells people how not to live. In the heavily didactic An Anatomie of Absurditie (1588), Nashe embodies the satirist’s call to reformation, rebuking the particular vices he sees around London, namely the morally bankrupt literature poisoning the minds of readers, the painted ladies becoming more common in society, the holier-than-thou Puritans he would repeatedly write against, and finally, the lazy scholar advancing too quickly through his education. Positioning himself as a satirist par excellence, Nashe constructs himself as a rare and discerning admonisher, one removed from the changeable opinion of society and thus able to see clearly the vice and corruption around him. He represents himself as a plain-speaking satirist who is solely interested in the reformation of England: “For my part, as I have no portion in any mans opinion, so am I the Prorex of my private thought: which makes me terme poison poison, as well in a silver pleece, as in an earthen dishe” (I: 5-6). In claiming to be the viceroy of his own private thoughts, Nashe demonstrates a strong sense of self-sufficiency and discretion. Through his satire, Nashe is capable of diagnosing poison—no matter how it hides itself—and publicly shunning such moral infection for the benefit of society. He will profit society through his insistence upon the reformation of its members.
Nashe acknowledges that although satire will profit society, it does not come without problems. On the one hand, Nashe must clear himself of the charge typically levied against satirists—that of ironically seducing the reader to the very ruin the author hopes to avoid—by calling upon the strength of his own ethos. On the other hand, Nashe must counter the negative perception of the satirist, namely that his constant admonition of the reader casts the satirist as an arrogant and hypocritical rebuker of vice rather than a moral guide gently urging reformation. In an attempt to strike the ethical balance necessary, Nashe complicates his personae in *An Anatomie*, first assuming the didactic admonitory ethos of a wise father in order to establish the moral efficacy of his work. Once he has demonstrated his moral authority, however, Nashe revises that pose, transforming its admonitory didacticism into a ethos characterized by earnest repentance. He replaces the pose of the godly father with that of the reformed prodigal, bolstering his ethos through his advice. By “proving” the didactic precepts of the father with his experience as a prodigal, Nashe achieves the necessary moral authority of the satirist.

Nashe uses his authority as a fatherly admonisher to identify vice and diagnose sin. Employing his discretion for the benefit of the reader, Nashe positions himself in an advisory role in *An Anatomie*, didactically admonishing his reader, whom he, in turn, positions as the prodigal child to be instructed. By assuming the persona of a godly father, Nashe attempts to imitate the strong ethos granted to the father in the adaptations of the prodigal son parable. His title page promises his reader the profit of reformation, advertising his tract as “a briefe confutation of the slender imputed praises to feminine perfection, with a short description of the severall practises of youth, and sundry follies of our licentious times” (I: 3). For Nashe, *An Anatomie* serves as a metaphoric commonplace book of vice: it reproduces popular
castigations of bad behavior, couching a promise of the reader’s reformation in the language of utility. Nashe sells his tract as didactic lessons “breefe” and “short,” as easy to remember and apply. The tract’s claim for the benefit of such precepts cements Nashe’s role as a fatherly advisor to the reader and positions the tract as applicable to future circumstance. According to its title page, the text will be “No lesse pleasant to be read, then profitable to be remembered, especially of those, who live more licentiously, or addicted to a more nyce stoycall austeritie” (I: 3). An Anatomie will offer its readers useful advice, applicable, as such admonition has been in the past, to the reformation of a licentious or austere life.

Unlike the morally insubstantial texts which he berates in his tract, Nashe’s Anatomie promises and claims to deliver profit to its readers through its satire. Nashe links his satire to the reader’s moral education: he demonstrates and diagnoses the corruption of sin for those unguarded readers who may otherwise be seduced to folly. Nashe offers his readers satiric examples of vice in the form of precept or adage, beginning his text with a proverbial expression taken from Erasmus:133

Zeuxes beeing about to drawe the counterfet of Juno, assembled all the Agrigentine Maydes… that in their beautie, he might imitate what was most excellent: even so it fareth with mee, who beeing about to anatomize Absurditie, am urged to take a view of sundry mens vanitie, a survey of their follie, a briefe of their barbarisme, [in order] to runne through Authors of the absurder sort, … sucking and selecting out of these upstart antiquaries, somewhat of their unsavory duncerie, meaning to note it with a Nigrum theta, that each one at the

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132 Richard Helgerson notes the impersonal nature of Henry Sidney’s letter of precepts to his son Philip, noting that the occasion was motivated by a sense of paternal guidance rather than any deviant behavior on the part of the son: according to Helgerson, Henry Sidney “does his duty as a father [in writing such precepts to his son], just as he expects Philip to do his as a son” in obeying his father’s advice (The Elizabethan Prodigals, 17).

133 McKerrow cites numerous instances of Nashe’s adaptation of Plutarch, Pliny, and Seneca in The Anatomy, arguing that he probably came to such references through Erasmus’ Parabolae. See McKerrow V: 118. Indeed, in this case, Nashe takes from Erasmus liberally. See Erasmus, Parabolae in The Collected Works of Erasmus (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1978), XXIII: 226.
first sight may eschew it as infectious, to shewe it to the worlde that all men may shunne it. (I: 9)

Nashe will anatomize his subjects through his compilation of their worst vanity, folly, and barbarism. As Zeuxes would imitate only the most excellent examples of beauty before him, so Nashe will cull through all the vice he sees and reads for its most choice “absurditie,” “sucking and selecting out” the most appropriate examples. After all the vice is assembled, Nashe will mark it with a nigrum theta, a mark of condemnation, so that he may model for his readers the rejection of such vice. Much like Zeuxes’ painting of Juno which will serve as a standard by which to judge the potential beauty of all women, Nashe’s Anatomie will represent all vice, and will demarcate future corruption for its readers. With this promise of his text’s diagnostic profit, Nashe attempts to educate his readers through the precepts he has assembled through classical literature, contemporary sources, and the daily experience of London life. As the “compiler” rather than the “author” of An Anatomie, Nashe asserts the power of reproducible precept to teach his reader discretion. As he promises in his title page, however, Nashe must weigh the pleasantness of his text with the moral discretion he has pledged to his reader. In order to accomplish this, he must replace his ethos of didactic admonition with the humility of the prodigal.

As the prodigal, he uses his experience as an instrument to strengthen his moral lessons and defend himself and his satire. Typifying an education learned through experience, Nashe positions his wit metaphorically as a repentant prodigal, home from its

134 In this way, Nashe mimics the humanistic emphasis upon commonplace books and texts interested in compiling sententiae from classical sources, like Erasmus’s Adages and the text Nashe has the most use for, his Parabolae. Unlike these texts, which promise tools beneficial for oratory and demonstrating rhetorical savvy, Nashe will compile negative examples to encourage discretion.

135 On the title page, Nashe de-emphasizes his authorial role, listing himself as a compiler rather than creator of the text.
morally dubious adventures to share its experience abroad. He urges his reader to learn from his experience, not repeating his mistakes. He confesses his former prodigality:

> What I have written, proceeded not from the penne of vain-glory but from the processe of that pensivenes, which two Summers since overtooke me: whose obscured cause, best knowne to everie name of curse, hath compelled my wit to wander abroad unregarded in this satyricall disguise. (I: 5)

In this obscure passage, Nashe constructs his prodigal wandering as a defense against the possible criticism that he has endeavored in his satire for his own glory, framing the rest of the sentence in the passive voice to distance himself from the charge of arrogance.\(^{136}\)

Adopting a common justification for his satire, Nashe legitimizes his text through his sense of compulsion, but tweaks the commonly used topos to authorize his wit’s exploratory wanderings rather than his satiric rebuke. Nashe’s statement that his wit wanders abroad carries with it the negative connotation of the prodigal’s idle travel, ungoverned by reason. As Red Cross Knight strays from the path to wander in the woods of Error, Nashe travels abroad “unregarded.” While the “unregarded” here may refer simply to Nashe’s wit wandering “incognito,” it may also modify his wandering, opening the possibility that Nashe’s wit has dangerously wandered without the government of reason, but, now contrite, has returned home, chastened by his experiences and willing to admonish other prodigals through his confession.

Much as he frames his wit as a repentant prodigal, Nashe casts his satiric text as the product of prodigal recreation, subtly questioning the profit of his satiric occupation. Such a stance may serve to mollify his critics who may read his castigations as alternately too harsh or too permissive. To deflect such criticism of his task, Nashe humbles himself, posturing

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himself as a simple rustic and his work as unlearned in his dedication. He self-consciously dismisses his work as an “undigested endevour” full of “unschooled indignities,” and his dedication as “rude” and unworthy of his patron, Charles Blunt (I: 7-8). As common as such a pose is in the sixteenth century, Nashe refashions it by coupling such humble confession with proverbial comparison, likening his satire to the _malorum Civitas_ of Phillip of Macedon.\footnote{From Erasmus, _Parabolae_, 202. Nashe makes use only of the first half of the comparison, leaving Erasmus’ condemnation of the busybody poignantly unsaid. Like a satirist, the busybody “collects bad things from every source, and stores his memory with a treasure of what is ugly and unpleasant.”} Assuming only the part of the comparison that suits his needs, Nashe protests that satire may be a prodigal mode:

> even as Macedon Phillip having finished his warres builded a Cittie for the worst sort of men, which hee called πουηρόπολις, _malorum Civitas_, so I: having laide aside my graver studies for a season, determined with my selfe beeing idle in the Countrey, to beginne in this vacation, the foundation of a trifling subject, which might shroude in his leaves, the abusive enormities of these our times. (I: 9)

As the equivalent of sixteenth-century beach reading, Nashe’s satire is subject to decorum. Because Nashe authors the “trifling” text in the spirit of mere recreation, it is fit only for idle time spent in vacation. Nashe pleads with his patron not to judge the text out of context, casting satire as simply the product of idleness. Despite such an apparently humble claim about his text, Nashe begins to display an ambivalence regarding the profit of his satiric work here. He interrogates his satiric choice to “shroude in his leaves” the sins of his time, simultaneously positing that there may be hidden potential in the text if he addresses the abusive enormities of England properly, but also leaving open the interpretation that such negative examples would be better hidden for the benefit of the commonwealth, even in a work castigating such behavior. Through his choice of “shroude,” Nashe entertains the
contradictory possibilities of veiling and embracing such vice. Through his ambivalence here, Nashe hits upon the very “problem” of satire: that any display of vice may ironically promote the very behavior the satirist would admonish his audience to avoid. Later in the dedication, however, Nashe compounds his own commitment to his text’s identity as mere recreation. Just as he sets aside his “graver studies” to accomplish what he sees as his idle work, he requests that Blunt remove from sight all his learned discourse so that Nashe’s work will appear less simple by comparison. At the end of his Epistle, he asks, “I am to request your worship, whiles you are perusing my Pamphlet, to lay aside out of your sight, whatsoever learned invention hath heretofore bredde your delight, least their singularitie reflect my simplicitie, their excellence convince mee of innocence” (I: 8). Here, Nashe adopts a common humility trope to describe Blunt’s recreational reading of his own work, emphasizing the lightness and prodigality of his satire with words such as “peruse” and “pamphlet.” He flatters his potential patron: in opposition to Nashe’s recreational toy, Blunt’s work must be “learned” and “singular.” Such a humble interpretation may disguise a more confident claim, however. While he assumes Blunt’s ability to discern profitable literature from recreation, Nashe also cleverly implies that his work possesses its own worthy singularity, and should be judged according to no other standards but its own. Through his wordplay, Nashe asserts the ultimate status of satire while protecting himself from the charge of arrogance. As such a discerning satirist, Nashe must deflect the indictment that, through his satire, he aims to “correct” the vice of his patron, while, at the same time, he must argue

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138 The OED provides contradictory definitions of “shroude.” Most commonly, it denotes a covering: “To hide from view, as by a veil, darkness, cloud; to cover so as to conceal; to screen, veil.” This meaning indicates that Nashe will hide vice from view of the reader, leaving his reader ignorant of its existence. On the other hand, Nashe would later use “shroude” to mean something different; the OED marks his use of the word to mean “To include, [or] embrace” in *Christes Teares Over Jerusalem*, offering the reader an interpretation which implies the embrace vice in order to rebuke it.
for the wide applicability and profit of his work. In order to accomplish this, Nashe posits two readerships: that of Blunt, the discerning reader who may regard satire as mere recreation, and that of his wider readership, filled with those who must build up their discretion through admonition.

While Nashe clearly positions Blunt as embodying the discretion of a most learned reader, capable of culling profit from even the lowest texts, he credits the average sixteenth-century reader with little in the way of interpretive discretion. As a result, Nashe condemns those texts which try the naïve reader’s ability to distinguish between profit and recreation without authorial guidance and offers his satire as an means of increasing the reader’s discretion. Rebuking those authors who would seduce unlearned readers to vice, Nashe insists that texts should fulfill their promises of profit with substantial lessons in the forms of overt precepts and didactic moral lessons, preserving not only negative examples, but also illuminating the consequences of vice. Without such moral guideposts, insubstantial and hollow texts offer only a “Chaos of sentences without any profitable sense” and are comparable to drums “which beeing emptie within, sound big without” (I: 10). Here, didacticism is a containing force. Absent the restraint inherent in the applicability of moral didacticism, the wild narrative enjoys full prodigal license, widely ranging in the author’s debaucheronous wit and enticing the reader to folly rather than repentance.139 Specifically, he calls out prose romances for playing down morality to emphasize rebellion: “in their bookes there is scarce to be found one precept pertaining to vertue, but whole quires fraught with amorous discourses, kindling Venus flame in Vulcans forge, carrying Cupid in triumph,

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139 Roger Ascham castigates Italian romances in *The Schoolmaster*, calling them out as deliberately attempting to ensnare England’s youth towards vice. He argues that the negative examples of these books “sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the sooner to corrupt honest manners, dedicated overboldly to virtuous and honorable personages, the earlier to beguile simple and innocent wits.” See Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1967), 67.
alluring even vowed Vestals to treade awry, inchanting chaste mindes and corrupting the continenst” (I: 10). The authors of these texts eschew their instructional duty and instead place the responsibility of interpretation entirely upon their readers. According to Nashe, the authors of these “emptie drums” rely upon their readers’ discretion without first strengthening it through precept and admonition. As the reader will inevitably flounder in the overwhelming presentation of such vice, Nashe condemns both author and reader as prodigals: while both waste their resources, he regards the prodigal reader sympathetically, the prodigal author, villainously. From Nashe’s perspective, the reader wastes time inefficiently trying to harness a moral out of the overwhelming amount of folly presented in the text and the author squanders the virtue of the printing press:

Were it that any Morall of greater moment, might be fished out of their fabulous follie, leaving theyr words, we would cleave to their meaning, … we would pry into their propounded sence, but when as lust is the tractate of so many leaves, and love passions the lavish dispence of so much paper, I must need send such idle wits to shrift to the vicar of S. Ffooles… the Presse should be farre better employed. (I: 10)

Nashe argues that, in struggling through the interpretation of these obscure works, the reader only finds more confusion and little profit. Casting the initial statement in the conditional, Nashe emphasizes both the author’s responsibility to create profitable literature and the reader’s expectation of such profit in the text. Through his emphasis upon didactic moral lesson, Nashe here reduces the benefit of reading almost exclusively to the moral profit achieved through didactic admonition. As such, literature which is morally unclear is more apt to lead to the reader’s descent into sin than to his ascent to virtue. Nashe urges his reader to be on guard against this seductive literature, educating himself in order to distinguish between texts which merely promise morality and those which deliver moral lesson.
Nashe offers his *Anatomie* as a text very concerned with increasing the reader’s discretion through its emphasis upon the educational experience of not only university students, but readers in general. Largely adapting his arguments from humanist educational tracts such as Roger Ascham’s *The Schoolmaster* and Thomas Elyot’s *Boke Named the Governor*, Nashe attempts to balance the benefit of wide reading with its liabilities. Both of these educational texts argue that good literature presents the delight of divinity and the allurement to learning. More so than Ascham and even Elyot, however, Nashe acknowledges that such profit often is obscured and difficult to decipher; but, he argues that, in the end, the hardest poetry hides the most beneficial lessons. For Nashe, the struggle and the reward is proportionate. He assures his reader that “in Poems, the things that are most profitable, are shrouded under the Fables that are most obscure” (I: 26). Unlike his earlier, more ambivalent use of “shroude,” Nashe here alludes only to “shrouded” as a veil or concealment. Simply put, the most profitable lessons must be hunted in obscure and difficult places. Nashe paints a path to truth very similar to that represented in the emblematic Choice of Hercules: it is through the submission of the will to virtue and the ascent up “the steepe, and craggie hill,” of righteousness that the reader “is sure / For his rewarde, to have a crowne of fame.”

Importantly, Nashe is careful to insist upon the relative slowness of the ascent to learning. Because such fables and obscurity must be deciphered and digested by a knowledgeable

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140 These texts offer a paradigm of education focused upon the bringing up of England’s noblemen for the purposes of their service to the commonwealth. The tracts emphasize the sheltering of the youth until an age of reason, agreeing that before the age of adolescence, the governor should absent vice from curriculum and nursery. After such an age, however, the tracts disagree about the best approach for the education of the gentlemen.


142 Nashe’s emphasis on the caution of the youth is akin to the hill of virtue described in the ekphrastic Tablet of Cebes, which demonstrates the Pythagorean Y: more forgiving than the stoic model, the Tablet describes that the youth may put himself on the right path at various points, working his way towards virtue through caution and perseverance.
reader, Nashe advises his reader to proceed up virtue’s hill with caution. Much like Ascham and Elyot before him, Nashe cites poetry as a delightful allurement to learning, but he deliberately constructs a more complicated relationship between such interpretive trial and his reader’s discretion than those offered in existing humanist educational tracts. Nashe’s observation regarding the raw power of poetry and the necessity of cautious interpretation leads him to outline more carefully the educational program he would advance in England in the second half of his text.

Nashe is largely ambivalent as to whether the digestion and interpretation of all texts should be undertaken by all students. He waffles between utter confidence in the reader’s self-sufficiency and anxiety about the damage which may be caused by a too hasty interpretive trial. First, Nashe posits that profit can be found in all literature: “even as the Bee out of the bitterest flowers and sharpest thistles gathers honey, so out of the filthiest Fables, may profitable knowledge be sucked and selected” (I: 30). Assuming the common Renaissance metaphor of the bee gathering nectar, Nashe’s argument for the sufficiency of his reader figures knowledge (nectar) in terms of humanist precepts, to be compiled and put to use in the making of a gentleman (honey). In this way, his own Anatomie attempts to mirror the very profit he outlines, with his advertisement for the text emphasizing the

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143 In his Schoolmaster, Roger Ascham posits that such interpretive discretion figures more as the exception than the rule: “And although I have seen some, innocent of all ill and staid in all honesty, that have used these things [translations of morally dubious texts] without all harm and without suspicion of harm, … yet if the meaning and manners of some that do use them were somewhat amended, it were no great hurt neither to themselves nor to others” (74). Thomas Elyot seems more optimistic in his Boke Named the Governor, positing that once a man is educated properly, he may cull profit from most any work. See Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Governour, Vol. 1, ed. Henry Herbert and Stephen Croft (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 14-29.

144 This metaphor seems to recall a particularly humanist concern for precept and adages, likening a humanist emphasis upon copia and the copying out of adages and phrases in commonplace books to the gathering of nectar. See Erasmus, Parabolae: “The bee flies everywhere, and carries home what she can use; and a studious man extracts from his reading what will make him better” (168).
gathering and storing of such knowledge in the reader’s memory. The *Anatomie* embodies the very profit Nashe would promote to his readers.

Nashe immediately qualifies his initial claim for his reader’s self-sufficiency, however, momentarily disqualifying untutored youths from ungoverned literary endeavors. For Nashe, although mature readers may contain the judgment necessary to cull the profit of virtue from the poison of vice, young students should be sheltered from the possible damage inflicted by unscrupulous reading. He clarifies his earlier claim of self-sufficiency, stating, “Nevertheless, tender youth ought to be restrained for a time from the reading of such ribauldrie, least chewing over wantonlie the eares of this Summer Corne, they be choaked with the haune before they can come to the kernel” (I: 30). Importantly, it is the manner of the youth’s reading (eating) which causes Nashe anxiety. While Nashe refers to the text as ribaldry, he also acknowledges that it contains profitable kernels meant to be digested by knowledgeable readers. He complicates Ascham’s narrow restriction against a youth’s ungoverned reading by insisting that the “chewing” of the youth is wanton, rather than the ribaldry of the text itself. Nashe asserts the flaw of youth to be a temporary one, characterized by heady and rash behavior which can be altered with education and corrected if necessary. Nashe argues that the reading of youth should be governed so that they may

145 In a similar vein, Spenser emphasizes the half-digested books of Error in the initial episode of *The Faerie Queene*: “Her vomit full of bookes and papers was, / With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke” (I.i.20, 6-7). Through his allegory, Spenser perhaps implies that Error would not be Error if the books were fully digested. See Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (New York: Longman Press, 1977), 35.

146 Unlike Nashe, Ascham argues for the complete sheltering of England’s populace against “bad” texts. Specifically, he dislikes Italian romances: “SUFFER these books to be read, and they shall soon displace all books of godly learning. For they … shall easily corrupt the mind with ill opinions and false judgment” (69).

147 Nashe’s portrayal of youth deciding between virtue and vice complicates the choice of Hercules by allowing for mistake and correction, more embracing the ekphrastic description of the Tablet of Cebes. The Pythagorean Y of the emblem dictates that the youth (Hercules) must choose his path and, once the choice is made, may not deviate. Should he choose vice and pleasure, he will end in only repentance. Should he choose virtue, he will
learn how to digest fully the profitable parts of the summer corn; but, as Nashe implies, in
time the youth will grow to be a self-sufficient, discreet reader.\footnote{148}

Nashe advises that the discretion of the reader be built up slowly, making solid the
reader’s ability to distinguish between profit and poison, but hesitates to commit to how such
a skill may be developed. Nashe states that any reader seeking profit from such texts must be
able to discern the kernel from the husk, the pearl from the pebble: “He that wil seeke for a
Pearle, must first learne to knowe it when he sees it, least he neglect it when hee findes it, or
make a nought worth peeble his Jewell” (I: 30).\footnote{149} Nashe’s conception of education here
seems largely to hinge upon his use of discretio, defined by Thomas Elyot as “a separation … Sometime election of good from ill.”\footnote{150} On the one hand, such discretion may be arrived
at through learned precept, which may help order experience and enable the youth make
better sense of the world.\footnote{151} On the other hand, discretion may resemble the virtue of

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\footnote{148}{In his emphasis upon the progressive growth of the reader through education, Nashe seems more in line with Elyot than Ascham. Elyot figures the growth of the reader into maturity by recalling the Latin, “maturitas,” meaning ripening, a process by which reason is refined and confirmed through both precept and experience: “And whan a man is comen to rype yeres, and that reason in him is confirmed with serious learning and longe experience: than shall be in reading tragedies execrate and abhorre the intolerable life of tyrants: And shall condemne the foly and dotage expressed by poetes lascivious” (I: 30).}

\footnote{149}{Erasmus emphasizes the commonality of the pebble in his own comparison in his prefatory letter to Pieter Gillis: “I have not chosen what was ready to hand, not picked up pebbles on the beach; I have brought forth precious stones from the inner treasure house of the Muses” (Parabolae, 131).}

\footnote{150}{Thomas Elyot, The dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knight (London: 1538), 35. Emblems for discretion emphasize its difficulty, but do not elaborate upon how it may be attained or perfected: for example, Geoffrey Whitney’s A Choice of Emblemes (1586) argues “That harde it is, the good from bad to trie: / The prudent sorte, shoulde have suche judgement sounde, / That still the good they shoulde from bad descrie: / And sifte the good, and to discerne their deeds, / And weye the bad, noe better then the weedes” (Geoffrey Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes (Brookfield, Vermont: Scolar Press, Gower Publishing Co., Ltd, 1989), 68.)}

\footnote{151}{In The Schoolmaster, Ascham argues for the committing of precept to memory before undertaking personal experience: “Learning, therefore, ye wise fathers, and good bringing-up, and not blind experience, is the next and readiest way that must lead your children, first to wisedom and then to worthiness, if ever ye purpose they shall come there” (52).}
prudentia, which implies a knowledge of the world gained by experience, both perhaps the objective experience of histories and the subjective experience of the individual. Nashe’s insistence upon the reader’s learning of discretion would later lead him to argue for the more empirical instruction offered by interpretive trial and cause him to abandon the type of rote precepts he applauds in the Anatomie. Here, however, he carefully argues only the idealized half of discretion, implicitly urging his readers to acquaint themselves only with profit, and to shun all vice. Nashe focuses on recognizing the Pearl, not the Pebble, thus confining his praise of discretion to only profitable kernels, refusing to tempt his readers by instructing them in the ways of vice.

Further retreating from advocating the ungoverned experience of reading, Nashe reaffirms the role of precept over experience in his return to the fatherly voice, admonishing the prodigal reader to build up his discretion. He positions himself as the voice of instruction and government, arguing for the necessity of solid knowledge before the reader attempts to engage texts which aim to challenge his discretion. Casting the over-hasty reader as a

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152 Geffrey Whitney’s emblem for Prudence offers the typical Janus figure, looking back in order to best judge the events of the future; he describes the figure as having regard: “as hee sees, the yeares both oulde, and newe, / So, with regarde, I may these partes behoulde, / Perusinge ofte, the newe, and eeke the oulde … his lookes did teache this somme; / To beare in minde, time past, and time to comme” (108).

153 Ascham argues for a similar definition of admonitory learning in The Schoolmaster, urging youth to listen to the advice of their elders, trusting in their experience instead of seeking their own: the true scholar will be “glad to hear and learn of another. For otherwise he shall stick with great trouble where he might go easily forward, and also catch hardly a very little by his own toil when he might gather quickly a good deal by another man’s teaching” (30). In his Zodiake of Life (London: Robert Robinson, 1588), Palingenius argues for his readers to pursue prudence through advice: “Sapience to Angels doth belong, and Gods above you see: / Where onely Prudence dothe pertaine to men that mortall bee. / Whereby they may take good advice from harmes and hurts to fliye / And gather things that may give aide, and live here quietlie. / What thing to doe, and what to leave, to man doth prudence show: / Therefore who wisheth well to live, and eke where thornes doe grow / With feete unprickerd for to goe, let him seeke her to know.” Palingenius distinguishes between sapience (heavenly knowledge) and prudence (earthly), offering prudence as a means of easing our lives rather than attaining knowledge of moral virtue or heavenly pursuits (97).
cautionary tale, Nashe returns to portray the reader as the prodigal son in need of discretion and admonition:

They that covet to picke more precious knowledge out of Poets amorous *Elegies*, must have a discerning knowledge, before they can aspire to the perfectiō of their desired knowledge, least the obtaining of trifles be the repentant end of their travel. (I: 30)

Noting that the pursuit of knowledge in dangerous mediums often ends badly, Nashe aligns the willful boldness of youth with the fate of the prodigal son. He refiges the scriptural parable to condemn not the search for material wealth, but the overzealous search for knowledge. Outlining a causal relationship which positions the achievement of discretion before the reader’s trial, Nashe insists upon his reader’s maturity and sufficiency of knowledge before he tests himself with dangerous amorous texts. Nashe does not dismiss experience and trial wholly, however; while the reader must first have discretion before he adds experience, he will never reach the “perfection of [his] desired knowledge” without the experience of difficult interpretive trial. Nashe’s emphasis upon perfection and his use of harvest imagery in the passage recalls Elyot’s Latinate *maturitas*, positing that each step of growth as necessary for the reader. For Nashe, if the maturation process is thwarted, the result will reduce the prodigal reader to repentance.

More so than his later works, *An Anatomie of Absurditie* argues for the educational benefit offered by admonition, guiding the reader through the world by advice and precept passed down from a godly father-figure. Even in the heavily didactic *Anatomie*, however, Nashe cannot wholly disavow the power of interpretive experience. In order to achieve full

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154 Palingenius seems to entertain both knowledge based on learning and knowledge based on experience, emphasizing the need for youths to study in order to achieve their intellectual potential; however, his wording emphasizes the application and use of knowledge: “On bookes with study for to looke, *applying day by day.* / For otherwise can none be learned except with untrue fame, / For fewe are learned now *in deede*, but many are in name” (96).
interpretive knowledge, Nashe’s readers must hazard interpretive uncertainty to reach a more perfect knowledge brought through particular experience, rather than knowledge which has sacrificed particulars to generalization and abstraction. By the time of his publication of *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, Nashe’s growing emphasis upon the constructed nature of experience causes him to abandon the didacticism of precept to favor a more particular, applicable knowledge. Nashe’s previous voice of admonition drops out of *Pierce Penilesse* entirely and is replaced by the author’s full embrace of the prodigal pose, a pose which disavows the moral authority of the satirist, reducing the authorial voice to a bankrupt poet ready to sell his soul to the Devil for a thousand pounds.

*Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*

In his later tracts, Thomas Nashe refashions the admonitory tone of *An Anatomie of Absurditie* into colloquies of morally bankrupt personae, all incapable of projecting the conventional moral authority needed for a strict satire of society’s ills. He transforms his authorial presence from his first major publication—a tract characterized by its investment in satire’s ability to elicit reformation—into numerous postures which disavow the profit of abstract admonition and divorce satire and the satirist from moral righteousness. Within two years of *An Anatomie*’s printing, Nashe would pen his most popular tract among early modern audiences, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, a text in which Nashe begins to challenge the nature of moral authority and the profit of satire. In this text, Nashe deliberately frustrates his readers’ expectation of satire’s moral profit by constructing his text with a distinct lack of a moral center or compass. At almost every opportunity, Nashe prevents his reader’s passive receipt of didactic moral lesson, substituting *An Anatomie*’s
persona of righteous admonition with the unlikely voices of prodigality and criminality. Through these distinctly “low” voices, Nashe privileges the reader’s interpretive experience of the text over the didactic power of the narrative, creating for his text an active readership invested in increasing their own discretion. Despite his rejection of passive didacticism in his own text, Nashe cannot disavow wholly the didactic power of all literature. Within Pierce’s supplication, he continues to praise poetry and drama as vehicles of inspiration and virtue, urging his audience to read poetry and attend plays in order to acquaint themselves with both virtue and vice. While he deliberately thwarts moral lesson in his own tract, he leaves open the possibility that other literature may inspire righteous behavior in London’s wayward population.

In 1592, the publisher of *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell* printed the text with a title page very similar to that advertising *An Anatomie of Absurditie*, identifying the tract as participating in the prodigal tradition and scripting for Nashe’s readers a narrative of repentance leading to moral profit. The tract promises its readers a discussion of the seven deadly sins, demonstrating the tract’s reliance upon classic precept and medieval admonition. The subtitle of the first edition, printed by Richard Jones, pledges that the text will describe “the over-spreading of Vice, and suppression of Vertue. Pleasantly interlac’d with variable delights: and pathetically intermixt with conceipted reproofs” (I: 149).155 This language publicizes the tract as morally profitable, specifically offering the reader pleasure and precepts in the form of “delights” and “conceipted reproofs” and satisfying the public’s expectation of moral didacticism. While it remains unclear whether this edition was indeed “pirated” as Nashe claims, the authorial changes made to the prefatory matter in *Pierce Penilesse*...

Penilesse’s second printing indicate that Nashe took umbrage with the printer’s “impudence” in altering his prescribed format (I,153). To his new edition, Nashe appends “A private Epistle of the Author to the Printer,” correcting the original publication for the new printing:

Now this is that I woulde have you to do in this second edition; First, cut off that long-tayld Title, and let mee not in the forefront of my Booke, make a tedious Mountebanks Oration to the Reader, when in the whole there is nothing praiseworthie. (I: 153)

While assuming the language of humility, Nashe dismisses the prodigal subtitle of his text as a “long-tayld Title” and replaces the printer’s promise of profit with a bare title and the aggressive motto Barbaria grandis habere nihil. In his insistence that the new tract lack an interpretive frame which prescribes a certain way of reading, Nashe rejects the very concept of reader expectation and argues against the contemporary humanist emphasis upon literature’s profit and utility, an emphasis Nashe himself fully had embraced in his Anatomie of Absurditie. Lorna Hutson reads this editorial change as Nashe’s attempt to “shock readers into thinking for themselves” and to deflate the emphasis given to typical prefatory material in interpreting obscure texts. More specifically, Nashe’s textual change parodies the flimsy didacticism popular in commercial literature of the 1580s. He omits the prefatory

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156 Hutson reads Nashe’s explanation as genuine and the second edition as the reliable authorial text (176-177).

157 The motto comes from Ovid’s Amores, III.vii, which Marlowe translates as “Wit sometimes was more precious than gold / Now poverty great barbarism we hold” (qtd. in Hutson, 176). The motto is very different in intention from the Christian one advertising An Anatomie: “Ita diligendi sunt homines, ut eorum non diligamus errors,” translated as “So human beings should be loved, although we do not love their errors” (I: 3)

158 Ibid.

159 Robert Greene is notoriously prodigal in his autobiographical prefaces and introductions: in his Greene’s Never Too Late, he promises the repentance of his protagonist and himself—the text is a thinly veiled biography—urging his reader to “race out idleness with delight and follie with admonition” (IX: 3). In Greene’s Mourning Garment, he asserts his earnestness in abandoning prose romance: “though [his repentance] be Sero, yet is it Serio, and though my showers come in Autumnne, yet thinke they shall continue the whole year” (IX: 123). In Greene’s farewell to Follie, he promises to renounces romance for morally efficacious satire: “it is the last I meane ever to publish of such superficiall labours” (IX: 228-229). References for Greene are to
material of his own work to frustrate the reader’s desire for an omnipotent authorial voice who would instruct the reader as to the proper interpretation of the text. Without prefatory matter claiming the superficial righteousness of an authorial voice, Nashe promises his reader only the experience of reading, trusting only experience to educate the reader and increase his discretion.

Juxtaposing the popular medieval format of the seven-deadly sins with a parodic supplication to the devil, *Pierce Penilesse* challenges its audience as a hybrid text. In adapting the homiletic form, Nashe interrogates the power of didacticism to reform its audience. He constructs his text deliberately to disorient his reader, insisting that the reader struggle through the experience of *Pierce Penilesse*, a text which embodies complicated notions of prudence and discretion. The result is a satiric hodge-podge that thwarts expectation and tries interpretation. The seven-deadly sins paradigm employed by Nashe at first glance appears to embrace the educative value of precept over experience, prescribing for the reader a well-known litany of sins and their effects. However, the didacticism implicit in Pierce’s homiletic supplication rings hollow in its attempt to reform society. While Nashe continues to have recourse to Erasmean source material, pulling from his *Parabolaeti* and *Adages* to admonish his targets for Greed, Pride, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery, he does not allow the power of such didactic admonition to go

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160 Neil Rhodes reads the type of hybridity found in Pierce Penilesse as evidence for his theory of the grotesque, seeing Nashe as exemplifying the grotesque’s juxtaposition of the extraordinary with the low or benign. For his discussion of the grotesque in sixteenth-century prose, see *The Elizabethan Grotesque* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 3-18.

161 For his discussion of the history of the seven deadly sins paradigm, see Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, Michigan: State College Press, 1952), 69-121.
unquestioned. While adhering to the generic restraints of the sermon, Nashe overturns the didacticism of the form he would co-opt, deflating the instructional power of the medieval seven deadly sins paradigm through his choice of “authorial” personae and his fictional audience of the devil.\textsuperscript{162} As Lawrence Manley argues, the “logic of the paradoxical encomium” enables Nashe to create a Supplication that is “a praise and celebration of the seemingly indefensible.”\textsuperscript{163} Resisting the urge to instruct his readers how specifically to read his text, Nashe argues for the development of interpretive prudence, demanding his reader struggle through the \textit{Supplication}. In doing so, Nashe recalls a sense of discretion similar to Aristotle’s \textit{phronêsis}, or practical knowledge. For Aristotle, this type of knowledge arises only from examples of deliberation, questioning the validity of general rules and privileging the reader’s experience.\textsuperscript{164} While prudence will not eschew wholly the type of knowledge that can be gained through general principles or truths, it subordinates such generalization to knowledge gained from particulars and deliberation.\textsuperscript{165} In \textit{Pierce Penilesse}, Nashe privileges the process of deliberation over rule. He will amass for the young reader the experiences of

\textsuperscript{162} Lorna Hutson interprets Pierce Penilesse similarly, emphasizing Nashe’s mockery of disingenuous morality in order to parody the patronage system upon which he unhappily depends: “confessing the emptiness of the moralizing posture on which a successful bid for patronage depends, going on to turn the frustration of this knowledge into a carnival pleasure by openly acknowledging his patron is the devil, and bequeathing him, … all the irrelevant stock phrases under which individual profit masquerades as moral reformation” (180)


\textsuperscript{164} In his discussion of Aristotle’s use of “kanôn” or rule, Joe Sachs observes that Aristotle “uses the word only to deny that there are such things in ethics, apart from flexible judgment of a serious and decent human being … he says that the right thing to do is always something particular that must be perceived. From the beginning of the inquiry, Aristotle warns against looking for the precision of formulations or deductions in ethics.” See \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2002), 210.

\textsuperscript{165} Aristotle defines prudence as not “a knowledge of general principles only; it must also take account of particular facts, since it is concerned with action, and action deals with particular things.” As such, he likens prudence with equity in the sense that both virtues deal almost exclusively in particulars and therefore require deliberation. Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, trans. Hugh Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934), 345-347.
his text, withholding his own authorial presence and interpretation, replacing his voice with the voice of Pierce Penilesse.

Through his persona of Pierce, Nashe demonstrates abstract precept to be wholly inapplicable to the fluctuating particulars of life. In the most obvious invalidation of precept, Pierce ironically attempts to instruct the devil in sin and virtue by dedicating his homiletic prose to him, and, in doing so, deflates the educational value of admonition. Any profit that might be gained by his rote representation of the seven deadly sins and satiric diatribes is re-scripted by Pierce’s very purpose and authorial nature. A diabolic sycophant, Pierce Penilesse “misreads” his audience and invalidates his own paradigm through his innate lack of moral authority. Modern critics tend to dismiss Pierce as a disorderly construction meant to unify a text largely derived from equally disorderly jest-books, emphasizing the mimicry of Pierce rather than his originality, but such treatment of Pierce undervalues the role he plays in the work, reducing him to a vehicle for vice.166 Pierce works as far more than a mere cipher; he demonstrates Nashe’s commitment to devaluing the nature of general principle in favor of more applicable experience. Pierce routinely emphasizes the particulars of situations rather than their adherence to an abstract rule: he rewrites the seven deadly sins in an unexpected way; likewise, he himself is an unexpected narrator. Pierce is a fool and a malcontent, but more than anything else, he is an unrepentant prodigal.

Beginning and ending his tract in the pose of the prodigal son—unthrifty, rebellious and lacking in conventional moral authority—Pierce adopts the persona in order to highlight

166 McKerrow argues for the tract’s “utter want of unity and definite plan” and states that “the original idea, that of a petition to the devil, is almost lost in a mass of scarcely relevant satire” (V: 18). Stephen Hilliard likens the voice of Pierce Penilesse to the voice of Dick Tarleton and the jest-book tradition, adding to that a dash of Robert Greene, and a bit of discontentment. Likewise, Hutson continually dismisses Pierce as a “diabolic buffoon” (174). Stephen Hilliard, The Singularity of Thomas Nashe (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 66-69.
the emptiness of its gestures. While he introduces himself and his tract through his posture of a repentant prodigal, he undercuts the earnestness of his penitence even as he asserts it. Mimicking the didactic lessons professed by reformed prodigals, Pierce claims that he has learned from the mistakes of his youth and will be more cognizant of folly in the future. He promises a narrative built on confession and the achievement of moral lesson, but cannot commit completely to a life as a profitable citizen:

Having spent many yeeres in studying how to live, and liv’d a long time without mony: having tired my youth with follie, and surfetted my minde with vanitie, I began at length to looke backe to repentaunce, & addresse my endevors to prosperitie: But all in vaine. (I: 157)

In his emphasis upon the folly of his youth and his mind’s previous preoccupation with vanity, Pierce assumes the language of the scriptural parable, but works to negate the very lesson offered by the prodigal son. In his assertion that he spent “many yeeres in studying how to live,” Pierce argues against the value of admonition and precept, demonstrating the inefficacy of abstraction in the face of real experience. Instead, Pierce emphasizes the educational power of the prodigal’s riotous living, relating his repentance to his full experience of folly in his youth. Learning the wrong lesson from the parable, Pierce implies that it is only after indulgence, not study, that reformation may occur. Like the prodigal son’s willful dismissal of his father’s godly advice, Pierce does not learn from precept, but from his mistakes. Adopting the posture of repentance without the benefit of genuine reformation, Pierce attempts to fashion moral authority from the prodigal confession of his sins, but undercuts the sincerity of such confession even as he asserts his “earnest”

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167 Stephen Hilliard argues that Nashe adopts the persona of the prodigal Pierce to demonstrates his discontentment with society without risking the charge of railing. As a result, he reads the pose as mostly genuine (63-66). What this reading omits is the prominence of the prodigal motif throughout his introduction, supplication, and even in the reaction of his fictional reader, the Knight of the Post.
repentance. He is a willful prodigal—selling his own repentance for a monetary reward: having gained all he can from his prodigal indulgence in sin, Pierce will now address himself to “prosperitie.” The prodigal Pierce does not look for spiritual succor like his scriptural source, who throws himself upon the mercy of his godly father. Rather, Pierce desires monetary fulfillment. With his apathetic “But all in vaine,” Pierce negates the possibility of reformation before it has even begun.

Pierce’s only direct reference to the prodigal son emphasizes the problem posed by Christ’s parable, demonstrating Pierce’s vexed interpretation of scripture. Nashe develops and expands Pierce Penilesse’s adopted persona throughout the text, calling attention to Pierce’s revision of Christ’s parable, which highlights the ingenuity of the prodigal over his repentance and thus negates the narrative’s admonitory power. Diminishing the didactic value of the parable, Pierce first omits all mention of the father’s godly advice to his wayward son in his revision, making the prodigal’s ruin almost inevitable. Next, he questions the sincerity of repentance in general, interrogating the corruption of human will brought about by the fall of Adam, a trespass which makes earnest repentance impossible without divine mercy. Finally, Pierce intrudes into the narrative alternately to sympathize with the prodigal and castigate him for his sin, positioning his voice as authorial and correctly “interpreting” the revised parable for his reader. Through his revision and interpretation of the prodigal son parable, Pierce showcases the inapplicability of admonition.

Within his narrative of Pride, Pierce constructs a conventional portrait of the prodigal son, initially portraying the young gallant as an ungrateful and effeminate spendthrift who feels entitled to the monetary treasure of the world. In the context of his supplication, Pierce particularizes the prodigal to be a young gallant who wastes his precious resources in the
Inns of Court and London and idly rails at his lack of fortune. Inconsolable and discontented, the prodigal swears that he will leave England and will travel by ship to Spain, fulfilling the narrative’s requirement for foreign travel. At first, Pierce adheres pretty strictly to the sequence of events laid out by the scripture, setting up the expectation of repentance, followed by spiritual renewal and moral lesson. But, Pierce thwarts the didactic expectation of the narrative, quickly refashioning the remainder of the parable to undercut such profitable resolution. The pure satiric force of the passage makes it worth quoting in full:

And when [the prodigal] comes there, poore soule, hee lyes in brine, in Balist, and is lamentable sicke of the scurvies: his dainty fare is turned to a hungry feast of Dogs & Cats, or Haberdine and poore John at the most, and which is lamentablest of all, that without Mustard.

As a mad Ruffion, on a time, being in daunger of ship-wrack by a tempest, and seeing all other at their vowes and praiers, that if it would please God, of his infinite goodnesse, to delyver them out of that imminent daunger, one woulde abjure this sinne wher unto he was addicted; an other, make satisfaction for that vyolence he had committed: he, in a desperate jest, began thus to reconcile his soule to heaven.

O Lord, it may seeme good to thee to deliver me from this feare of untimely death, I vowe before thy Throne and all thy stary Host, never to eate Haberdine more whilest I live.

Well, so it fell out, that the Sky cleared and the tempest ceased, and this carelesse wretch, that made such a mockery of praiers, readie to set foote a Land, cryed out: not without Mustard, good Lord, not without Mustard: as though it had beene the greatest torment in the world, to have eaten Haberdine without Mustard. But this by the way, what penance can be greater for Pride, than to let it swing in its own halter? Dulce bellum inexpertis. (I: 171)

Through his insistence that “what penance can be greater for Pride, than to…swing in its own halter” Pierce attempts to conclude his fable of the prodigal son with a neat resolution condemning the prodigal’s selfish and unholy behavior. According to Pierce’s authorial interpretation, because he suffers from Pride, the prodigal should suffer punishment for his
Pierce’s retelling of the prodigal fable does not bear out such a reading, however. Rather, the prodigal escapes danger with little sacrificed. In short, Pierce demonstrates the inapplicability of didactic interpretation by appending an ill-fitting moral lesson onto his revision of the parable.

Throughout his revision, Pierce continues to empty the parable of its didactic and admonitory value. In it, the prodigal acts vilely, mocking the very nature of prayer, and in the place of earnest repentance, offering God a self-serving bargain, that of denying himself the “delicacy” of Haberdine. It is only while he is afraid for his life that the prodigal prays to God like those around him, who were “at their vowes and praiers, that if it would please God, of his infinite goodnesse” to save them, they would amend their sinful lives. While Pierce’s prodigal recognizes the form of prayer, he deliberately mistakes the content, substituting the promises of amendment with a meaningless dried fish. The prodigal appears to parody the seemingly genuine repentance of the other sailors, mocking their godliness and showing himself to be morally destitute. Within the context of his diabolic supplication, however, Pierce leaves the situation morally unclear. On the one hand, the reader may condemn the prodigal harshly by reading him as an unholy villain for his “mockery of praier” and his presumptuous attempt to “reconcile his soul to heaven.” As such, the prodigal is derided and hopefully serves as an admonition to readers against such vile behavior. On the other hand, the prodigal may represent for Pierce an embodiment of human sinfulness. The prodigal does not sacrifice to God anything of worth, denying himself a fish he will never desire; but, according to the Protestant insistence upon justification by faith alone, the other sailors offer no more than the prodigal, promising God only their own sin. Neither deserve to be saved, but all are saved. In his interpretation, Pierce ironically embodies more fully the didactic
power of the prodigal parable, demonstrating that post-lapsarian man can in no way reconcile himself to heaven, but must instead offer himself up to God’s mercy. In comparing the prodigal to the other sailors, Pierce makes prodigality universal.

Pierce appends the Latin epigram *Dulce bellum inexpertis* to the prodigal fable, expressing the tension inherent in the didactic application of Christ’s parable. As an emblem of God’s mercy to his undeserving creation, the prodigal son parable exists to reaffirm God’s love for humanity and his paternal kindness to sinners. A problem arises, however, when a reader attempts to “use” the parable to govern his action. While adaptations of the parable appear to argue for the youth’s adherence to the advice of the father, they also implicitly argue for the indulgence of experience as a necessary step for gaining knowledge and spiritual rebirth. In a similar way, Pierce sympathizes with the prodigal, taking his side by admonishing the potential hypocrisy of the reader’s condemnation of the prodigal’s behavior. Insisting upon the value of experience in order to distinguish properly between good and evil, the acquaintance with both virtue and vice become necessary. Pierce’s commentary regarding his revision of the parable bares this interpretation out. Rather than insisting upon the prodigal’s confession at the conclusion of his fable, a resolution which would bring with it didactic admonition of the prodigal’s behavior, Pierce instead invalidates such didacticism by appending an inapplicable precept to his prodigal revision. Once he has invalidated preceptoral knowledge as a legitimate way to order the world, Pierce is able to argue that true knowledge can be gained only by the particulars of experience. He condemns the untried virtue for its hypocrisy: “It is a pleasante thing, over a full pot, to read the fable of thirsty Tantalus: but a harder matter to digest salt meates at Sea, with stinking water” (I: 171). Unlike his assertion in *An Anatomie* that precept acts to order existence and educate the
reader, in *Pierce Penilesse*, Nashe dismisses knowledge gained through precepts as knowledge largely untested. He has replaced his previous emphasis upon reproducible knowledge with knowledge learned through interpretive exercise.

Pierce pushes his argument for knowledge gained through experience still further, directly encouraging his reader to indulge in prodigality in order to increase his own sense of discretion. Returning to his affirmation of experience, Pierce cites the knowledge of both virtue and sin as the only viable method of distinguishing good from evil. Unlike his earlier claim in *An Anatomie of Absurditie* which urged only a positive sense of discretion, Nashe, through Pierce, now urges young men to engage in prodigal behavior as a means of building up their powers of discrimination. In his discussion of Sloth, Pierce argues in support of the young London gallants who walk abroad in the world, gaining personal experience and profiting from their missteps. He defends these prodigals and their behavior, asserting “how should a man know to eschew vices, if his own experience did not acquaint him with their inconvenience? *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*: that villainy we have made no assasies in, we admire” (I: 210). Here, Pierce privileges the knowledge of good and evil achieved through morally dubious behavior over that of more socially benign, but fundamentally unprofitable, pursuits. The experience of wrongdoing teaches and demystifies vice in a way that untried virtue cannot. Through Pierce’s insistence that gallants should indulge

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168 The *Gesta Grayorum* for 1594-1595 encouraged its members to indulge in a similar sampling in vice, advising the young men to “frequent the Theatre, and such like places of Experience; and resort to the better sort of Ord’naries for Conference, whereby they may … become accomplished with Civil Conversations, and able to govern a Table with Discourse.” See *Gesta Grayorum*, ed. Desmond Bland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1968), 41.

169 Under the guise of another fictional persona, Nashe urges his readers towards experience. In *An Almond for a Parrat*, Cuthbert Curryknave serves the state in answering the poisonous pamphlets of Martin Marprelate, carefully differentiating between what he reads as his own righteous indignation and Martin Marprelate’s unrepentant railing. Curryknave repeats Marprelate’s attacks of the Bishops; but, lest his readers mistake the him for Martin Marprelate, Nashe is quick to clarify: “Gentle reader, I give you but a tast of them by the waie,
sin, Nashe complicates the strict Aristotelian notion of prudence which argues for prudence’s virtue: distinguishing between mere “cleverness” and “prudence,” Aristotle insists that “the soul … cannot acquire the quality of Prudence without possessing Virtue.” ¹⁷⁰ For Aristotle, while prudence ideally will embrace only the good, cleverness embraces vice.¹⁷¹ Nashe works from a more liberal definition of discretion, separating the instrument of prudence from the more dubious means which it is achieved. For Nashe, discretion necessitates the experience of both the pearl and the pebble. He reshapes the end of Aristotelian prudence from a means of achieving virtue to suit his ends: he refashions the virtuous action of prudence into profit, arguing the applicability of discretion to a humanist framework which lauds service to the state as the ultimate good.¹⁷²

The satirist runs aground in his quest to profit the commonwealth, however. In urging the indefensible—namely, the prodigality of the citizenry—the satirist loses his moral authority. According to Nashe (this time in the voice of the Knight of the Post), satire is, itself, prodigal. It will not bring about the reformation of its subject, nor will it profit the satirist. At the conclusion of Pierce’s long supplication, the Knight of the Post confronts

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¹⁷⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b1-5.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 1144a35.

¹⁷² Nashe enlarges the benefit gained from negative experience from merely personal knowledge of good and evil to embrace the humanist paradigm of profiting the commonwealth as well. He ironically recasts the prodigal behavior of youth into profitable service to the state. He qualifies any harm the prodigal may come to, making his behavior and its consequences safely benign, and arguing that such behavior is justified through its unforeseen profit to young gallants and the commonwealth: “Besides, my vagrant Reveller haunts plaues, & sharpens his wits with frequenting the company of Poets: he emboldens his blushing face by courting fair women on the sodaine, and lookes into all Estates by conversing with them in publike places. … this livelie, wanton young Gallant, is like to proove the wiser man, and better member in the Common-wealth” (I: 210).
Pierce with his satire’s prodigality, dismissing Pierce’s creation as simple lunacy and misspent labor:

A supplication calst thou this? (quoth the Knight of the Post) it is the maddest supplication that ever I saw; me thinks thou hast handled all the seven deadly sinnes in it, and spared none that exceeds his limits in any of them. It is well done to practice thy witte, but (I believe) Our Lord will cun thee little thanks for it. (I: 217)

According to the Knight of the Post, the text will literally earn Pierce nothing; his satire represents time (mis)spent in mere recreation and will return no monetary profit to its author. Despite its castigation of the seven deadly sins and its attempt to reform society, Pierce’s satire is wholly prodigal. The Knight reduces it to mere recreation, which invalidates its creation and publication as profitable activity. Pierce’s treatment of the seven deadly sins, while thorough, can offer little compensation either from his diabolic patron or his readership. This assertion by the Knight recalls Nashe’s anxious treatment of his satiric task in *An Anatomie of Absurditie*: through his remarks to Pierce, the Knight implicitly questions whether satire can hope to admonish the sins of society through the exposure and castigation of its vice. Whereas Nashe fights for satire’s ability to urge reformation in his previous tract, here, Pierce cannot refute the Knight’s dismissal of satire. He merely changes the subject.

At the close of Pierce’s and the Knight’s digressive narrative, Nashe himself finally enters the text to further question the nature of his satiric occupation. Beginning with a jocular direct address to the reader, “Gentle Reader, *tandum aliquando* I am at leasure to talke to thee” (I: 239), Nashe’s epistle to the reader expresses anxiety regarding the power of moral didacticism to elicit reformation. In it, Nashe consistently dodges authorial responsibility for his work through his adoption of a variety of morally low postures: he is first a “scurvy pedling Poet,” dragging the unwilling reader through Paul’s Churchyard (I:
239); then, he is a felon awaiting hanging for his crime of authorship (241); and lastly, he is a pen-pal to Aretino’s ghost, calling up the Scourge of Princes to rail upon the stingy patrons who will not sponsor his work (242). Through his persona of a criminal, Nashe refigures Pierce’s willful prodigality to more directly question the challenge posed by satire.

In his epistle to the reader, Nashe argues for the metaphoric lowness of the satiric text by aligning his task as a satirist with the occupation of a thief. Defending his decision to place his satiric apologia at the conclusion of the work rather than at its more conventional location, Nashe states, “a felon never comes to his answere before the offence be committed” (I: 241). In other words, Nashe, like any proper criminal, will wait for his reader’s indictment before he mounts his defense. While he suggests through his metaphor that satire must be defended, the promise of his justification remains undelivered in the text. He can only problematize satire from the safe distance of metaphor. He equates his satiric achievement with horse-theft: “Wherefore, if I in the beginning of my Book should have come off with a long Apologie to excuse my selfe, it were all one as if a theefe, going to

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173 Nashe’s adaptations of two of these low personae have been discussed extensively. First, as a “scurvy poet” eager for the means out of poverty, see the literary/biographical work of Hilliard, The Singularity of Thomas Nashe, specifically Chapter Three, and McKerrow’s commentary in his Works V: 18-19. The material discussing Nashe’s indebtedness to Aretino is immense: again, see Chapter Three of Singularity, also Saad El-Gabalawy’s “Aretino’s Pornography and Renaissance Satire” in Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature, 30, no. 2 (1967): 87-99, and David C. McPherson’s “Aretino and the Harvey-Nashe Quarrel” in PMLA 84, no. 6 (1969): 1551-1558. For possibly the best discussion of Aretino and Nashe, see Neil Rhodes, Elizabethan Grotesque, 26-37.

174 In his need to justify his satiric pamphlets, Nashe is not wrong. Nashe complains in Strange Newes of the Intercepting of Certaine Letters that Pierce Pennlesse is being wretchedly misinterpreted by its audience: “Poore Pierce Pennillesse have they turned into a conjuring booke, for there is not that line in it, with which they doo not seeke to raise up a Ghost, and, …[converting] my booke into bitternesse” (I: 259). To amend the malicious misreading of his text, Nashe asserts a qualified authorial interpretive authority. He promises a clear explication to those offended readers who are in doubt about Nashe’s meaning: “if…the matter hangeth in suspense, let them send to mee for my exposition, and not buy it at the seconde hand, and I doe not doubt but they will be throughly satisfied” (I: 260). Nashe pledges to relent, offering his own interpretation of his work, demonstrating his acknowledgement of his own innate authority as the author of Pierce Pennlesse. Importantly, however, Nashe does not publish his own interpretation; rather he merely promises that he will give it in order to protect himself from charges of libel, but only if necessary.
steale a horse, should devise by the waie as he went, what to speake when he came at the
gallows” (I: 241). While this metaphor may represent a simple apology for his odd
placement of the authorial epistle at the conclusion of his book, Nashe’s statement also
engages the potential criminality of satire and the problem of Nashe’s own moral authority.
He questions the legitimacy of his satiric occupation by equating his authorship of *Pierce
Penilesse* with felonious action, specifically, a capital crime punishable by death. Through
his use of these comparisons, Nashe deliberately separates his low satiric occupation of
exposing and diagnosing vice from the high inspirational qualities of poetry and drama, the
didactic power of which he cannot bring himself to dismiss wholly.

Despite his anxiety regarding his own artistic task, Nashe cannot be said to disavow
completely the power of poetry to inspire virtue and instill righteousness in its audience.
Rather, he seems to continue to regard poetry as profitable. Demonstrated by his praise of
Sir Philip Sidney in his opening of *Pierce Penilesse* and the admiration for Edmund Spenser
with which he closes his text, Nashe harbors hope that the right literature can still return
society to a grandeur similar to that of Eden. Perhaps oddly, Nashe does not include himself
in this group. He idealizes both poets as the pinnacle of their profession and exemplars of
virtue, but speaks of them as oddly separated from himself. As an emblem of his praise and
his anxiety, Nashe’s perception of poetry—perhaps not inappropriately—recalls the language
of the most famous defense of poetry in the Renaissance. In the context of Pierce’s
supplication, Nashe affirms the utility of poetry in the commonwealth, maintaining Philip
Sidney’s argument for the supremacy of the poet above all other professions. For Nashe,
poets and dramatists, more than chronographers and even ministers of God, are credited with
the means to cleanse and purify rude speech and the power to inspire virtue. In his
discussion of Wrath, Pierce aptly criticizes the enemies of poetry, castigating them for their jealousy of poets, a group in which Nashe does momentarily include himself: “they cannot sweeten a discourse, or wrest admiration from men reading, as we can, reporting the meanest accident” (my emphasis I: 194). While potentially unable to assert his own art as worthy of likeness with Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, Nashe does position himself as opposed to the enemies of poetry, whom he speedily denounces. After his invective against these “enemies of poetry,” he abandons his wrath to idealize poetry further as “the hunny of all flowers, the quintessence of all Sciences, the Marrowe of Witte, and the very Phrase of Angels,” and empowers poetry to inspire and affirm virtue: “The vertuous by [poets’] praises they encourage to be more virtuous” (I: 193-4). Similarly, Pierce digresses to defend plays from those who would close down the playhouses for their perceived role in promoting idleness. He lauds plays as reaffirmations of justice and righteousness, idealizations where the guilty are punished and the virtuous rewarded:

In Playes, all coosonages, all cunning drifts over-guylded with outward holinesse, all stragelms of warre, all the cankerwormes that breede on the rust of peace, are most lively anatomiz’d: they shew the ill successe of treason, the fall of hastie climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the miserie of civill dissention, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murther. (I: 213)

He recalls Sidney’s argument for literature’s power to display the actions of a golden world, one unencumbered by historical fact and the corruptions which plague the iron age. He closes his argument for the righteousness of drama with a statement which recalls his description of satire in An Anatomie of Absurdite: “[plays] are sower pills of reprehension, wrapt up in sweete words” (I: 213). Mixing the profitable with the pleasant, righteous and inspirational literature offers examples of goodness to the reader.
While he embraces the power and pleasantness of poetry and drama in general, Nashe regards the profit of his own satiric task with a more jaundiced eye. In speaking of the ability of the mode to elicit its subject’s reformation, Nashe widens the gulf between his own work and that of the poetry he praises in *Pierce Penilesse*, separating himself from the praiseworthy texts of Sidney and Spenser. On the one hand, he praises satire as potentially the most authoritative mode and satirists as god-like in their power: “[t]hose that care neither for God nor the Divell, by their quills are kept in awe” (I: 193). Nashe’s praise of poetry here seems almost absolute. More so than the specter of divinity or sin, satire has the means to discriminate between the righteous and corrupt in society, granting the mode control over fame and thereby threatening men into obeying the rules of order. On the other hand, he reduces satire to mere libel, uninterested in the reformation of the wicked: “the vertuous by their praises they encourage to be more vertuous, [but] to vicious men they are as infernall hags, to haunt their ghosts with eternal infamie after death” (I: 193). In this passage, satire can only maintain the status quo, it cannot threaten or cajole the vicious to adopt the ways of the virtuous. Satire is not only impotent to educate or reform its audience, it is unconcerned with anything more than superficialities. In this assessment, satire becomes little more than a vehicle for punitive injury to reputation. Hardly the “hunny of all flowers,” satire shuns rehabilitation. Importantly, Nashe gravitates to this darker view of satire in his treatment of his critics. To his detractors, he threatens to unleash a sustained literary assault, leaving a monument “more lasting than bronze” to the infamy of his subject. He promises his critics, “if I bee evill intreated, or sent away with a flea in my ear, let him looke that I will raile on him soundly: not for an houre or a day, whiles the injury is fresh in my memory, but in some elaborate, pollished poem, which I will leave to the world when I am dead, to be a living
image to all ages” (I: 195). Nashe will rail rather than admonish. The violence of Nashe’s attack serves as a reminder to his audience that, despite the commonplace regarding poetry’s ability to inspire virtue, the efficacy of satire as a means of reformation remains much more troublesome.

In his first tract, The Anatomie of Absurditie, Nashe displays a confidence in his satiric task, assured of his moral authority and the profit of his occupation; however, in Pierce Penilesse, he begins to challenge the nature of the mode, divorcing moral authority from satire and complicating easy denunciations of vice. In his later tracts, Nashe returns to the question of his satiric occupation. In The Unfortunate Traveller, he again adapts the persona of the prodigal to reject the power of admonition to bring about reformation and to mock the very nature of repentance in the fallen world. Through his roguish clown, Jack Wilton, Nashe negates the ability of satire to accomplish the Herculean task of cleansing society of its overwhelming sin.

The Unfortunate Traveller

During his visit to Wittenberg, Jack and the Earl of Surrey witness a “scholastic entertainment” in honor of the Duke of Saxony. According to Wilton’s appraisal, “The Duke laught not a little at this ridiculous oration, but that very night as great an ironcall occasion was ministred, for he was bidden to one of the chiefe schooles to a Comedie handled by scollers. Acolastus, the prodigal child, was the name of it” (II: 249). In referencing this

175 First published in 1529, the heavily didactic Acolastus aimed to edify its audience of young schoolchildren through its assumption of the language and characters from the parable of Christ along with overtly didactic elements derived from the morality play tradition. Acolastus was the most popular prodigal son drama on the continent, numbering forty-eight printings and three translations before Nashe would write The Unfortunate Traveller. See J. Dover Wilson, “Euphues and the Prodigal Son,” The Library 10 (1909): 341.
particular prodigal son play, Nashe demonstrates the difficulty of rendering admonition applicable to its audience. The play consists of four parts, namely the departure of the prodigal from his father’s house, his riotous living abroad, his growing poverty and repentance, and lastly, his reunion with his father and their celebration, but does not represent all parts equally. Rather, almost three-fifths of the play are devoted to Acolastus’s dissolute rebellion, consisting of episodes showcasing the practices of parasites, conny-catchers, whores and bawds. While the amount of time spent demonstrating the prodigal’s “riotous living” in the drama may seem disproportionate, the play, like many retellings of the prodigal son fable, casts the prodigal’s sinful indulgence as safely benign through its initial godly admonition to avoid such vice and the inevitable repentance and conversion of the prodigal; these didactic safe-guards undercut and christianize the riotous episodes of vice which otherwise may thwart the morally-edifying admonition of the parable.\footnote{In addition to the parable’s own didactic guides against misinterpretation, Gnapheus inserts the allegorical character \textit{Eubulus, or Prudence}, who serves as the prodigal’s father’s advisor and continually admonishes the audience against the path chosen by the prodigal. Eubulus offers precept and didactic moral lesson throughout the drama, acting as the play’s moral center and allegorizing the virtue of prudence for potentially misguided audience members.}

Not surprisingly, these safeguards fail before Jack.

Jack Wilton easily ignores the didacticism of Christ’s parable. Rather than gain moral edification from the show acted before him, Jack Wilton treats the moralistic drama as the ethical equivalent of any other evening’s entertainment. He ignores the content of the parable, choosing instead to disparage aspects of performance. He criticizes the show as “so filthily acted, so leathernly set forth, as would have moved laughter in Heraclitus” (II: 249).\footnote{The OED offers this quotation as the only example of the word “leathernly” meaning “clumsily.”}

According to Jack, the play’s moral didacticism is made no more effective than
farce. He reduces the show to mere form and gesture, judging its artistry rather than its morality:

One, as it he had ben playning a clay floore, stampingly trode the stage so harde with his feete that I thought verily he had resolved to do the Carpenter that set it up some utter shame. Another flong his armes lyke cudgels at a peare tree, insomuch as it was mightily dreaded that he wold strike the candles that hung above their heades out of their sockettes, and leave them all darke. Another did nothing but winke and make faces. There was a parasite, and he with clapping his handes and thripping his fingers seemed to dance an antike to and fro. The onely thing they did well was the prodigall childs hunger, most of their schollers being hungerly kept; & surely you would have sayd they had bin brought up in hogs academie to larn to eate acorns, if you had seene how sedulously they fell to them. Not a jest had they to keepe their auditors from sleeping but of swill and draffe; yes, nowe and then the servant put his hand into the dish before his master, & almost chokt himselfe, eating slovenly and ravenously to cause sport. (II: 249-250)

Jack jocularly comments on his experience in the theater, distracting himself from the play’s moral lesson by criticizing the acting styles of the scholar-players, worrying about the construction and illumination of the stage, digressing to comment upon the dietary condition of the players, and finally pleading for more jests to entertain the sleepy audience. Simply put, the play does not succeed in spreading the Gospel to Jack. Instead of receiving the play’s moral lesson—one which would be particularly applicable to him—he can only “practice his wit” satirizing the actors. Through his description, he positions the didacticism of the prodigal son drama as a prodigal waste of time. Left to amuse himself, Jack can only criticize the players for their bad form. In this episode, Nashe points out the failure of drama

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178 Jack similarly disregards his very serious audience with Luther and Carolostadius, refusing to profit from his time with the two divines. He notices particulars which amuse him rather than substance which may benefit him: “I thought verily they would have worried one another with wordes, they were so earnest and vehement. Luther had the louder voice, Carolostadius went beyond him in beating and bounsing with his fists. ... They uttered nothing to make a man laugh, therefore I will leave them” (II: 250).
to persuade, sharply contrasting his earlier assertion of its ability to inspire virtue. While in *Pierce Penilesse* Nashe defends young men’s acquaintance with plays and poetry as profitable exercises for inspiring virtue, in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, they are, at best, a waste of time.

As in his earlier texts, *Anatomie of Absurditie* and *Pierce Penilesse*, Nashe returns to the persona of the prodigal son in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, unifying the episodic world of Jack Wilton through its prevalent debauchery. This time, however, Nashe adopts a more self-conscious approach to the scriptural narrative, reminding his audience of the prodigal son parable throughout the text. Likening his protagonist to the anti-heroes of popular repentance literature, Nashe constructs Jack Wilton as a jocular swindler who fits the prodigal paradigm. Much as he did in *Pierce Penilesse*, Nashe adapts the pattern of admonition, rebellion and repentance, but does so now in order to satirize the didactic authority of repentance narratives. He evacuates the prodigal genre of its didactic safeguards of admonition and repentance, showcasing the inability of such narratives to reform their audience. Instead, Nashe knowingly misrepresents the lessons of the parable: didactic admonition is weak, repentance is deceitful, and indulgence is fun. This parodic deflation does not come without a price, however. Nashe’s mockery of repentance narratives indirectly questions the ability of all didactic literature to reform its audience, even satire. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Nashe implicitly argues for a reconsideration of satire, removing it from its roots in medieval complaint and homiletic literature. Through the persona of Jack Wilton, Nashe calls for satire to admit its impotence and abandon its undeliverable promises of edification and reform.
Most broadly, Jack’s narrative loosely conforms to Richard Helgerson’s model of Elizabethan prodigality, a didactic paradigm defined by the protagonist’s initial admonition by an elder, followed by his rebellion against the authority and advice offered, and closing with the protagonist’s repentance or imprisonment (or both). The events of the parable attempt to present the riotous living of the prodigal within the didactic safeguards of his admonition by an elder and his contrition and repentance of his ill deeds. Once reformed, the prodigal returns home, spiritually reborn from the ashes of his sin, and enjoys a feast celebrating his redemption.

In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the reader follows Jack through his prodigal travels on the Continent, where he repeatedly is admonished and imprisoned and, finally, claims repentance for his sins. To summarize: Jack first gulls a Cider Merchant, for which he is whipped; undaunted, he cozens a Captain and Clerks; after leaving the war camp of Henry the Eighth and having exhausted his means of living, Jack contemplates returning to England but happily joins the retinue of the Earl of Surrey instead. As Surrey and Jack idly travel throughout the Continent, they switch identities, are arrested for counterfeiting, meet a Courtesan in prison, get released, and continue to Italy. After he and Surrey part company, Jack cannot give up the disguise, claiming to be the Earl only to be admonished by Surrey for his presumption; Jack then continues on his prodigal journey, gets arrested on suspicion of rape and murder, and is almost hanged; on the scaffold, however, a Banished Earl offers testimony of Jack’s innocence, only to admonish him for his profitless travels; Jack ignores the banished English lord’s advice and later suffers imprisonment respectively by a Jew, an Anatomizer and the sexually insatiable Juliana. After witnessing the graphic execution of Cutwolfe, Jack returns to the English court, claiming repentance for his prodigality:
Unsearchable is the booke of our destinies. … To such straight life did it thence forward incite me that ere I went out of Bologna I married my curtizen, performed many almes deedes; and hasted so fast out of the Sodom of Italy, that within fortie daies I arrived at the king of Englands campe … and feasted many daies. (II: 328)

The text closes with Jack’s insertion of a moral lesson and declaration of his reformation, seemingly returning Jack to the safe fold of the orthodoxy and completing his prodigal journey with his repentance and a feast.

Despite his overall adherence to this prodigal paradigm, Nashe subtly alters the pattern in The Unfortunate Traveller. The alterations help him to satirize early modern repentance narratives that profess moral edification but deliver debauchery. The alterations are three. First, pushing the humanist concern for literary profit to an absurd extreme, Nashe elevates his text’s utility, positioning his papers as serving the commonwealth as useful “wast paper,” fit for mustard pots, the storage of food and drink, and most importantly, toilet paper. In addition to mocking their claims of edification, Nashe also deflate s the power of admonition in his own parodic text, demonstrating the weakness of the old, godly admonishers and their advice to the young prodigal. Lastly, Nashe undercuts the final didactic safeguard of these texts, parodying the prodigal’s conversion through Jack Wilton’s promise of a sequel to his narrative of knavery.

In his frame for The Unfortunate Traveller, Nashe parodies literature which claims for itself the easy profit of didacticism, elevating such use of the text to the point of absurdity. In his introduction of Jack, Nashe admits to a vexed relationship with literary profit. He admittedly dismisses Jack’s text as prodigal, but qualifies his dismissal, adding that it is not wholly without profit. Nashe first scripts for his readers the prodigal paradigm by alluding to Jack Wilton’s chronicle as “pages of his misfortunes,” framing the text as one of
repentance. Creating the perception that Jack’s narrative will be a retrospective of his ill living culminating in an edifying scene of repentance, Nashe equates the text’s prodigality directly with its profit: “A proper fellow Page of yours called Jack Wilton … hath bequeathed for wast paper here amongst you certaine pages of his misfortunes” (II: 207). Nashe cannot stop there, however: he urges his reader, “In anie case keepe them preciously as a privie token of his good will towards you” (II: 207). Hinting at the mockery to come in the text, he juxtaposes contradictory theories about the value of literature, asserting that the chronicle should be kept “preciously” but also insisting that it is a “privie token of good will.”

In a very literal way, Nashe urges his reader to make the text profitable, emphasizing the use of the text’s paper, not what is printed. Continuing to promote the physical properties of the chronicle, Nashe insists that the text be used “to stop mustard-pottes” and pleads with his readers to serve the commonwealth well with it: “To anie use about meat & drinke put them to and spare not, for they cannot doe theyr countrie better service” (II: 207). According to Nashe, The Unfortunate Traveller will be made profitable, serving the commonwealth as useful “wast paper.”

Nashe further interrogates the didacticism implicit in the prodigal paradigm commonly used in repentance narratives by invalidating the moral authority of the supposedly godly admonishers who urge the prodigal to avoid “riotous living.” While Jack is routinely reprimanded for his prodigal behavior in The Unfortunate Traveller, the admonishers rarely command the moral authority necessary to reform the rogue to a morally profitable lifestyle, and more often than not, share in the blame assigned to Jack’s highjinks.

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Within the world of the text, Jack is admonished multiple times with little promise of reformation: early on, he is punished by the civil magistrates in the war camp of Henry the Eighth for his cozenage of the Cider Merchant; later, he is chastised by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey for his presumptuous usurpation of the Earl’s identity; and lastly, Jack is advised by the Banished Lord to cease his prodigal traveling and to return home to England. In each case, however, the authority of the supposedly godly admonisher is tainted by his own sin. Rather than reform their prodigal audience, their admonitions serve to reinforce the very riotous living they would admonish, erasing the moral difference between the righteous admonisher and the prodigal recipient of the advice.

Early in the narrative, Nashe deflates the moral edification promised by admonition and corporal punishment by positioning the magistrates who reprimand Jack as complicit in his crime. After he gulls the Cider Merchant, Jack is discovered and is “pitifully whipt for his holiday lye” by the king’s magistrates (II: 216). In its purer forms, punishment intends to demonstrate both the heinous nature of the crime and the meting out of appropriate justice: according to Ronald Paulson, “punishment thus conveys a definite admonition,” showcasing the direct causal relationship between the crime and the punitive consequence. In addition, the edification offered by the administration of punishment reinforces the distinction between the beneficent orthodoxy and the riotous criminal who thwarts its rules. More specifically, the corporal punishment of miscreants in early modern England “was seen as the most essential means of achieving order” among the potentially rebellious citizenry, strengthening the public perception of the orthodoxy as the ruling power of society through the public administration of justice. In contrast to this view of punishment as socially and morally

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reaffirming, Jack opposes his punishment with his observation that although the magistrates punished him for his crimes, “they made themselves merrie with it manie a Winters evening after” (II: 216). While he is declaimed as a perpetrator of misdemeanors by the whipping he receives, his punishment is divorced from its admonitory properties. Instead, its rehabilitative qualities are replaced with laughter and even the encouragement of further vice. Contradicting his punishment with the apparent success of his plot, Jack deliberately casts the magistrates as part of his cozenage, subordinating the punishment he receives to the mirth he imparts to his ironic admonishers.\textsuperscript{182} In the end, the whipping of Jack Wilton demonstrates the fulfillment of the letter of law, but misses the spirit which animates it.\textsuperscript{183}

In a similar way, Nashe deliberately undercuts the moral authority of the Earl of Surrey, leaving his standing as an admonisher in jeopardy. Although Jack initially asserts that Surrey embodies the best qualities of the perfect poet, this portrayal soon transforms to demonstrate Surrey’s prodigality. (II: 242). According to Jack, the Earl of Surrey formerly embodied the gravity and modesty of those poets separated from the world. He was once full of didactic moral virtue and commandment, but his infatuation with the lovely Geraldine has transformed him into a literary prodigal. As such a prodigal, he can only write love sonnets and other “profitless” verse and is unfit “for any calling in the Common wealth” (I: 37).\textsuperscript{184}


\textsuperscript{182} Stephen Hilliard again takes Jack and Nashe at their words: “After he has duped the victualer into magnificently showing his nobility by distributing free drink and food to the camp, he is whipped for his ‘holiday lie,’ but the whipping is passed over without description, and those who whipped him enjoyed his prank” (138-139).

\textsuperscript{183} David Kaula mentions that Jack’s lack of description of his whipping stands in sharp contrast to the more belabored descriptions of violence elsewhere in the text, namely, the violence of Cutwolfe’s execution and even the brutally comic rape of Heraclide (47). See “The Low Style in Nashe’s Unfortunate Traveler,” \textit{Studies in English Literature} 6, no.1 (1966): 43-57.

\textsuperscript{184} After witnessing Surrey’s ridiculous display of passion for Geraldine—in the form of the courtesan, Diamante—Jack pointedly speaks of his master’s odd emasculation: “I perswade my self he was more in love
Even more grievous than his adolescent love of Geraldine, however, Nashe hints that Surrey has abandoned his responsibility to his king and country. He implies that Surrey displays the worst of prodigality through his displacement of his royal father with his love, Geraldine. Surrey is “morally emasculated” through his pursuit of Geraldine’s love, choosing such consuming love over his duties to his king. Noting his master’s prodigality, Jack wonders why Surrey would leave the comfort of England: “what changeable humor had so sodainely seduced him from his native soyle to seeke out needlesse perils in those parts beyond sea” (II: 243). Moreover, Nashe also raises the suspicion that Surrey’s departure from the court was perhaps committed without proper consent, as the King issues the commandment that Surrey return to England “as speedily as he could…whereby his fame was quit off by the shins” (II: 279). Coming upon his former page, Surrey acknowledges to Jack that he is divorced from his former self, and is now subject to amorous Cupid, who has usurped Surrey’s allegiance from his rightful father:

Ah, quoth he, my little Page, full little canst thou perceive howe farre Metamorphozed I am from my selfe, since I last saw thee. There is a little God called Love, that will not bee worshipt of anie leaden braines; one that proclaimes himselfe sole King and Emperour of pearcing eyes, and cheefe Soveraigne of soft hearts; hee it is that, exercising his Empire in my eyes, hath exorsized and cleane conjured me from my content. (II: 243)

with his own curious forming fancie than hir face; and truth it is, many become passionate lovers onely to winne praise to theyr wits” (II: 262). Nashe’s obsession with “form” over the “content” of Love would reach its logical embodiment in his pornographic poem, “The Choice of Valentines,” where the speaker realizes that his lover prefers a dildo to the flesh and blood man: she tells her lover “Adiew faint-hearted instrument of lust, / That falselie hast betrayde our equal trust. / Hence-forth no more wil I implore thine ayde, / Or thee, or men of cowardize upbrayde. / My little dildlo shall suplye their kinde” (III: 412, lines 235-239).

Hutson, 237.

Ibid. Hutson argues for a similar interpretation: “Surrey’s travels through Italy, while posing no threat to his sovereign, seem to have been undertaken without the king’s authority; after winning the tournament Surrey is censored … by a king who orders him back to England against his own desire” (237).
Through his depiction of Surrey’s transformation, Nashe equates the Earl’s prodigal infatuation with Geraldine with a more dangerous prodigality. In figuring Love’s triumph over him as an exorcism or conjuring, Surrey links the “little God called Love” with sorcery and the occult. In addition, by referencing Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, Nashe alludes to that author’s political exile for his literary endeavors, and implies Surrey’s treachery. Like Ovid, Surrey’s proper obedience to his King and godly father has been replaced by his prodigality: the dominion of infatuation conjures him away from his allegiance to his king. In doing so, he abandons his “sterne precepts of gravitie & modestie” which might have provided him a way to order his experiences, preventing his full devolution.

As he comes upon Surrey, metamorphosed from his “former self” into a prodigal, Jack does not deride his master’s transformation to prodigality. Far from rebuking Surrey, Jack quickly observes that his transformation to prodigality has made him more likeable, erasing the moral difference between himself and his lord. At first, Jack seems happy to have come upon the Earl, but withholds his true delight until after he observes that Surrey has abandoned his precept-driven life of virtue. He observes of this new Surrey:

> Not a little was I delighted with this unexpected love storie, especially from a mouth out of which was nought wont to march but sterne precepts of gravitie & modestie. I swear unto you I thought his companie the better by a thousand crownes, because hee had discarded those nice tearmes of chastitie and constancie. (II: 245)

That Jack approves of Surrey’s new incarnation might be cause for the reader’s concern. Jack’s sarcastic assessment of Surrey’s former self—admonishing Surrey’s boring adherence to precept and applauding his turn to prodigality—reinforces Nashe’s own disillusionment.

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187 For this observation, I am heavily indebted to Hutson’s discussion of Surrey and Ovid (236-237).
regarding the power of didacticism and admonition. According to Jack, while Surrey once was good, now he is fun.

Surrey fails as an effective admonisher because of his own damaged credibility. He does not possess the moral superiority necessary to rebuke Jack for his presumptuous impersonation of his nobility, having earlier urged the very indiscretion he would now admonish. In fact, Jack cites precedent in order to justify his adoption of the Earl’s identity: “the state of an Earle he had thrust upon me before, & now I would not bate him an ace of it. Through all the cities past I by no other name but the yong Earle of Surry” (II: 267). Through their earlier exchange of identities, Surrey obscures the difference between himself and Jack, sacrificing his moral authority for his freedom. According to Jonathan Crewe, by trading names, Surrey and Jack erase the moral and social distinctions manifested by rank and mark the interchangeability of identity. Having previously endorsed the ruse, Surrey must accept Jack’s continuation of it. In point of fact, when he discovers that Jack presumptuously has assumed his title, Surrey is only able to upbraid Jack with laughter. In contrast, Jack expects to be punished for his crime. He describes the scene, juxtaposing his expectation of reprimand with the reality of Surrey’s easy dismissal:

In sted of menacing or affrighting me with his swoorde of his founes for my superlative presumption, he burst out into laughter above Ela, to think how bravely napping he had tooke us, and how notably we were dampt and stroke dead in the neast, with the unexpected view of his presence. (II: 268)

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188 As Jack claims, he and the Earl of Surrey earlier had switched places in order to afford Surrey more freedom than he would enjoy under his title. Jack narrates: “By the waie as we went, my master and I agreed to change names. It was concluded betwixte us, that I should be the Earle of Surrie, and he my man, onely because in his owne person, which hee would not have reproached, he meant to take more liberty of behavior: as for my carriage he knew hee was to tune it at a key, either high or love, as he list” (II: 253).

Because Jack recognizes the legitimacy of any punishment he may receive for his “superlative presumption,” he is momentarily positioned above the Earl, who cannot garner the authority to rebuke his charge. The Earl recognizes that he has been made complicit in Jack’s fun through his previous sanction of the ruse and acknowledges that he lacks the moral standing to rebuke Jack. Making light of the situation, Surrey chooses to emphasize the joke rather than Jack’s offense, highlighting the interchangeability of their identities by joking with his page: “Ah, quoth he, my noble Lorde, (after his tongue had borrowed a little leave of his laughter,) is it my lucke to visite you thus unlookt for? I am sure you will bidde mee welcome, if it bee but for the names sake. It is a wonder to see two English Earles of one house at one time together in Italy” (my emphasis II: 268). Surrey ironically elevates Jack through his acceptance of his adopted identity, titling him “Lord” and not distinguishing Jack as an imposter. He laughs off the potential criminal action of Jack’s impersonation, dismissing the ruse as innocuous fun.

The moral interchangeability of Jack and the Earl of Surrey reaches a flashpoint immediately following Surrey’s good-natured laughter, however: while Jack attempts to escape real punishment through his assertion of his social and moral likeness with Surrey, Surrey tries to re-establish the moral distance between himself and Jack.\(^{190}\) Attempting to reaffirm his moral superiority, Surrey admonishes his page for his public association with Jack asserts that he has brought Surrey honor through his prodigal display of wealth. He argues, “your name which I borrowed I have not abused; some large summes of monie this my sweet mistres Diamante hath made me master of, which I knew not how to better imploy for the honor of my country, than by spending it munificently under your name” (II: 268). Jack subtly reminds the Earl, as well as the reader, of Surrey’s own prodigality. He opposes his generous adoption of the Earl’s identity with the possibility that, had he not been so prodigally unthrifty, his usurpation would have been more ignoble. Jack alludes to Surrey’s prodigality again, inverting social order through his assumption of the parable’s language: “If you can reprehend me of anie one illiberal licentious action I have disparaged your name with, heape shame upon me prodigally, I beg no pardon or pittie” (II: 269). Jack casts not himself, but the Earl, as the unthrifty and rebellious son, upending the natural paternal hierarchy of nobleman over page. Such inversion is short-lived, however. Jack immediately follows up his allusion by recasting himself as the repentant son, unworthy of his noble father’s pardon or pity.

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Diamante, acknowledging the potential for Jack’s ruse to expose Surrey’s reputation to scorn. In reminding Jack of his duties as the impersonated Surrey, the genuine Earl attempts to reassert his role as a godly father figure. He demands that Jack give up his courtesan as a condition of his continued impersonation. Surrey’s pleads with Jack: “One thing, quoth he, my sweet Jacke, I will intreate thee, … that though I am well pleased thou shouldest bee the ape of my birthright, (as what noble man hath not his ape & his foole?) yet that thou be an ape without a clog, not carrie thy curtizan with thee” (II: 269). While he seems to laugh off Jack’s “aping” of his identity as he did earlier, dismissing Jack’s ruse as unworthy of rebuke, Surrey also recognizes Jack’s ability to harm to his reputation by parading around Italy with his courtesan. He asserts his authority through his charge that Jack dismiss her if he wishes to continue his impersonation. In response to such a demand, Jack challenges the Earl’s moral and social superiority over him by refusing to repent and dismiss his lover. Rather than leave Diamante, Jack resigns the Earl’s title. Arguing that he “is thus challenged of stolne goods by the true owner,” Jack will return to his “former state” as the Earl’s page rather than give her up (II: 269). Despite his admission of fault here and his re-assumption of his inferior role, Jack continues to insist upon his own autonomy. He chooses to assume his previous role and abandons his pretensions to Surrey’s title, separating himself from Surrey by positioning himself as a self-sufficient, autonomous individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that soon after, he and Surrey part company for good.  

The last advisor in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the Banished Earl, most obviously resembles the godly admonishers commonly deployed throughout Elizabethan prose fiction.

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191 Fredson Bowers asserts that the manner of Surrey’s departure speaks to Jack’s perception of the Earl as “a gull’d and ridiculous figure, of whom Wilton is secretly contemptuous.” Therefore, once he has served his purpose in the narrative, Surrey is no longer needed and is promptly sent away with the easy device of “post-hast letters.” See Fredson T. Bowers, “Thomas Nashe and the Picaresque Novel.” In *Humanistic Studies in Honor of John Calvin Metcalf*, ed. James Southall Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 25.
by authors conscious of the need to christianize their narratives. He asserts precepts and admonitions straight out of Ascham, by way of John Lyly’s *Euphues and His England*, typifying the grave advice of a fatherly lord in the prodigal tradition. And, like the admonishers of such narratives, the nameless Earl is unable to bring about Jack’s reformation. The Banished Earl’s experience mirrors that of Jack’s own narrative, itself adhering to the prodigal paradigm of admonition, rebellion and repentance. As such, the Earl argues not just from precept, but also from experience, attempting to reform Jack’s prodigality by narrating his own misfortunes. Of course, the admonition fails, emphasizing the inevitable failure of all such admonitions. Through his employment of an admonitory stock-character, Nashe highlights the empty nature of the gesture: in order to fulfill the requirements of a repentance narrative, the prodigal must ignore the admonition in order to proceed through his rebellion to repentance.

Derived largely from Elizabethan prose fiction such as John Lyly’s *Euphues and His England*, the advice of the Banished Earl reflects the inability of admonition to elicit the honest reformation of its subject or the moral edification of its reader. In borrowing so liberally from Lyly’s *Euphues*, Nashe implicitly reminds the Earl’s two-fold audience—both Jack and the reader—of the prodigal son narrative. Specifically, Nashe highlights the tension in the narrative between the benefit of advice and the singularity of experience through his use of his source. In *Eupheus*, the hermit admonishes the young Callimachus to avoid the mistakes he has made, narrating the lessons of his own repentance for the edification of his charge. His is the story of the prodigal son: “seeing my money wasted, my apparel worn,

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192 G.R. Hibbard focuses his analysis upon the admonitory precepts the Banished Earl spouts, but largely ignores his arguments from experience. See *Thomas Nashe, a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 171.
my mind infected with as many vices as my body with diseases...I thought it best to retourn into my native soyle ... to lead a solitary life.”¹⁹³ Like the Banished Earl, the hermit confesses to his own prodigality in order to spare the youth his own missteps. In response, the youth dismisses the advice of the hermit, as all prodigals must do in order for the narrative to proceed to its final edification. Acknowledging the problem of putting the parable of the prodigal son to use, Callimachus challenges the hermit to think of the ends rather the means: “Things are not to be judged by the event, but by the ende.”¹⁹⁴ The repentance of the hermit—the end of his prodigal traveling—implicitly argues for the ironic profit of such riotous living and promotes the very wanderlust the hermit would admonish.

Very similarly to the Hermit’s advice to Callimachus, the Banished Earl constructs his argument against foreign travel with an eye towards his own experience, urging Jack to learn from his mistakes and return home. He closes his otherwise precept-laden discourse with reference to his own plight:

I am a banisht exile from my country, though never linkt in consanguinitie to the best: an Earle borne by birth, but a begger now as thou seest. These manie yeres in Italy have I lived an outlaw. A while I had a liberall pension of the Pope, ... I have since made a poore shift to live, but so live as I wish my selfe a thousand times dead. (II: 302-303)

The Banished Earl embodies the moral lesson of the repentant prodigal: he has literally consumed his substance in riotous living and begs to return to the land of his father. He confesses his crimes—although the nameless crime for which he is banished is hinted at rather than directly stated—and urges Jack to learn from his experience. Reflecting the moral education he has received through his ill experience, the Banished Earl demonstrates

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¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 28.
his shame. Weeping, he pleads with Jack to save himself a similar experience—reflecting Jack’s earlier claim for his reader to “buy experience of mee better cheape”—and to find refuge in England, assuming the language of Christ’s parable: “Let no man for anie transitory pleasure sell away the inheritance he hath of breathing in the place where hee was borne. Get thee home, my yong lad, laye thy bones peaceably in the sepulcher of thy fathers, waxe olde in overlooking thy grounds, be at hand to close the eyes of thy kindred” (II: 303). Finally, he likens himself to the devil, positioning himself as suffering a similar type of alienation as the great enemy of God: “The divel and I am desperate, he of being restored to heaven, I of being recalled home” (II: 303). The Banished Earl here mirrors the language of the biblical prodigal son, reaffirming God as the godly father at home, and himself as the penitent son unworthy of forgiveness, eagerly awaiting the possibility of mercy and the father’s blessed command. But it is not enough. As Callimachus dismisses the advice of the hermit, so Jack rejects the experience of the Banished Lord. Through his liberal use of Lyly’s model, Nashe mocks didacticism, invalidating the interpretive safeguards of admonition and repentance. As such, Nashe fulfills another requirement of the prodigal paradigm while simultaneously highlighting its emptiness.

After Jack blissfully indulges in all manner of sinful behavior, he must go through the motions and repent to christianize his text. With Jack only paying lip-service to repentance, the conclusion of the text reinforces the emptiness of such moral profit. Jack mimics his target, namely, those repentance narratives which attempt to “undo” the rebellion and riotous living at the last moment through the repentance of the text’s protagonist. In The Unfortunate Traveller, Jack’s claims of repentance for his knavery are undercut by his promise of a sequel to his narrative, should his text meet with commercial success. In doing
so, Jack uses the paradigm of rebellion and repentance in order to sell his narrative, deflating any promises of the chronicle’s moral profit. Instead of genuine penance, Nashe constructs for Jack a insubstantial moral lesson, vague enough to be applicable to any situation and therefore helpful to none. After pages of debauchery and the routine promises of moral edification, the reader is left only with “Unsearchable is the booke of oiu destinies” (II: 327). Such an abrupt and flimsy moral mocks the reader’s very desire for a morally edifying resolution, nullifying the text’s sincerity. According to Stephen Hilliard, Jack’s hasty repentance and marriage to Diamante rings false: “what might be the climax of a serious story of redemption is here wrapped up in two sentences.” Indeed, after he returns to the fold of the orthodoxy, Jack closes his narrative, looking ahead to a possible sequel which promises more roguish exploits. He pledges to his reader his desire to please through his continued shenanigans: “All the conclusive epilogue I wil make is this; that if herein I have pleased anie, it shall animat mee to more paines in this kind. Otherwise I will sweare upon an English Chronicle never to bee outlandish Chronicler more while I live. Farewell as many as wish me well” (II: 328). Co-opting the position which conventionally asserts the didactic moral lesson of the text in order to promise a sequel, Jack undercuts even his nominal repentance. Instead, he will “animate” himself to more such adventures, elevating any commercial success he may enjoy above the moral profit of his reader as Pierce Penilesse did earlier. Jack’s repentance is emptied of moral rejuvenation, nullifying the resolution’s attempt to “contain” the riotous living of its protagonist within the paradigm of admonition, rebellion and repentance.

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195 Hilliard, 148.

196 This closing may mock Robert Greene’s odd didacticism in The Blacke Bookes Messenger (see note below).
In dismissing admonition and edification as false didactic gestures, Nashe parodies the prodigal model in his own narrative, evacuating the world of *The Unfortunate Traveller* of any semblance of moral authority. As Lorna Hutson argues, Nashe parodies early modern notions of literary profit through *The Unfortunate Traveller*, revealing “the moral hypocrisy and aesthetic impoverishment of narratives thus obliged to sacrifice everything and everyone in the interests of credit and profit.”

According to Hutson, Nashe pokes fun at the “pragmatic Tudor discourse” which demanded that literature demonstrate such “profitable state service.” Indeed, through Jack’s repeated assertions of “instruction and godly consolation,” Nashe mocks those texts which pay lip-service to moral profit through his parody, highlighting the emptiness of these promises. Hutson’s claims may need qualification, however. In assuming the language and structure of the texts he would satirize, Nashe erases the difference between the subject he would mock and his own work. In other words, Nashe’s parodic emulation of such flimsy didacticism implies satire’s own hollow bravado.

Through his anti-hero, Nashe lowers the satirist to the level of his target, diminishing his authority to rebuke through his mimetic art. Mocking the very nature of edification, Nashe constructs a prodigal anti-hero that can neither repent his crimes nor be reformed.

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197 Hutson, 217.

198 Ibid., 220.

199 Robert Greene’s *The Blacke Bookes Messenger*, for example, reduces the promise of edification to the last page of the work. After narrating the crimes and cozenages of Ned Browne, Greene re-enters the text, professing his moral purpose: “Thus I have set downe the life and death of Ned Browne, a famous Cutpurse and Conny-catcher, by whose example is any be profited, I have the desired ende of my labour” (*The Life and Works of Robert Greene* XI: 37)

200 Hutson safely marginalizes the problem of *The Unfortunate Traveller’s* satire by labeling it a type of humanist menippean satire: “A tendency to classify Jack as a satirist and to regard *The Unfortunate Traveller* as the vehicle of his satiric comment leads attention away from what is surely the most important point: it is not a society that is the object of representation in Jack’s narrative, but the way in which society is currently ‘set forth’ in discourses of all kinds, not least in Jack’s own” (220).
through the admonition of others. In short, Jack Wilton stands both as the rebuker and the object of rebuke. “A certain appendix or page,” Jack represents for Nashe the prodigality of satire. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the page is vexed by his own lack of authority. Like satire, Jack claims that his text will be profitable to his readers, but the promises of moral profit remain undelivered in the text of the work (II: 209).

Nashe uses Jack’s chronicle to erode the moral authority necessary for satire’s reformation of society, replacing the didactic edification satire promises with a moral ambiguity which erases the differences between virtue and vice. Conventionally, the effectiveness of the satirist is bound intimately to his moral authority, specifically to his ability to discern righteousness from corruption. Constructed from the “subjective angle of his moral vision,” the satirist’s ethos is developed through his “self-possessed moral standing within the world,” specifically, according to Lawrence Manley, in his “ability to weigh greater and lesser, tolerable and intolerable evils.” In other words, the essential task of satire is to demonstrate to its reader the difference between the righteousness of virtue and the corruption of vice. Typically, the satirist accomplishes this through admonition and edification. In contrast to this moralistic view of satire, however, Nashe constructs his text with an eye towards its immorality. His satirist argues as a willful prodigal who will not listen to admonition or pleas for his own conversion. He ends the text as he begins it, deliberately undercutting the morally profitable lessons demonstrated by arguments for his admonition and repentance.

While Jack Wilton claims the profit of moral edification and godly instruction for his satire, he ultimately cannot maintain the ethical authority necessary to support such

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didacticism. While his text is framed to be read as a retrospective of his indulgence, promising his future conversion through the power of the narrative’s didacticism, Jack only once interrupts his narrative to profess his regret. Rather, he prides himself on his ingenuity and his knavery. Early on, he boasts of his status as the “king of the cans and blacke jackes, prince of the pigmeis…[and] Lord high regent of rashers” (II: 209). Nashe compiles in Jack the morally low attributes of the rogue, the swindler, and the conny-catcher to construct the persona of the prodigal. In this position, Jack insolently pledges future profit to his readers—claiming to offer his text “for your instruction and godly consolation” (II: 227)—but consistently withholding satire’s promise of moral clarity in favor of ambiguity. In his superficial concern for the welfare of his reader, Jack constructs himself as a godly satirist. He describes himself as an honest advisor to his naïve targets, urging one to “be rudl” by him (II: 222). To his readers, Jack would do the same, positioning himself as a moralistic sermonizer: he promises that his narrative will augment his audience’s faith, and will demonstrate that God’s judgments “here shine in their glory” (II: 320). He also embraces his persona as a prodigal, urging his audience to “buy experience of [him] better cheape” (II: 282), positing an ironic authority for himself as a reformed man by claiming arguments from experience. Jack professes himself to be the godly satirist of *An Anatomie of Absurditie*.

Attempting to embody the promise implicit in his “conversion” narrative, Jack works to construct *The Unfortunate Traveller* as a via negativa, arguing for the use-value of his satire by positioning it as an instrument by which the reader may judge vice. Recalling the language of Nashe’s *Anatomie*, Jack argues that his narrative of vice is meant for his reader’s edification:

> It is a pittie posteritie should be deprived of such precious Records; & yet there is no remedie: and yet there is too, for
when all failes, welfare a good memorie. Gentle Readers (looke you be gentle now since I have cald you so), as freely as my knaverie was mine owne, it shall be yours to use in the way of honestie. (II: 217)

Jack laments that his other “thousand better jests” must remain unchronicled, but casts his documented knavery as worthy of the reader’s memory and profitable “in the way of honestie.” Framing his chronicle as a satiric instrument by which the reader may judge future vice, Jack builds an exemplar of corruption similar to Zeuxes’ portrait of Juno. In the end, however, The Unfortunate Traveller’s protagonist cannot maintain the moral authority necessary to make the via negativa work.

In order for his narrative to work as a negative example of vice, Jack must interrupt his retrospective chronicle of knavery to narrate his repentance or regret for his sins; instead, Jack regularly intrudes into his narrative in order to applaud his ingenuity or to mock his subjects further. The interiority which Jack constructs through his narrative does not frame his story according to his claims of repentance which conclude the narrative, but rather, belabor his sinful indulgence. For example, after his whipping by the magistrate, Jack does not address the reader to confirm the righteousness of the magistrates, but instead, remains undaunted, immediately returning to his knavery to cozen an “ugly mechanicall Captain” (II: 217). He laughingly describes his role in the Captain’s treachery and eventual torture, proud of his ability to wreak such havoc, and justifying his cozenage through the Captain’s stupidity:

Adam never fell till God made fooles; … told the King he was a foole, and that some shroud head had knavishly wrought on him; wherefore it should stand with his honour to whip him out of the Campe and send him home…Here let me triumph a while, and ruminate a line or two on the excellence of my wit:
but I will not breath neither till I have disfraughted all my knaverie. (II: 224-225)\textsuperscript{202}

Likewise, Jack interrupts his narrative later to highlight his ironic lack of repentance. While Jack is imprisoned with Surrey under the false charge of counterfeiting, he transforms a scene of possible contemplation into a scene of unrepentant adultery: “During the time we lay close and tooke physick in this castle of contemplation, there was a magnificos wife of good calling sent to beare us companie” (II: 260). After he corrupts Diamante—claiming to his reader in an aside, “many are honest because they know not how to be dishonest (II: 261)—Jack elaborates on the alteration of his situation in a direct address: “How I dealt with her, gesse, gentle reader, subaudi that I was in prison, and she my silly Jaylor” (II: 263). Given the opportunity to contemplate repentance, Jack only furthers his indulgence.

In his only narrative instance of regret, Jack rebukes himself for dismissing the Banished Earl’s advice. Although he momentarily commits himself to the repentance narrative’s retrospective viewpoint, he immediately rejects his own moralizing. Upon repudiating the Lord’s advice as a “cynike exhortation” worthy of little heed, Jack narrates his capture and imprisonment by Zadoch, Zachary, and Juliana, and immediately moralizes that “God plagud me for deriding such a grave fatherly advisor” (II: 303). Madelon S. Gohlke interprets this scene in \textit{The Unfortunate Traveller} as the text’s movement to a moral; specifically, she reads Jack’s acknowledgement of the Earl’s good advice as the text’s emerging “moral pattern.”\textsuperscript{203} Likewise, Lorna Hutson interprets Jack’s acknowledgment of the righteousness of the Banished Lord as “a last ditch attempt on the part of \textit{The Unfortunate Traveller}...”\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{202} The OED marks Nashe as the only author to use “disfraught,” meaning “to unload.”

Traveller to turn itself back into a profitable discourse by trying to prove that the page is a prodigal son who has finally ‘consumed his substance in riotous living.’ While Gohlke reads the text’s moralizing turn as genuine and Hutson sees it as a failed attempt at authentic prodigal discourse, Jack’s assertion of a causal relationship between his scorning of the Banished Lord’s advice and his subsequent misfortunes rings false in a narrative so reliant upon the whimsy of chance. Indeed, Jack himself invalidates this interpretation by immediately rejecting the jurisdiction of providence in the events, replacing God’s plan with the power of Fortune. After his statement that he is scourged by God for his dense refusal to adopt the advice offered by the Banished Earl, Jack dismisses the thought, chalking the experience up to “the worst throw of ill luckes” (II: 303). According to Jack, chance or fortune may be able to bring about reformation, but admonition will fail miserably.

The inability of his narrative to reform the fallen world is not simply a self-deprecating estimation of Nashe’s own career, but is a result of his increasing cynicism regarding the power of didacticism to instill righteousness and inspire virtue in the individual. The entrance of Surrey into the narrative affords Nashe the opportunity, through Jack, to pontificate on the nature of poets and poetry in the fallen world; however, Nashe’s estimation of the power of poetry has lowered substantially since the publication of Pierce Penilesse: Jack argues, “if there be anie sparke of Adams Paradized perfection yet emberd up in the breasts of mortall men, certainelie God hath bestowed that his perfectest image on poets” (II: 242). He casts his statement in the conditional, implying through his irony that poets can no longer separate themselves from the dross of the sinful world. Through Jack’s pessimistic “if,” Nashe argues that the perceived perfection of poets and poetry cannot exist after the fall. He continues, ironically praising these poets:

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204 Hutson, 241.
None comes so neere to God in wit, none more contemne the world, *vatis avarus, non temere est animus*, sayth Horace, *versus amat, hoc studet unum*; Seldom have you seene anie Poet possessed with avarice, only verses he loves, nothing else he delights in: and as they contemne the world, so contrarlie of the mechanicall world are none more contemned. (II: 242)

Far from allowing his poets to enjoy the limitless perfection of the divine image from safely above the fray of the world, Nashe’s ironic conception of poetry urges the poet to abandon his “supernaturall kind of wit” and to engage the world around him (II: 242). According to Nashe, the poet can no longer separate himself from the world: after all, it is only through his rebuke of the world that the poet can ever hope to instill virtue and righteousness. Connecting poetry with satire more directly, Jack turns to Horace’s *Epistles* for support. What he quotes from his source, however, is perhaps less telling than what he omits: after the quoted passage above, Horace praises poetry for its ability to instill virtue:

> *os tenerum pueri balbumque poeta figurat,*  
> *torquet ab obscenis iam nunc sermonibus aurem,*  
> *mox etiam pectus praeeptis format amicis,*  
> *asperities at invidiae corrector et irae,*  
> *recte facta refert, orientia tempora notis*  
> *instruit exemplis, inopem solatur et aegrum.* (II: I: 126-131) \(^{205}\)

In these lines, Horace emphasizes the transformative power of poetry; specifically, he cites satire’s ability to correct the “roughness and envy and anger” of the world through didactic precepts and examples. In choosing to omit these lines, Nashe strengthens his argument that poetic didacticism is unable to reform society’s sinful members. According to Nashe, the satirist must engage the realities of the world, risking the infection of the sin he attempts to castigate. He must sink to the level of his target. In contrast to his earlier, more optimistic

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\(^{205}\) “The poet … turns the ear from unseemly words; presently, too, he moulds the heart by kindly precepts, correcting roughness and envy and anger. He tells of noble deeds, equips the rising age with famous examples, and to the helpless and sick at heart brings comfort.” Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), lines 126-131.
assessment of poetry’s potential to raise mankind to virtue, Nashe now lowers virtue to mankind.

Nashe’s mimetic satire of his contemporaries in *The Unfortunate Traveller* highlights the difficulty of separating satire from its moralistic roots: inevitably, in assuming the language and structure of his targets, Nashe erases the difference between the satirist and the satirized. Much as Surrey cannot exert the moral authority necessary to admonish Jack after he has erased the moral and social difference between them, Nashe’s satire cannot separate itself from the taint of its subject. As a result, *The Unfortunate Traveller* at times rarely resembles a satire at all.\(^\text{206}\) Despite Nashe’s claim in his dedication that this work marks itself as “being a cleane different vaine” from his previous tracts, *The Unfortunate Traveller* returns to many of the issues and quandaries which Nashe struggles throughout his career.

**Conclusion**

While he was tasked with defending the ecclesiastical establishment from Martin Marprelate’s scurrilous jests and *ad hominem* attacks, Thomas Nashe learned from his epistolary opponent. His most famous constructed fictions, Pierce Penilesse and Jack Wilton, admittedly owe a great debt to those of Martin Marprelate, Martin Junior and Martin Senior. But, while Martin Marprelate insists upon the righteousness of his mirth and his character assignations of the bishops, steeping his arguments in first reformist language and later Pauline rebuke, Nashe comes to embrace the lowness of his satiric persona. Beginning his

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\(^\text{206}\) Reading Nashe’s text as social commentary, Stephen Hilliard classifies *The Unfortunate Traveller* as an “outspoken satire on Elizabethan England” and asserts that Nashe is enabled by the freedom of fiction “to develop his criticisms and express his anger more explicitly” (121). On the other hand, Richard Lanham regards the text as a burlesque rather than a satire: “It has been assumed that [Jack] is a satiric persona of some sort, but … his behavior implies no criticism of social values. His outbursts against the order of things lament not that order is good or bad in itself, but simply his place in it” (“Thomas Nashe and Jack Wilton: Personality as Structure in *The Unfortunate Traveller,*” *Studies in Short Fiction* 4, no. 3 (1967): 206). Jonathan Crewe is the most cautious, calling the work a “critical fiction” (69).
career confident in the ability of didactic admonition to reform transgression, Nashe pens *An Anatomie of Absurditie*, constructing his persona as a godly paternal advisor. After Nashe’s repudiation by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, however, his texts reflect a growing antagonism with authority. *Pierce Penilesse* and *The Unfortunate Traveller* demonstrate Nashe’s denial of the satirist’s moral authority in favor of an authorial fiction that delights in vice and criminality.

While Nashe articulates through his texts a vision of satire divorced from its promises of reformation, Edmund Spenser divides satire into two manifestations in his epic. Like Nashe, Spenser associates satire with criminal speech, presenting his readers with the slanderous Malfont, the only self-titled poet in *The Faerie Queene*. Unlike Nashe, however, Spenser cannot dismiss the value of satire completely. Through his allegory of Mercilla, Spenser argues that scorn and scornful speech must be utilized as a necessary component of earthly justice.
CHAPTER THREE

Spenser’s Scorn and Mercy:
A Study of The Faerie Queene, Book V, Canto IX, Stanzas 22-50

As Jonathan Goldberg asserts in James I and the Politics of Literature, James VI/I was offended at Spenser’s depiction of his mother as the villainess Duessa, tried before the allegorical queen of mercy, Mercilla. Narrating the king’s displeasure, Robert Bowes wrote to Burghley to urge Elizabeth to condemn Spenser for his topical satire:

The K[ing] hath conceaved of great offence against Edward Spencer publishing in prynte in the second book p[ar]t of the Fairy Queene and ix th chapter some dishonorable effects (as the k. demeth therof) against himself and his mother deceassed...he still desyreth that Edward Spencer for his faulte, may be dewly tried and punished.207

While Spenser escaped punishment for his portrayal of the treasonous Duessa, modern scholarship was bruised by James’s topical interpretation of Mercilla’s court. For a long time, James’s historical reading of Spenser’s allegory colored the way modern scholars have interpreted the second half of canto ix.208 By reading Duessa as Mary, Mercilla as Elizabeth, Malfont as Spenser, and Awe as Elizabeth’s famously tall porter, critics have simplified this


episode of Spenser’s epic, flattening his satirical allegory. By privileging a topical interpretation of the Mercilla episode, recent scholarship has subordinated the ways in which Spenser’s allegory may exceed and challenge the pattern laid out for it by its historical precedent. In this chapter, I argue that Spenser’s trial of Duessa in the court of Mercilla offers more than a satirical portrait of the proceedings against James’s mother; rather, it presents an allegory that unfolds as an ambivalent, and even contradictory, interrogation of the role of scorn in the administration of justice.

Mercilla’s trial and execution of Duessa in the legend of justice refigures the previous, more mild adjudication of the villainess which occurs in book one, the legend of holiness. Having released the imprisoned Redcrosse Knight from the dungeon of Orgoglio, Arthur presents him with Duessa, whose fate Redcrosse Knight is empowered to decide. Arthur leaves the knight as her judge, but Redcrosse Knight is cautioned by Una to be temperate in his punishment of his enemy:

To do her dye (quoth Una) were despight,
And shame t’avenge so weake an enemy:
But spoile her of her scarlet robe, and let her fly. (I, viii, 45.7-9)

In book one, Una equates Redcrosse Knight’s possible execution of Duessa with “despight” or vengeance, condemning the scornful infliction of punishment as sinful. For Una, representing Christian truth and holiness, the infliction of bloody punishment is damnable. As Penaunce asserts in the house of holiness, Redcrosse Knight must learn “wrath, and hatred, warely to shone, / That drew on men Gods hatred, and his wrath” (I, x, 33.5-6). In book five, however, Spenser seems to contradict this assertion: Mercilla, the embodiment of mercy but also a monarch and agent of the state, condemns Duessa to die for her treason. Further complicating any easy reconciliation of the two extremes, Spenser asserts that each
allegory is correct. As Carol Kaske asserts, the different moral perspectives by which the two judgments are enacted demonstrate the conflict in Spenser between the private and public virtues. While Una, personifying Christian truth, is concerned with Redcrosse Knight’s salvation—her mercy of Duessa possibly derived from Christ’s admonition to the unchaste woman—Mercilla, the agent of Justice, must condemn Duessa for her crimes, affirming the lamentable but necessary place of scorn in the administration of justice.

Centering upon Spenser’s portrayal of justice as a function of scorn and mercy, the allegory of Mercilla’s court loosely divides into three sections. The first two sections, the descriptions of the punished Malfont and the enthroned Mercilla, engage the emblematic values of scorn and mercy. First, Spenser portrays Malfont as a scorners. Specifically, Malfont is associated with scornful speech, his “rayling rymes” likened to unlawful satire and slander. For Spenser, however, scorn is not limited to criminal speech; it is also an essential tool of justice. Mercilla’s piercing of Malfont’s tongue demonstrates the applicability of scorn as punishment. Countering this allegorical portrayal of scorn, Spenser next depicts Mercilla as an emblem of heavenly mercy and divine justice. She represents an emblem of Christian restraint. Building from these emblems of scorn and mercy, the final section, the trial of Duessa, allegorizes justice’s active administration, dramatizing the necessity of both scorn and mercy in the accommodation of justice to the fallen world.

Spenser is constant in his use of “mercy” throughout The Faerie Queene: as a private virtue, mercy denotes a Christian temperance of anger; as a public virtue, it denotes the legal

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209 Kaske claims that the discrepancy between these portrayals can be reconciled, claiming Una’s condemnation of scorn exemplifies the private and Christian virtue while Mercilla’s execution of Duessa embodies the public virtues of duty and justice. I disagree with Kaske on an important point, however. She argues that Artegaill is the true judge of Duessa, remarking that his status “first as a knight of duty, second as a knight of Justice” confirms him as a public official (137). In correctly ascribing the decision regarding Duessa’s execution to Mercilla, the embodiment of Mercy, I argue that the distinction is not so neatly reconciled.
mitigation of punishment. But, Spenser’s use of “scorn” is more slippery. Throughout his portrayal of Malfont and Mercilla, Spenser activates scorn in many different forms. At one moment, it is a private emotion associated with anger and vengeance that should be quelled in the administration of justice; at another moment, it is a speech act, an articulation of righteous indignation or criminal slander; thirdly, it is a function of justice, an animation of force likened to the legitimate execution of punishment, but also associated with brutality. Finally, and most complexly, it can be a manifestation or combination of all three, it can denote an emotional state, a verbal act, and a physical reaction.

Immediately after the distressed maiden Samient has sung the praises of her most merciful queen to Arthur and Artegall, they are introduced to the punished Malfont, the only self-titled poet in *The Faerie Queene*, made mute by Mercilla’s justice. While often read biographically as an emblem of Spenser’s anxieties regarding his place in the court and his struggle to depict poetically the politics of Queen Elizabeth, Malfont and his punished tongue more directly question the ethics of scornful speech. Spenser portrays his poet as a raider, aligning him with satire, admonition, and finally, slander, the crime for which he is so viscerally punished. Although mute, Malfont’s tongue articulates the paradox of scorn: while Spenser depicts misdirected scorn as criminal, its criticism of power a slanderous and malignant threat to the security of the realm, he also demonstrates the legitimate application of scorn in his depiction of Mercilla’s maintenance of her kingdom. In short, scorn is both a criminal act and an agent of the state’s power. As a governor of an earthly kingdom, Mercilla must execute punishment; she is unable to rely upon heavenly mercy. Instead, she

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The OED confirms “scorn” as a pejorative term, associated with mockery and derision, but also a more neutral term, associated with indignation and “passionate contempt.” The OED also shares a tension similar to Spenser’s: “scorn” is both an interior, emotional state, as well as the verbal or physical embodiment of such a state. It notes that “scorn” can reflect a “manifestation of contempt; a derisive utterance or gesture; a taunt or insult,” or, even more vaguely, to “shame or disgrace.”
must fashion her courtiers into gentlemen through her rigorous application of the law. She transforms Malfont’s tongue from a sign of transgression into a sign of admonition by piercing it with scorn, re-creating it as a warning to her subjects to avoid similar behavior.

Once readers and courtiers alike have been properly tempered by the threat of Mercilla’s might, she is introduced as an emblem of mercy. Spenser leaves his portrait deliberately ambiguous, however: positioned on and around her throne, Mercilla’s emblems of monarchy speak both to Mercilla’s divine mercy and her earthly justice, negotiating in their contradictions the applicability of mercy to the fallen world. By allowing these two interpretations of Mercilla to co-exist in his text, Spenser marks, like Martin Luther, the inherent contradiction between the gospel’s call for ideal mercy and the practical need for law and earthly justice. Although Mercilla does not wield her sword, it lies ready at her feet. Once the reader has been instructed by the complex didactic emblems of scorn and mercy, she can witness the exercise of justice, Mercilla’s administration of the secular sword against Duessa.

The trial of Duessa invigorates the abstracted virtues of mercy and punishment, pity and scorn with activity, demonstrating the application and the limits of application of both functions of justice. The trial is a stylized allegory of Seneca’s De Clementia: the defense, represented by Pittie, argues for the undeserved mitigation of Duessa’s punishment, while the prosecutor, Zele, representing Seneca’s vice of cruelty, argues for her execution. Mercilla’s reluctant execution of Duessa highlights the problem of accommodating justice to an earthly

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211 In his tract On Secular Authority, Luther argues for the necessary coexistence of the secular law and the law of the gospel: “If any one attempted to rule the world by the Gospel, and put aside all secular law and the secular sword … what would happen? He would loose the bands and chains of the wild and savage beasts, and let them tear and mangle every one, and at the same time say they were quite tame and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds. Just so would the wicked under the name of Christian abuse this freedom of the Gospel, carry on their knavery, and say that they were Christians, subject neither to law nor sword” (370-371). See Martin Luther, On Secular Authority, in Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings, ed. John Dillenberger, (New York: Anchor Books, 1962).
subject: because she is a public magistrate, Mercilla cannot show Duessa Una’s Christ-like mercy; at the same time, however, as the embodiment of mercy, she cannot side wholly with Zele. Mercilla is only able to reconcile scorn with pity by dividing her persons. As a private individual, Mercilla demonstrates her mercy through her “piteous ruth” for Duessa, manifested in the tears she covers from view. As a monarch, Mercilla reluctantly condemns Duessa. Spenser implies that Mercilla’s private person remains untainted by scorn, depicted as vengeance, while her public person is unstained by pity.

**Malfont: Spenser’s Rayling Rymer**

As the knights Arthur and Artegaill enter the court of Mercilla’s palace, they encounter the figure of Malfont, the presumptuous poet who dared to publish slanders against the pure Mercilla. For his crimes, Malfont is punished publicly: his tongue, the instrument of his trespass, is nailed to a post in the middle of Mercilla’s court. Spenser describes the grisly scene in detail:

There as they entred at the Scriene, they saw
Some one, whose tongue was for his trespasse vyle,
Nayld to a post, adjudged so by law:
For that therewith he falsely did revile,
And foule blaspheme that Queene for forged guyle,
Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
And with lewd poems, which he did compyle;
For the bold title of a Poet had
He on himselfe had ta’en, and rayling rymes had sprad.

Thus there he stood, whylest high over his head,
There written was the purport of his sin,
In cyphers strange, that few could read,
BONFONT: but bon that once had written bin,
Was raced out, and Mal was now put in.
So now Malfont was plainely to be red;
Eyther for the evill, which he did therein,
Or that he likened was to a welhed
Of evill words, and wicked slaunders by him shed. (V, ix, 25-26)

Concentrating upon the second stanza of the passage, modern scholars often read Spenser’s Malfont as an emblem of the poet’s anxiety about the reception of his “darke conceite,” flattening the allegorical significance of the evil speaker by arguing for Bonfont as a roman à clef. 212 According to this reading, Spenser narrates his struggles for recognition in the court, writing himself into The Faerie Queene by allegorizing his fear of offending his queen. This interpretation hinges upon a reading of Bonfont’s crime as a misconstrued or unsanctioned poetic act, insisting that we see Spenser as only Bonfont and rarely, if ever, Malfont. 213 I read Malfont’s crime and punishment as Spenser’s allegory of the benefits and liabilities of satire and scornful speech. The image Spenser constructs is inwardly conflicted, insisting upon the criminality of satire while simultaneously arguing for its precipitating emotion, scorn, as a necessary but dangerous instrument of order and authority.

Already punished by the time Arthur and Arthegall enter Mercilla’s court, Malfont is constructed as a negative example of satire and an emblem of evil and unjust speech. In its purest form, satire scorns the vicious members of society in need of correction, re-substantiating virtue and promoting the salvation and well-being of the kingdom. Properly executed and directed, satire embodies one of the highest goals of poetry, urging the reformation of its subject. In his earlier satiric work Mother Hubberd’s Tale, Spenser affirms that satirists, like poets, aspire to a lofty goal: their “onely pride / Is vertue to advaunce, and

212 A number of critics such as A. Leigh Deneef, Peter C. Herman and A. Barlett Giamatti have taken this approach, asserting the ways in which Spenser effectively “wrote” his frustrations and anxieties into the allegory. While such an interpretation presents appealing options for autobiographical and court culture arguments, I find that such readings rely too heavily upon the murky and therefore pliable images of stanza 26 and too quickly gloss the more concrete images of the preceding stanza.

213 Jonathan Goldberg confidently asserts “James’s demand that the poet be subject to his ruler is voiced by the poet himself…Spenser’s text records such truths. Thereby he is Bonfont—his tongue intact, but sacrificed to the queen nonetheless” (2).
vice deride” (811-812). Spenser elaborates and particularizes this portrayal of poetry’s reformist tendencies in *The View of the Present State of Ireland*. While Eudoxius praises Irish poets for their ability to “set forth the praises of the good and virtuous” and to “beat down and disgrace the bad and vicious” (75), Irenius argues that the moral center of these poets is skewed:

> Whomsoever they find to be most licentious of life, most bold and lawless in his doings, and most dangerous and desperate in all parts of disobedience and rebellious disposition, him they set up and glorify in their rhymes, him they praise to the people, and to young men make an example to follow. (76)

For Spenser, misdirected praise works in a way very similar to misdirected blame: if executed poorly or for the wrong reasons, satire and blame turn quickly to slander.

Building a reading of Malfont that emphasizes the transgressive nature of his satiric speech, Spenser introduces the reader to Malfont through his instruments of bitter articulation: his tongue blazes bold speeches, compiles lewd poems, and spreads railing rhymes. By marking the only self-titled poet in *The Faerie Queene* a railer, Spenser associates him with defamatory verse. Throughout the epic, Spenser reserves the term “railer” for the speakers of misdirected invective and slander, most notably, for those vitriolic speakers who would abuse the power of admonition by scorning virtue instead of vice. Like the other railers

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216 Spenser contrasts the satirist’s virtue with the slanderer’s ill intent later in *Mother Hubberd’s Tale*. Unlike the satirist who desires to promote reform and godliness, the slanderer is motivated by a malicious will to do harm, berating his victims “with sharp quips joy’d others to deface, / Thinking that their disgracing did him grace (707-8).

217 Rarely, Spenser also use “raile” to allude to blood spilling out of a wound: see, for instance, the narration of Archimago’s (as Red Cross Knight) fight with the Sarazin: “Large floods of bloud adowne their sides did raile; / But floods of bloud could not them satisfie: / Both hungered after death: both chose to win, or die” (I, vi, 43.7).
condemned in *The Faerie Queene* for their inappropriate criminal vitriol, Malfont abuses satire and scorn when he directs it at the idealized Mercilla, transforming legitimate rebuke into slander, sedition and treachery.\(^{218}\)

Despite his likeness to the other railers in *The Faerie Queene*, Malfont is isolated as the only example of evil speech to be punished and silenced successfully in Spenser’s epic. More commonly, Spenser asserts that slanderers must be ignored, their defamation of good knights and ladies disregarded by the sober and grave heroes who encounter them.\(^{219}\) In rare instances, slanderers may be bound, their offending tongues bridled momentarily; in such cases, however, the evil-speakers inevitably escape—or are released by other allegorical evildoers—to continue to inflict verbal havoc on their virtuous targets.\(^{220}\) In contrast, Spenser silences Malfont for the duration of the episode. He is condemned as a slanderer and is punished for his crimes. Later, Spenser more clearly criminalizes Malfont’s poetics, overtly condemning him as “a welhed / Of evill words, and wicked slaunders.” His indictment of Malfont on these charges leaves the reader with an unambiguous condemnation of the poet and his slanderous treatment of Mercilla.\(^{221}\)

\(^{218}\) The list of these evil speakers includes Coreca, Occasion, Cymochles, Atin, Slaunder, Adicia, Souldon, Detraction and the Blatant Beast, all of whom abuse rebuke, attempting to harm their targets through their misdirected and malicious scorn.

\(^{219}\) As noted in this chapter’s Introduction, Spenser treats slander as a relatively benign affront to virtue in the early books of *The Faerie Queene*, constructing heroic patience and stoic self-sufficiency as the only viable reaction to the slanderers of righteousness.

\(^{220}\) Both Occasion and the Blatant Beast are contained momentarily through heroic effort. Guyon silences Occasion’s “bitter rayling and foule revilement” by “catching hold of her ungratious tong” (II, iv, 12.5.8) and fitting her with a scold’s bridle, but she is released by Pyrochles in the next canto (v. 19). Similarly, the Blatant Beast, is “supprest and tamed” by Calidore at the conclusion of book six, “his blasphemous tong” muzzled, “Until that, whether wicked fate so framed, / Or fault of men, he broke his yron chaine, / And got into the world at liberty againe (VI, xii, 38.6-9).

\(^{221}\) Of the terms used to describe Malfont, only “bold”—a term used throughout *The Faerie Queene* to express both virtue and vice—can be interpreted benignly. The rest of his language attests to Malfont’s guilt.
Spenser’s allegory is not a complacent condemnation of all scorn, however. In constructing such a public and visceral punishment for Mercilla’s slanderer, Spenser complicates his allegory to demonstrate not only the criminality of scorn, but also its utility as an instrument of justice. Through Mercilla’s punishment of Malfont, Spenser represents scorn as an attractive but dangerous instrument of justice, marking it as a problematic agent of the state. In publicly punishing her defamer, Mercilla allegorizes what M. Lindsay Kaplan calls the “paradox of slander”: Kaplan claims that “state officials can only disparage, not contain, verbal dissent. In effect, the only recourse against slander is to discredit it, that is, to slander it.”

Mercilla allegorizes the push-pull embodied in scorning a scorrner, utilizing public punishment and humiliation as an instrument of correction: she lays Malfont open to infamy in order to discredit his lies and to restore peace to her kingdom. In short, Mercilla must employ the same methods she would condemn. The historical contradiction does not escape Spenser, who bases his depiction of Mercilla’s punishment of Malfont on well-established English law, relying upon the threat of public infamy as a method of curtailing criminal behavior. With its roots in the Roman law of *iniuria*, early modern defamation law privileged the reputations of the English citizenry, attempting to guard against verbal assaults that would damage a respectable person’s credibility or bring contempt upon a dutiful subject. To accomplish this, the English courts threatened the slanderer with counter-assault, subjecting those who falsely imputed others of a crime to infamy. A form of *lex talionis*, *infamia* sought to redress improper scorn by subjecting a convicted criminal to the same ill repute and ridicule to which he would have subjected his target.

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demonstrated particularly clearly in royal proclamations which sought to discredit the queen’s critics by labeling them traitors and heretics and exposing them not only to criminal charges, but also to the infamy of her subjects. In the sixteenth century, multiple royal proclamations called in texts containing critical accounts of the Queen’s policies, describing these dissenting texts as libels against her majesty. On September 28, 1573, Elizabeth issued a proclamation, “Ordering Destruction of Seditious Books,” which condemned texts penned by “obstinate and irrepentant traitors” by citing their libels and slanders of her majesty. Three years later, Elizabeth went one step further, offering rewards for information leading to the arrest of libelers against her office, employing similar language of defamation to discredit her slanderers.

In his epic, Spenser constructs Mercilla in such a way as to harness the didactic powers of infamy while distancing its administrator from the ugliness of scorn’s

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223 Its context has been tamed in modern times. In Republican Rome, Infamia had teeth: “The oldest measure to brand a person as dishonest was the nota censuria which was a moral punishment by the censors for misconduct in political or private life … The praetorian edict deprived certain persons for moral reasons of the right of appearance in court as advocates or representatives of a party to the trial, or of being represented by another. … Besides procedural disabilities infamia caused other disadvantages such as exclusion from tutorship and denial of the right to obtain a public office or to be an accuser at trial” (Quoted in Kaplan, The Culture of Slander, 14). The punishment here destroys the individual’s moral authority. Literally marked as dishonest, those subjected to infamia were prevented by their morally bankruptcy from holding office, swearing an oath, or even pressing a civil case.


225 The Proclamation reads “These chiefly, beside their general reproving of all other having charge in this government, they study, by their venomous and lying books, to have specially misliked of her majesty contrary to their manifold virtues so approved by long and manifest experience … their attempt is understood to be the work of cankered envy and malice and the accustomed wont of such men as be possessed with those spirits” (Tudor Royal Proclamations, II: 378).

226 Dated March 26, 1576 (Tudor Royal Proclamations, 400). Elizabeth was not alone in her condemnation of dissent: According to a Star Chamber report, the Lord Keeper overtly accused dissenters of slanderous treachery in 1599: “Yett of late are found, some wicked and traitorous persons (Monsters of men) that without regards of dutie or conscience…cease not in the abundance of their malice, to … sclaund er her counselors and ministers, not only by rayling open speaches, but also by false lying and trayterous libles … with many false, malicious, and vylanious imputations” (Quoted in Kaplan, The Culture of Slander, 23-24).
administration. In order to ensure that his reader will view Mercilla’s verdict against Malfont as not only just, but poetically appropriate, Spenser emphasizes Malfont’s culpability for his punishment over Mercilla’s role in meting out justice. To argue this more effectively, Spenser divides Malfont’s narrative into two stanzas: the first stanza arraigns Malfont as a slanderous railer, the second punishes him.

In the first stanza of the episode, Spenser builds his case against Malfont, poetically convicting the railer for his false slanders of Mercilla. Emphasizing the poet’s vile trespass, foul blasphemy, and forged guile, Spenser charges Malfont with criminal slander:

Some one, whose tongue was for his trespasse vyle
Nayld to a post, adjudged so by law:
For that therewith he falsely did revyle,
And foule blaspheme that Queene for forged guyle,
Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
And with lewd poems, which he did compyle;
For the bold title of a Poet had
He on himself had ta’en and rayling rymes had sprad. (V, ix, 25.2-9)

Thinking himself a poet of “rayling rymes,” Malfont has slandered the virtuous Mercilla with his misdirected and inappropriate satire. Spenser makes clear that Malfont’s presumption and his abuse of poetry have condemned him. Specifically, the repetition of the transition “for” in the stanza demonstrates the causal relationship between his crime and his currently painful and humiliating punishment. The repetition of conjunctions “And” as well as “both with” quickly builds Mercilla’s case against him, piling charge on charge in order to quell the reader’s sympathy and deflate Malfont’s authority. Constructing the slanderer as the embodiment of unjust speech, Spenser refers to Malfont and his crimes with contempt throughout the stanza. He emphasizes Malfont’s sinful behavior by repeatedly asserting what “he” has done to violate the law. In contrast to this repetition, Spenser mentions “that Queene” only once in the episode. He textually separates Mercilla from the taint of Malfont’s
scornful speech to solidify her ethical credibility, which he reinforces further by removing
her from the slanderer’s prosecution. She is replaced by “law,” abstracted and impersonal.
Mercilla is positioned as the target of Malfont’s slanders, his victim rather than his punisher.

In the next stanza, Spenser allegorizes the administration of Malfont’s punishment,
attempting to demonstrate both the proper application of scorn and the careful impartiality of
its enforcer. To avoid the appearance of partiality or revenge, Spenser absents Mercilla from
the proceedings, portraying Malfont as the sole actor in the episode and his punishment as
passively administered by an unnamed executioner. Spenser sets up the causal relationship
between Malfont’s slanders and his punishment immediately, fusing the poet’s crime to his
public disfigurement with the transition, “Thus there he stood,” a phrase that links the first
and second stanzas and motivates the reader to interpret the poet’s current situation as a just
and inevitable response to Malfont’s guilt. Reinforcing the causal relationship between
Malfont’s crime and his punishment, Spenser narrates the poet’s devolution as one directly
caused by his abusive actions towards his queen, repeating “now” throughout the stanza to
mark the transformation from good poet to slanderer:

BON FONT: but bon that once had written bin,
Was raced out, and Mal was now put in.
So now Malfont was plainly to be red. (V, ix, 26.4-6)

While Spenser leaves unstated the precise reasons for the poet’s devolution, earlier veiling
the “purport of his sin” in mysterious “cyphers strange,” he insists that the poet’s new title is
caused by his actions of the previous stanza.

Importantly, Malfont is unlike other evil-speakers of The Faerie Queene in another
important aspect: he slanders an active monarch rather than a private citizen or a knight
errant. Throughout The Faerie Queene, Spenser clearly distinguishes between the danger of
slander as it applies to a private citizen and how it applies to an active monarch. Confident in the limited ability of slanderers to taint their virtuous targets with their scornful derision, Spenser’s knights and ladies dismiss such misdirected admonition with heroic patience. In book one, for example, Abessa and Coreca are characterized by their impassioned slanders of the virtuous Una: “they gan loudly bray... / Shamefully at her railing all the way, / And her accusing of dishonesty, / That was the flower of faith and chastity” (iii, 23.1-5). In response, Una simply ignores their misdirected slander directed at her, and Coreca, “when she saw her prayers nought prevail,” returns home to stew over her perceived wrong in private (iii, 24.1). Likewise, Arthur, Amoret and Aemylia, when confronted with the railings and admonitions of Slauder, “endured all with patience milde” (IV, viii, 28.6). Though they are vexed by Slauder’s twisted version of the truth, they continue on their way, confident in their virtue. Spenser here reflects the historical reality presented in English defamation law. The slander of a private citizen was difficult, though not impossible, to prosecute in sixteenth-century England: strict requirements detailed that the wronged party had to prove the intent of the slanderer, the harm inflicted by the slander, and the respectability of the audience to whom the slanderer was speaking. In contrast to the

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227 Coreca rails three times during her encounter with Una (23.3, 23.6, 25.2). A.C. Hamilton glosses her, Abessa and Kirkrapine as an allusion to Martin Marprelate. I would love to believe it, but I am uncomfortable applying that level of specificity to the allegory. More accurately, they represent dissension broadly defined.

228 In other instances, the target’s ability to dismiss slanderers’ railings is achieved with difficulty. A microcosm of his larger quest, Guyon initially reacts to slander with violence, muzzling Occasion with a scold’s bridle. Later, Guyon is provoked to ire by Cymochles’s “unknightly raylings,” which kindled his “wrathfull fire” (vi, 30.6-7). As he fully embodies temperance, Guyon ignores the railings of Atin and controls his passion: “But sober Guyon, hearing him so raile, / Though somewhat moved in his mightie hart, / Yet with strong reason maistred passion fraile, / And passed fairely forth” (vi, 40.2-5). His resolve is refigured with Grille, whose hoggish condition Guyon laments, but dismisses with his slander.

229 In his very thorough examination of cases, R.H. Helmholz posits three requirements that must be met before a slander would be declared an actionable offense under the Auctoritate dei patris, or the Constitution of the Council of Oxford, which served as the legal basis for early modern English defamation law. To be guilty of defamation, a slanderer must 1) accuse his target of a crime (the definition of “crime” here can range from a
difficulty of prosecuting the slander of a private individual, the slander of a monarch was a fully actionable offense. Unlike the reputations of Arthur, Amoret and Una, Mercilla’s name is not hers alone: as a monarch, she, like Queen Elizabeth, must protect herself from the threats of defamation in order to preserve her kingdom from disorder and unrest.

In slandering his monarch, Malfont represents a threat to the authority of the state, clouding the distinction between virtue and vice, between legitimate and illegitimate power. Multiple political handbooks and humanist texts detail the threat slander poses to a kingdom. Most notably, in his *Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus argues that action must be brought against any who would tarnish a kingdom by slandering a magistrate. He claims that laws protect the sanctity of the prince and calls for the punishment of a man who “has diminished those qualities which make the prince truly great; if his greatness lies in the excellence of his mind and the prosperity which his wisdom brings to his people, then anyone who undermines these must be accused of *lese majeste*.”  

In a similar manner, many decrees and proclamations mark the concerted effort by the English government to protect the sanctity of the monarch’s name and reputation—and by extension the peace and order of the realm. In 1275, Edward I decreed in *scandalum magnatum* that the defamation of a magistrate or other state official was a punishable offense, an act that was reinvigorated by

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230 Erasmus emphasizes the importance of the distinction between the office of the prince and his person, protesring that a prince must avoid the appearance of revenge and personal investment in punishment, but also insisting that the sanctity of the state must be preserved from slander. The distinction is not clear, however; Erasmus states that “the good prince will forgive no offences more easily and willingly than those which damage his personal interests…since vengeance is the mark of a weak and mean spirit, and nothing is less appropriate to the prince, whose spirit must be lofty and magnanimous” (88). On the other hand, however, Erasmus marks the urgent need for a prince to take action when his office is impugned (89). See Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Richard II in 1379 to protect the kingdom from rebellion.\textsuperscript{231} On September 27, 1579, Elizabeth took the unprecedented step of calling in one book, Stubb’s \textit{The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf}, as “a false libel” because she deemed it likely to foment rebellion by “sounding in every subject’s ear both of the manifest lack of her majesty’s princely care (if she should mind to marry) and also of the undutiful offices and unnatural intentions of her councilors.”\textsuperscript{232} Such treatment of dissenters is not confined to Elizabeth’s proclamations, however. Positioning “slanderous speeches” as a virulent threat to England’s peace, Ferdinando Pulton rehearses the country’s long but murky legal battles against slander and bitter defamers in his reformatory text, \textit{De pace regis et regni} (1609). Attempting to codify and disseminate a vernacular account of English law to the populace in order to educate them regarding proper behavior and actionable offenses, Pulton poignantly begins his account of vice and law by deriding slander and scornful speech, equating bitter words—which he sees as the “roote and principall cause” of discontentment in England—with fomenting rebellion capable of destroying the kingdom:

though slanderous speeches, and menaces, be but words and may be taken only as a smoke, breath, or blast of wind, and so to vanish and be dispersed in the aire like dust; yet experience doth teach us, by the imbecilitie of mans judgement, and the corruption of his nature, they be used as firebrands of privat and open grudges, quarrels, conspiracies, and most other turbulent stratagems, and thereby \textit{a verbis ad verbera peruentum est}. And we seldom heare of any ye said enormities effected, but they tooke their beginnings of menaces, threats, slaunders and other evill words.\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{231} The 1379 version of the decree, which prescribed the specific offices that were protected from slander under the previous proclamation, posits that slander must be contained to preserve the stability of English society: “Debates and slanders might arise betwixt lords, or between the lords and the commons…and whereof great peril and mischief might come to all the realm, and quick subversion and destruction of the said realm” (qtd in Kaplan, \textit{The Culture of Slander} 22).

\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Tudor Royal Proclamations}, 449.

\textsuperscript{233} Ferdinando Pulton, \textit{De pace regis et regni} (London, 1609), B1r-v.
Pulton asserts the infectious nature of scornful speech to be of paramount concern to the state, which stands to suffer from the conspiracies and stratagems devised and propagated by malicious slanderers.

Emphasizing Mercilla’s harsh punishment of her slanderer, Spenser acknowledges the danger scornful speech poses to the kingdom and the urgency of silencing it. Spenser empowers Mercilla to punish and contain verbal dissent and scornful speech, effectively silencing her slanderer by nailing his tongue to a post. More than simply quieting his scorn, however, Mercilla’s punishment of Malfont transforms him from a slanderer into a mute symbol of her power. She utilizes the punished Malfont as an vehicle by which she can exercise her authority, in effect, re-substantiating her power as queen from the ashes of transgression. By publicly silencing Malfont, Mercilla reconstructs the evil-speaker as a text upon which she demonstrates her authority, attempting to reform her citizens by denouncing her slanderer.

**The Didactic Power of Scorn**

Malfont is not the only text written upon by monarchical authority in the canto, however. While Malfont’s punishment asserts Mercilla’s power and authority, the giant Awe represents a positive affirmation of the respect subjects should show their monarch. Functioning as Mercilla’s porter, Awe guards the gate to Mercilla’s palace:

[The] porch, that most magnificke did appeare,  
Stood open wyde to all men day and night:  
Yet warded well by one of mickle might,  
That sate thereby, with gyantlike resemblance  
To keepe out guyle, and malice, and despight,  
That under shew oftimes of fayned semblance,  
Are wont in Princes courts to worke great scath and hindrance.
His name was Awe. (ix, 22.5-9, 23.1)

Antithetical to Malfont’s derision of his monarch, Awe demonstrates the correct attitude of subjects towards Mercilla, his existence offering a preemptive rebuke to the railing of Malfont. Awe educates the newcomers to Mercilla’s court in proper reverence and is portrayed by Spenser as a virtuous alternative to Malfont’s derision. Awe is respectful and admiring of Mercilla’s virtue, while the railer is slanderous and hyper-critical of what he perceives to be his monarch’s vice.234 As an emblem of reverence, Spenser positions Awe as “the first requirement in preserving the integrity of Mercilla’s court as a palace of justice,” at the same time that Malfont demonstrates her might through his punishment.235 Awe acts as more than a reminder of courtly etiquette. While he does not engage Artegall and Arthur as they enter the court of mercy—they have proven themselves against the enemies of Mercilla already 236—he does act as an intimidating porter to the court and an enforcer of peace and order. While the gate to Mercilla’s palace claims to welcome “all men day and night,” the invitation is not without qualification: the “giantlike Awe” vets those who seek admission, admitting the virtuous, but turning away or punishing the dissemblers. He sits at the gate, winnowing the true courtiers from the chaff. More than blind reverence, Awe is able to discriminate between the morally poor and the virtuous and chivalric. It is his ability to

234 Awe here may indirectly reflect lese majeste: understood in early Roman law to imply one that is owed reverence, this law came to be associated more directly with the reverence owed to a monarch or ruler after the fourth century (89). For more information on the roots of English defamation law and its link to early modern censorship practices, see Debora Shuger, Censorship & Cultural Sensibility (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).


236 T.K. Dunsheath notes that the three “hindrances to justice against which Awe guards Mercilla’s porch—guyle, malice, and despight—are exactly the same three that Artegall and Arthur have just overcome. … In the logic of the poem, Artegall and Arthur have earned their admission to Mercilla’s Court.” See T.K, Dunsheath, Spenser’s Allegory of Justice in Book Five of The Faerie Queene, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 206-207)
judge character and to discern a person’s moral worth that proves Awe to be the ideal guardian of the court, one who protects Mercilla from both insincere flatterers and railers. Like Artega ll’s enforcer Talus, Awe acts as the propagator of Mercilla’s public image and the executioner of her will, a position that associates him with the administration of scorn. Executing Mercilla’s justice through his brute force, Awe didactically instructs the populace to regard their monarch with sincerity, humility, and respect. Through his scornful discrimination, Awe separates Mercilla from the moral decay that contaminates the rest of book five.

Enabled by the discriminating work of Awe, Mercilla constructs her court as an earthly substitute for the edenic world of the Garden, separated from the dross of the Iron Age which both surrounds her and threatens to breach her walls. Spenser portrays the courtiers crowding Mercilla’s palace as untouched by war and political corruption, representing pure and virtuous men in their innocence, unfamiliar with the corruption of the world. Apparently unexposed to the sin of violence, the courtiers stand “amazed” and with “unwonted terror half affray” to behold Arthur and Artega ll as they enter the court in their warlike armor (24.3,4):

> For never saw they there the like array,  
> Ne ever was the name of warre there spoken,  
> But joyous peace and quietnesse always,  
> Dealing just judgements, that mote not be broken  
> For any brybes, or threatens of any to be wroken. (24.5-9)

Spenser’s portrayal here recalls the lament for the Golden Age that begins the legend of justice: “So oft as I with state of present time, / The image of the antique world compare, / When as mans age was in his freshest prime, / And the first blossom of fair virtue bare

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237 Indeed, if we believe Dunseath, Awe acts as Mercilla’s unnamed executor (208). If this is the case, then it is Awe who transforms Malfont’s derision of Mercilla into a reassertion of her monarchical authority, effectively re-scripting the offender as an emblem of infamy and admonition.
As in conventional Golden Age myth, the pureness of Mercilla’s courtiers is constructed as a satiric rebuke to the present age. In subtle contrast to early modern courtiers, Mercilla’s courtiers are pure because they are not sinful. More specifically, his language makes his debt to Hesiod’s *Works and Days* clear: Hesiod’s is the only Golden Age account to mark the bribery and governmental corruption of his contemporaries as consequences of the departure of Justice from the earth. In particular, Hesiod claims his current age is ruled by δωροφάγοι, or “gift-eaters” rather than righteous judges seeking to recapture a golden world. Spenser reflects the negative construction of his source, portraying Mercilla’s “just judgements” as golden because they are impervious to the corruption that currently ensnares justice. Despite his portrait of Mercilla’s innocent courtiers, Spenser insists upon the necessary place of justice and rebuke in her kingdom.

Spenser refigures prior Golden Age myths, co-opting their ends of peace and innocence but challenging the easy means by which they achieve that end. As the embodiment of justice and mercy, Mercilla presides over the peaceful and edenic world of her court in a manner consistent with her allegorical nature, but Spenser insists that this golden world, unlike those portrayed by Ovid and Virgil, is *sub lege*. Those classical accounts promoted mankind’s spontaneous goodness and virtue, thereby envisioning a society of mutual respect unencumbered by law; Spenser, however, leaves no doubt that

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238 When the last immortals “go from the wide-wayed earth back on their way to Olympos, forsaking the whole race of mortal men, … all that will be left by them to mankind will be wretched pain. And there shall be no defense against evil” (ll. 198-201). One effect of this departure is the increase in litigation and lawsuits as men scheme greedily “for other men’s goods.” (ll. 39) Richard Lattimore, trans. *Hesiod: The Works and Days, Theogony and The Shield of Herakles*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

Mercilla’s courtiers achieve their virtue through her rule—and if Malfont is any indication, they still transgress. By constructing Mercilla as an active monarch, dispensing justice and, when needed, punishment, Spenser breaks with the most idealistic convention of Ovid’s account:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo,} \\
\text{sponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.} \\
poena metusque aberrant, nec verba minantia fixo \\
aere legebantur, nec supplex turba timebat \\
\text{iudicis ora sui, sed errant sin vindice tuti.}
\end{align*}
\]

Insisting that the Golden Age was ruled *quae vindice nullo* and *sine lege*, Ovid articulates its goodness and virtue as spontaneous and uncompelled: men are good because they want to be, not because they are fearful of punishments that would befall them if they are not. Spenser is not as optimistic as Ovid. Moving Golden Age myth from the abstract to the particular, Spenser constructs Mercilla as not only a simple emblem of mercy and justice, but also as the daily application of these virtues to a kingdom.

As an executioner of justice rather than its abstract ideal, Mercilla must fashion her courtiers into virtuous citizens through her use of law and punishment. While this image of active justice differs markedly from the passive portrayals of the feminine protagonists of

\footnote{240 The existence of Malfont complicates any easy categorization of Mercilla’s courtiers as absolutely pure: for Hesiod, slander works as an innovation of the iron age, a sin which is born out of man’s envy and greed: “The vile man will crowd his better out, and attack him / With twisted accusations and swear an oath to his story, / The spirit of Envy, with grim face and screaming voice, / Who delights in evil, will be the constant companion / Of wretched humanity (193-197).}

\footnote{241 Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Books I – VIII*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), I, 89-93. George Sandys translates these lines in the seventeenth century as “The Golden Age was first, which uncompeled / And without rule, in Faith and Truth exceld. / As then, there was nor punishment nor feare, / Nor threatening laws in brasse prescribed were; / Nor suppliant crouching pris’ners shooke to see / Their angrie Judge: But all was safe and free.” George Sandys, *The First Five Bookes of Ovids Metamorphosis* (London, 1621), 4.}

\footnote{242 For the historical allegory of Queen Elizabeth as Astraea, see Part II of Frances Yates’s wonderful study, in particular, “Queen Elizabeth as Astraea” in *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1999) 29-87.}
conventional myth—note that Nemesis and Aidos,\textsuperscript{243} Dike,\textsuperscript{244} and later Astraea,\textsuperscript{245} all forsake the earth rather than rule corrupted and corrupting mankind—Spenser’s bases Mercilla upon his own incarnation of Astraea, a version of the just virgin goddess who promotes peace through law. In the Proem, Spenser stresses Astraea’s ability and agility as a monarch as a necessary component of mankind’s virtue:

\begin{quote}
For during Saturnes ancient raigne it’s sayd,  
That all with goodnesse did abound:  
All loved virtue, no man was affrayd  
Of force, ne fraud in wight was to be found:  
No warre was knowne, no dredfull trompets sound,  
Peace universall rayn’d mongst men and beasts,  
And all things freely grew out of the ground:  
Justice sate high ador’d with solemne feasts,  
And to all people did divide her dred beheasts. (9.1-9)
\end{quote}

In this account, humanity is virtuous, to be sure, but Spenser is less emphatic than his predecessors that such goodness is spontaneous. He co-opts his source material to emphasize the lack of war and violence in the Golden Age, but leaves room for law and even punishment as a method of maintaining order and peace. In direct contrast to those who write more conventional accounts, Spenser insists upon the utility of fear in dispensing justice, repeating “dred” throughout his Proem—first as a description of the fearful trumpets that signal war, then as a adjective for Astraea’s behests, and later describing Astraea/Elizabeth as “Dread Soverayne Goddess”—to discredit the idealized unrehearsed goodness of mankind in the Golden Age. Hardly a construction of the Iron Age for Spenser,

\textsuperscript{243} Translated from Hesiod by Harry Levin as “Shame” and “Indignation,” Nemesis and Aidos are the last of the immortals, leaving earth at the beginning of the iron age. Harry Levin, \textit{The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 15.

\textsuperscript{244} An innovation of the Stoic poet Aratus in his poem \textit{Phaenomena}, Dike leaves even earlier than Nemesis and Aidos, fleeing the earth during the age of bronze. See Levin, \textit{The Myth of the Golden Age}, 15.

\textsuperscript{245} Once Dike is positioned as a feminine force in the ages of man, Astraea is not far off; Virgil labels the fleeing deity as Virgo; Ovid is the first to call her Astraea.
society’s fear of scorn and punishment works to reinforce the law in all ages. Astraea and her “dred behests” will be followed because, if they are not, the transgressors will be punished. Spenser here seems to be revising his source material deliberately to showcase Astraea’s—and later, Mercilla’s—use of the law to maintain peace. Through his description of Mercilla’s active participation in law and peace, Spenser calls the reader’s attention to the ways in which he alters Golding’s translation:

Then sprange up first the golden Age, whiche of it selfe maintaing
The truth and right of every thing unforced and unconstraind.
There was no feare of punnishment, there was no threatening lawe
In brazen tables nayld up, to keep the folk in awe. …
They lived saufe without a judge in every realme and lande.  

More than demonstrating the difference between Ovid’s *sine lege* and his own *sub lege* golden world, Spenser deliberately plays on Golding’s equation of positive law as a means of keeping subjects in “awe.” Transforming scorn from something to be avoided into a necessary component of a just society, Spenser reminds the reader of Awe’s role as Mercilla’s executioner by likening him to his allegorical equivalent, Talus. Although positive law is eschewed in Ovid, it is instrumental to justice in Spenser, who allegorizes the power of law through the two brutal enforcers Awe and Talus, the iron groom of Artegall who represents the embodiment of the unbending and unchanging law throughout the book. Spenser insists that, despite the “yron” of his body, Talus is not a product of the Iron Age, but was created in an earlier one. A gift to Artegall upon her departure to Olympus, Talus works as the unflinching enforcer of his master’s administration of iron-age justice, but


247 Indeed, Talus is replaced by Awe in the episode: no mention of him occurs from the time the two knights cross the threshold of the palace of Mercilla until Artegall leaves Mercilla’s palace at V, xi, 36.

248 Derived from the Greek *Talos*, Talus is a product of the bronze age. Dunsheath, 52-54.
Spenser argues that he previously operated in this capacity for Astraea: “But when she parted hence, she left her groome / An yron man, which did on her attend / Alwayes, to execute her stedfaste doome” (I, 12.1-3). Like Astraea, Mercilla cannot rely complacently upon the virtue of her populace to order her kingdom and promote peace. Instead, she must fashion them into virtuous citizens through her “righteous doome” and her “just judgements.”

By rewriting Golding’s *Ovid*, Spenser complicates the portrayal of perfect and spontaneous virtue present in conventional Golden Age myths to interrogate the use-value of scorn in the administration of justice. In introducing Mercilla through representations of good and bad speech, Spenser affirms the didactic nature of awe and scorn, challenging the earlier myths’ dismissal of such methods. The embodiment of evil speech, the punished Malfont serves as a warning to the newcomers of Mercilla’s court, directing their action and speech through the threat of pain and humiliation. Awe provides a necessary counterpoint to the admonition of Malfont, working to affirm the courtier’s respect for Mercilla’s office. Emphasizing her desire to educate her courtiers in the ways of justice, Mercilla’s court works to blend Golden Age justice with a humanist perception of the virtue. Embodying educational principles, such a humanist version of law insists that the laws enacted by an upright prince should be few in number, but should “conform to the ideals of justice and honour and have no other purpose than to advance the interests of all.”

Aligning justice with education, Erasmus argues that the best laws promote the virtue of the population through example and instruction, stating that the first aim of a magistrate or a prince should

249 Through theses epithets, Spenser aligns Mercilla with other emblems of active justice in *The Faerie Queene*, most importantly, Astraea and Artegaill. Early in the book, Spenser narrates Astraea’s bringing up of Artegaill, instructing him in “all the depth of rightfull doome” (I, 5.3), motivating his love of virtue, and inspiring his “heroicke heat” (1.7).

250 Erasmus, 79.
be to induce men to virtuous thought and action. To accomplish this, a “prince should promote the kind of laws which not only prescribe punishment for the guilty but also dissuade men from breaking the law.”²⁵¹ Standing in for the reader, Arthur and ArtegaII correctly interpret the two emblems and proceed into the court with the appropriate caution and reverence.

Despite their insistence upon the didactic nature of laws, both Golden Age myth and humanist treatises on government display anxiety as to the role of punishment in a subject’s education. Like Mercilla, Erasmus demonstrates the tricky nature of scorn and rebuke in the pursuit of justice. He firmly states that punishment debases men, arguing that laws should work “to deter men from law-breaking more by reasoning than by punishments;” and, because man is “the noblest of all creatures, it is only fitting that he should be induced to observe the law by rewards, rather than by threats and punishments.”²⁵² Despite his assurance of man’s nobility, Erasmus goes on to make room for punishment as a legitimate deterrent to sin. He argues that a variety of methods should be employed to reflect all manner of subjects. While virtuous men respond to rewards, “men of thoroughly servile, or rather bestial, disposition must be tamed by chains and the lash.”²⁵³ London, appealing to the lowest members of society, attempted to fashion its citizenry through visceral and public punishments of transgressors, transforming the bodies of condemned men into admonitions to the living. One common example of this type of education greeted early modern travelers entering London: welcomed into the city by the heads of guilty men, newcomers were

²⁵¹ Ibid., 80.
²⁵² Ibid.
²⁵³ Ibid., 81.
warned against similar behavior. Malfont may be of such a servile disposition, warranting the display of his maimed tongue as a punishment for his transgression as well as a warning to others, who otherwise would attempt such transgressive behavior.

Through his insistence that the Golden Age benefited from law and the administration of corrective punishment, Spenser implies that man is not spontaneously virtuous or inherently good; rather, Spenser stresses that his virtue must be crafted by education and the rigorous application of the law. Mercilla’s didactic use of Awe and the punished Malfont transforms law into instruction, mirroring the task of *The Faerie Queene*. As Spenser aims to transform his reader into “a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” through his use of examples and pleasant fictions, Mercilla will fashion her subjects into perfect courtiers. On a simple level, the mute tableaux of Awe and Malfont work to prepare Arthur and Artegaill, stand-ins for Spenser’s readers, for the entrance of Mercilla. Once they have finished their instruction and are prepared to view Spenser’s Mercilla with reverence and dread—the previous application of scorn having been signaled by Malfont’s painful piercing—readers are presented with the emblem of divine mercy.

**Mercilla’s Emblems of Justice**

Demonstrating the effectiveness of the didactic emblems of Awe and the punished Malfont, Arthur and Artegaill enter the Presence chamber and, “bowing low before her Majestie, / Did to her myld obeysance, as they ought” and “meekes boone, that they imagine mought” (V, ix, 34.3-5). Instructed to be humble by Awe and admonished from criticism by

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254 Charles Mitchell narrates the scene generated by public execution: those entering west London were greeted by “the bodies of executed felons hung in chains,” while those coming into east London met a similar sight at Mile End Green; entering from the Thames, travelers would see the bodies of pirates bobbing in the water, and where, nearby on Tower Hill, transgressive nobles were beheaded (Mitchell, *Shakespeare and Public Execution*, 7-8).
Malfont, Artegaill and Arthur prostrate themselves before Spenser’s ideal monarch. A ruler of heavenly justice, Mercilla acts as the earthly deputy of Christ. Spenser’s portrait of Mercilla is more ambiguous than this title would indicate. While she may embody an ideal of Golden Age justice, she also is charged with accommodating that ideal to an earthly and fallen world. Her justice is thus mediated. She is a Golden Age judge grafted onto the Iron Age by her fallen subjects. As part of justice, she, like Artegaill, must struggle to apply mercy and scorn in their due measures.

Spenser introduces Mercilla by emphasizing her heavenly nature, positioning her as a monarch of Christ and his deputy on earth:

All over her a cloth of state was spred,  
Not of rich tissew, not of cloth of gold,  
Nor of ought else, that may be richest red,  
But like a cloud, as likest may be told,  
That he brode spreading wings did wyde unforld;  
Whose skirts were bordred with bright sunny beams,  
Glistring like gold, amongst the plights enrold,  
And here and there shooting forth silver streames,  
Mongst which crept litle Angels through the glittering gleames.

Seemed those litle Angels did uphold  
The cloth of state, and on their purpled wings  
Did beare the pendants, through their nimblesse bold:  
Besides a thousand more of such, as sings  
Hymnes to high God, and carols heavenly things,  
Encompassed the throne, on which she sate:  
She Angel-like, the heyre of ancient kings,  
And mightie Conquerors, in royall state,  
Whylest kings and kesarls at her feet did them prostrate. (ix, 28-29)

As A.C. Hamilton asserts, the imagery of Mercilla’s throne is both scriptural and classical, demonstrating the complementary Christian and pagan roots of the Golden Age through Spenser’s use of solar and angelic heraldry. Employing conventional emblems of orthodoxy to describe Mercilla, Spenser likens her to both God and Jove, portraying her throne upon a
cloud, illuminated by the sun’s radiance. In doing so, Spenser represents her as God’s merciful representative on earth. Specifically, Spenser insists that Mercilla’s transcendence is linked with her administration of her office, signaled by the angels who support her throne, encompassing her as they sing hymns to God. The emblems surrounding the “Angel-like” Mercilla represent not only scriptural affirmations of her virtue, but also the virtue of her administration. Positioned as the allegorical revision of Lucifera’s throne in the house of Pride, Mercilla’s seat of power emphasizes her heavenly nature: while Lucifera is characterized by her scorn and disdain of the earthly, signaling her untempered ambition, Mercilla embodies the virtuous administration of justice. According to this reading, the emblems of orthodox power and authority that surround Mercilla reinforce her image as the new Astraea: the angels and sun encompassing her emphasize her divine office and position her as the deputy of God, while the rusted sword and chained lion at her feet work to impress upon her subjects her restrained, but ever-ready might. According to this common reading, Mercilla’s heavenly attendants suggest that she is able to restore a type of divine harmony on earth through her mercy and proper administration of justice. One critic, Althea Hume, interprets the heavenly accoutrements depicted in Mercilla’s presence chamber as signaling

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255 This section is indebted to Jane Aptekar’s study of the imagery of Mercilla and her throne, but differs from it in how these symbols resonate throughout the text. Aptekar reads this use of pagan imagery as entirely within reason for Spenser: “Jove is to be regarded as analogous, or equivalent, to God.” She clarifies further, stating that “Jove was the king of the Pagan gods and the greatest of the gods who ruled men; inevitably, the correspondence-finding Elizabethans took him to represent or to provide an automatic metaphor or mere pseudonym for the Scriptural God and King” (17).

256 T. K. Dunsheath conflates Spenser’s descriptions of Mercilla and Astraea with contemporary depictions of Elizabeth. He cites John Case’s Sphaera Civitatis (1588), stating that the work, “has as a frontispiece an astrological chart in which the heavenly spheres, each assigned a particular moral virtue, move around immovable justice … and the Astraea-like figure of Elizabeth presides over them all.” He concludes his argument, returning to Spenser’s Mercilla: “In this scheme the magistrate is justice personified and the effect of her justice is harmony, a harmony Mercilla recreates both symbolically and actually” (209).
her status as the paragon of virtue: “it is Mercilla, not Isis, who embodies the full nature of the book’s virtue.”

Far from presenting an emblem of abstracted virtue as he does in the temple of Isis, Spenser defines his queen through her ability to dispense righteous justice to her active kingdom of transgressive subjects. Because she governs impure subjects, Mercilla cannot rely solely upon mercy; she, on occasion, must couple her mercy with the force of scorn. As a result, Spenser is forced to qualify Mercilla’s divinity, insisting that she is “Angel-like,” rather than wholly angelic. While this epithet is by no means a slight to Mercilla, nor to the queen she represents, the repetition of “like” throughout the description—occurring four times in the passage—emphasizes Mercilla’s approximation of the divine on earth. Importantly, Spenser stops short of casting her as the daughter of God. In this model, Mercilla, and her justice, is fundamentally earthly: Spenser stresses that she is the “heyre of ancient kings / And mightie Conquerors” rather than the reincarnation of Saturn. As an earthly, rather than divine, monarch, Mercilla represents the application of justice rather than Justice herself: Spenser’s portrait of her revises traditional emblems of justice to create an allegory of monarchy that struggles to negotiate carefully the benefits and liabilities of mercy and scorn in the administration of justice, never settling for a tight solution that privileges one over the other.

Through his portrayals of the rusted sword, bevy of allegorical virgins, and chained lion at her feet, Spenser creates an image of monarchy that has recourse to both scorn and mercy in the daily maintenance of her kingdom. These allegorical representations positioned around Mercilla’s throne signal the necessity for balance between scorn and mercy. Spenser implies Mercilla’s restraint through her godly reluctance to wield her force at the same time.

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that he insists scorn must be present in justice. Mercilla’s occasional recourse to scorn presents her as a dynamic and complicated emblem of justice: she is associated with monarchical authority, signaled by the sword of state positioned at her feet; likewise, she is associated with anger, demonstrated by the Litae’s pleas for temperance and pardon; finally, she is associated even with brutality, represented by the lion who growls beneath her.

Spenser employs these dynamic emblems of monarchical order and justice to demonstrate Mercilla’s—and Elizabeth’s—active struggle to administer justice virtuously. All of the emblems positioned on or around Mercilla signify the process of dispensing justice through monarchical force, rather than an abstract conception of the virtue. The first emblem of monarchical power Spenser includes in Mercilla’s portrait is her rusting and resting sword, denoting the present peace and tranquility of her kingdom but also threatening her enemies with the promise of her force and her authority. Perhaps derived from a 1585 state portrait painted by Marcus Gheeraerts I that portrays Elizabeth holding an olive branch with a sword at her feet, Spenser’s portrayal of Mercilla and her sword reflects a historic ambivalence fostered by Elizabeth, who marketed herself as a monarch who privileged peace over war. In this, she differed from her father and half-brother, who wielded the sword of state as an emblem of their royal authority, signifying their power as kings and as disciples of the Word through the sword’s promise of wrath and violence. In contrast to their scornful and warlike portraits, Elizabeth was more often painted with the royal scepter, demonstrating her

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258 In the portrait, a crowned Elizabeth holds an olive branch in one hand and gloves and a fan in her other, signaling her peaceful reign and feminine demeanor. Adding to the portrait of Elizabeth as a domestic queen, a dog sits in attendance upon her. The only signal to attest to her monarchy is the sword that lies at her feet, ready to be utilized should the need arise and reminding the viewer not to judge Elizabeth as a dainty woman unwilling to protect her kingdom. See Roy Strong, Portraits of Queen Elizabeth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Plate XI.

peaceful administration of her kingdom. In fact, she is only rarely portrayed with the sword of state at her feet, and, when she is, she holds feminine signifiers of peace to balance symbolically the violent instrument of force.260 By portraying Mercilla holding the royal scepter with the sword of state at her feet, Spenser likewise balances his portrait of the queen:

    Holding a Scepter in her royall hand,
    The sacred pledge of peace and Clemencie,
    With which high God had blest her happie land,
    Maugre so many foes, which did withstand.
    But at her feet her sword was likewise layde,
    Whose long rest rusted the bright steely brand;
    Yet when as foes enforst, or friends sought ayde,
    She could it sternely draw, that all the world dismayed.  

In this passage, the present peace of Mercilla’s kingdom is matched by the ever-present threat of her anger. The power of the monarch’s scepter—depicting her divine office and God’s approval of her rule—is matched by the power of the monarch’s sword—depicting her ability to protect scornfully her kingdom. By constructing Mercilla this way, Spenser poetically revises Elizabeth’s portrayal of her own monarchical authority, assuming emblematic elements from conventional representations of justice. Typically, Justice clutches in one hand measuring scales denoting the weighing of evidence, or, rarely, a cornucopia signifying peace; in her other hand, she holds her sword, demonstrating her might and power to administer her will fully.261 In Cesare Ripa’s Nova Iconologia (1618), three of

260 To my knowledge, Elizabeth was never depicted holding both the scepter and the sword (either at her feet or in her hand) in state portraits or other artistic renderings. Elizabeth’s portraits and engravings always temper the wrath of the sword by demonstrating Elizabeth as a feminine ruler, showing her holding an olive branch, gloves, fans, a jewel, or coronation globe. By contrast, she is said to have carried a sword with her in her later years to signify her might. According to Sir John Harrington’s narration of his 1601 visit to court, Elizabeth’s rage and wrath is symbolized by her wielding of a sword: the “evil plots and designs have overcome all her highness’ sweet temper. She … thrusts her rusty sword at times into the arras in great rage...the dangers are over, and yet she always keeps a sword by her table.” Quoted in William Nelson, “Queen Elizabeth, Spenser’s Mercilla, and a Rusty Sword” in Renaissance News 18.2 (1965), 113-117.

261 Nelson makes the argument that Spenser subtly reminds his audience of Elizabeth’s own words: according to Nelson, Spenser references a poem Elizabeth penned around 1570, referring to Mary Queen of Scots:

    The daughter of debate that discord aye doth sow
the four figures of justice hold scales and swords: Justice Rigorous, portrayed as a crowned skeleton representing the strictest interpretation of the law, is armed with both emblematic instruments; Inviolable Justice and even Justice Divine, portrayed on a cloud and backlit by the sun like Mercilla, are similarly armed. Only Justice, fully embodied and decked in jewels, is portrayed as empty-handed. To create a unique emblem of monarchical justice, Spenser combines these emblems, emphasizing Mercilla’s mercy by removing Justice’s sword from her person, but also dismissing from his portrait the allegorical significance of Justice’s scales. By replacing the scales that weigh “right and wrong” with a royal scepter that signifies monarchical authority, Spenser potentially associates Mercilla with corrective rather than distributive justice, marking her power and scorn of transgression as vital aspects of her role as monarch. Spenser reinforces this reading by describing Mercilla as able to draw her sword so “sternly…that all the world dismayed,” highlighting the necessity of scorn in war and overtly reminding his audience that to be effective, mercy

| Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace |
| hath taught to know. … |
| My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ |
| To poll their tops that seeks such change or gape |
| for future joy. (115) |

262 These emblems are available in Aptekar’s *Icons of Justice*, 56.

263 Elizabeth actively co-opts the image of divine justice wielding a mighty sword in order to justify not only her claim to the throne, but also her supremacy of the Church of England: the frontispiece of *The Bishops’ Bible* depicts the enthroned Elizabeth, holding her scepter and her globe, surrounded by the divine virtues of Justice, Mercy, Prudence and Fortitude. Justice is shown wielding a sword, signaling her protection and validation of the Queen. Strong, *Portraits*, 123.

264 Aptekar asserts, “This is that sword of justice which figures representing the monarch frequently carried and those representing justice almost always carried. … though Mercilla has…the resources of power available to her, she is merciful” (60).

must be balanced with a will to execute justice, even brutally. The placement of Mercilla’s warlike accessory also speaks to Spenser’s—and perhaps Elizabeth’s—anxiety regarding the role of scorn in justice, enabling the allegorical queen to distance herself from her use of wrath and force as she did with Malfont: she acknowledges its necessary application, but is able to keep such anger and violence from tainting her person, demeaning violence by placing the instrument of scorn at her feet, below her, but still within reach.

Spenser continues to describe Mercilla in ambivalent terms. She is alternately a divine embodiment of perfect mercy and an earthly judge administering her fallen kingdom. In particular, Spenser’s inclusion of the Litae at the feet of Mercilla presents conflicting readings. As Aptekar asserts, the specific classical root of Spenser’s Litae is unclear: they represent an amalgamation of Homer’s Litae—personified prayers for forgiveness and mercy—and Hesiod’s virginal Dikê, Eunomie and Eirene—abstract representations of justice, equity, and peace. Spenser’s combination of his classical sources—Homer’s Iliad and Hesiod’s Theogony—result in a portrayal of the Litae that both reinforce Mercilla’s divinity, positioning her as Jove—the divine judge of all subjects—but also challenge the

266 Nadya Q. Chishty-Mujahid argues that “One of Mercilla’s true triumphs, indicative of both her undeniable power and her admirable poise and restraint, lies in the fact that she never actually needs to “wield” the rusty sword that lies beneath her throne.” See her “Chapter One: Refracted Regality: Spenser’s Allegory of Justice and the Fragmentation of Monarchical Identity,” in Character Development in Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 45.

267 The reading of Mercilla that signals Spenser’s historical debt to Elizabeth’s portraiture is not incorrect; it simply does not go far enough. In total, I have found only three other images of Elizabeth with a sword, two of which relate to her supremacy over the Church of England, a third, a Dutch painting which depicted Elizabeth as Europa, wielding her sword at the Spanish Armada, her body made of a map of present day Great Britain and the continent. The first warlike portrait to install Elizabeth as the head of the Church of England is, not surprisingly, John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments: she appears in the woodcut Letter “C,” sword in hand, ready to defend the faith (contained in the 1563 edition onward). Soon thereafter, she is portrayed on the frontispiece of Richard Day’s Christian Prayers and Meditations in English (1569), assuming a posture of prayer with a ready sword at her feet (Strong, Portraits 116, 121, and Plate XI).

268 Aptekar 18. Dunseath defines Spenser’s references this way to get at the main themes of book five (211).
perception of Mercilla as perfect virtue. According to the latter reading, they imply that her emotions and judgments may need to be softened, and her justice mediated still further by the Litae’s pleas for temperance. Spenser’s version of the Litae work to mitigate the wrath of mighty Jove on the behalf of men. They are depicted as beautiful, saint-like intercessors:

And round about, before her feet there sate
A bevie of faire Virgins clad in white,
That goodly seem’d t’adorne her royall state,
All lovely daughters of high Jove, that hight
Litae, by him begot in loves delight,
Upon the righteous Themis: those they say
Upon Joves judgement seat wayt day and night,
And when in wrath he threatens the worlds decay,
They doe his anger calme, and cruell vengeance stay. (V, ix, 31)

Spenser positions the Litae in the same place as he does Mercilla’s sword, initially introducing them as ornaments at Mercilla’s feet, heralding her divinity and virtue: “A bevie of faire Virgins … That goodly seem’d to adorne her royal state” (31.2-3). Much like the angels who fly about her throne, the Litae are shown first as emblems of superfluous goodness, but also come to signify Mercilla’s need to balance her administration of justice with careful consideration of the law, equity and mercy.269

Begotten by Jove and the “righteous” Themis, Spenser’s Litae are associated with both divine justice and earthly corrective justice. By combining these two mythological intercessors in his version of the Litae, Spenser emphasizes their mercy, temperance and pity for the unfortunate, creating an necessary complement to the scornful justice of the Iron Age.

269 According to Aptekar, “Mercilla is the embodiment of a particularly merciful kind of justice. And she is influenced to make merciful judgments by the same Litae who influence Jove toward mercy. The Litae restrain Jove when in his wrath he threatens cruel vengeance and the world’s decay. Similarly…influenced by the Litae and her own essential mercifulness, Mercilla pities [transgressors]” (17). Aptekar attempts to scoot around the problematic result of this comparison, dismissing the complexity of the allegory in favor of a circular reading of Mercilla’s execution of justice that likens her to the Lité themselves. She asserts that in an attempt to flatter Elizabeth, Spenser positioned the female characters of justice as allegorically merciful and therefore more divine, while he allegorizes the male characters and their counterparts (Artegall and Talus, in particular) as scornful and full of wrath (20ff).
On one hand, their paternity affirms the Litae as divine offspring, reconciling the pagan Jove and the Christian God through Spenser’s allusion to the four daughters of the Father: Justice, Truth, Fortitude and Peace. On the other hand, Hesiod asserts that the Litae are born younger siblings to the Horae, begotten by Jove and Themis after the fall of Saturn. Their lineage demonstrates the end of the perfection of the Golden Age on earth, marking the Litae as necessary mediators between the gods and man.  

For Spenser, the Litae may emblematize the perfect dispensers of accommodated Justice: they are associated with both divine and earthly justice from their birth and are charged with the merciful task of cooling the effects of Jove’s anger and vengeance on earth. Striving to protect mankind from the inevitable annihilation they would suffer if Jove were allowed to administer Justice according to mankind’s dessert, the Litae resemble Spenser’s Protestant conception of divine mercy, granting the Father’s children better than they merit.  

Given the heavenly reward that their sins would more appropriately earn, mankind could never enjoy paradise without such prayers. The Litae prevent mankind from such a fate through their intercession. Spenser does not leave the Litae in the heavens, however; he asserts that they are outsourced to earthly monarchs as well, positioned as suitors to their thrones:

They also doe by his divine permission  
Upon the thrones of mortall Princes tend,  
And often treat for pardon and remission  
To suppliants, through frayltie which offend.  
Those did upon Mercillas throne attend:  
Just Dice, wise Eunomie, myld Eirene.  
And them amongst, her glorie to commend,

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270 According to Hesiod’s chronology in the *Theogony*, “Next Zeus took to himself Themis, the shining, who bore him the Seasons, / Lawfullness, and Justice, and prospering Peacetime: these / Are concerned to oversee the actions of mortal people; / And the Fates, to whom Zeus of the counsels gave the highest position: / They are Klotho, Lachesis, and Atropos: they distribute / To mortal people what people have, for good or for evil” (ll. 901-906).

271 Their task reminds this reader of Una’s counsel to Redcrosse Knight when he encounters the figure of Despayre five books earlier.
Sate goodly Temperance in garments clene,
And sacred Reverence, yborne of heavenly strene. (32)

Insisting that the Litae “did upon Mercilla’s throne attend,” Spenser’s inclusion of them in her Presence Chamber signals the poet’s possible qualification of the earthly monarch, cautioning the reader to examine more closely Spenser’s portrait of idealized justice.

More so than the rusted sword at her feet, the Litae signal to the reader the ways in which Mercilla fulfills her role as a judge of perfect mercy and justice, but also insist that the reader remember the ways in which Mercilla is limited by the fallenness of her subjects. Trying to correct the sins and mitigate the suffering of those who “though frayltie … offend,” the Litae mirror the work of Mercilla, applying law, equity and mercy to the reformation of the flesh. By doing so, the Litae, like Mercilla, attempt to recreate a golden world. Mercilla and the Litae are not the same, however. Unlike the angels and the personifications Temperance and Reverence who exist to commend the glory of Mercilla to those ignorant of her virtue (34.7-9), the Litae are described as taking an active role in her government, “attending” Mercilla’s throne. Seeking the pardon of sins and remission of punishment where warranted, the Litae struggle to affirm mercy as a legitimate instrument of reformation in the Iron Age, attempting to promote mercy as a means of inculcating virtue and justice. Because they work within the moral decay of the Iron Age, however, they cannot show mercy to everyone. The reader is left to suppose that the heinous nature of his crime and its threat to public order exempt Malfont from mercy, his “frayltie” offending Mercilla’s reputation and hindering her ability to administer justice “with indifferent grace” (IX, 36.4). They likewise are swept from the throne during the trial of Duessa—the voices of pardon and remission silenced by the corruption of her sin.
While Spenser positions scorn as an unrealized or absent threat of Justice in the two previous emblems, he further complicates his allegory in his third symbol of monarchical power, the chained Lion at Mercilla’s feet. In contrast to the previous emblems, the restrained lion upon which Mercilla sits may signal her active application of scorn in the administration of justice. As Aptekar compellingly asserts, the Lion at Mercilla’s feet represents simultaneously the righteous strength of Mercilla’s monarchical force and the hostile opposition to such authority: 272

Thus did she sit in royall rich estate,
Admyr’d of many, honoured of all,
Whylest underneath her feete, there as she sate,
An huge great Lyon lay, that mote appall
An hardie courage, like captived thrall,
With a strong yron chaine and coller bound,
That once he could not move, not quich at all;
Yet did he murmure with rebellious sound
And softly royne, when salvage choler gan redound. (33)

In this passage, the Lion can be interpreted optimistically as a symbol of raw, impassioned power tempered by idealized Mercy and Justice, but also can be read more cynically as Mercilla’s use of force.

If the Lion beneath Justice symbolizes the “superseding of the Old Covenant by the New, Justice by Mercy,” then he refigures Isis’s dominion over the Crocodile—Spenser’s representation of “forged guile” and “open force”—reflecting the Lion’s status as a useful instrument of Justice (vii, 7.3,4). 273 This reading would have its antecedent in the Lion of the legend of holiness, whose “bloodie rage” and “furious force” represent his raw power, which

272 In reference to Mercilla’s lion, Aptekar references a variety of emblem traditions that cite unchained lions as symbols of monarchy (62), magnanimity (62-63), and clemency (63); she importantly notes that there is a less established tradition of chained or restrained lions, positing that Mercilla’s lion, like one pictured in Ripa’s Iconologia, may represent “force subdued by justice” (64). It is this reading that I plan to take up.

is tempered by Una’s gentleness and the Lion’s pity for her undeserved plight (I, iii, 5.8-9). Mercilla’s Lion also cautions that the raw power of royal force should be restrained, lest it have recourse to cruelty or tyranny, possibly referring to Seneca’s admonition to Nero: *Quid enim interest, oro te, Alexander, leoni Lysimachum obicias an ipse lacers dentibus tuis? Tuum illud os est, tua illa feritas.* These readings are by no means clear-cut, however. If the Lion is meant to be read as tyranny, then the allegory appears to denote Justice’s own attempts at self-restraint, a reading not incompatible with the previous emblem of the Litae. Conversely, were the Lion to signify Justice’s use of force, Mercilla’s restraints speak to the volatile nature of brutality and violence.

One point upon which Spenser insists, however, calls these readings into question: the Lion’s restraints demonstrate that he potentially poses a specific danger to the court and the state and must be contained by Mercilla. Indeed, Spenser associates him overtly with rebellion. According to this reading, the Lion is not an instrument of justice like the rusted sword or the Litae; rather, he is acted upon by Justice, becoming the captive of Mercilla and reflecting her use of scorn and mercy in her administration. As Justice’s prisoner, the restrained lion reflects anxieties similar to those portrayed in the punished Malfont. These two restrained transgressors represent the paradox of scorn: both are former emblems of transgressive action transformed through their punishment into vehicles upon which monarchical force can act. Like Malfont, who is charged with slandering the office of his queen, the Lion also is associated with dissenting speech: he murmurs “with rebellious

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274 “For what difference does it make, I beg of you, Alexander, whether you throw Lysimachus to a lion or if you yourself tear him to pieces with your teeth? That lion’s may is yours, and yours its savagery.” Seneca, *De Clementia* in *Moral Essays I*. Translated by John W. Basore (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1928), I, 25.1
“sound,” threatening Mercilla and her kingdom with his “salvage choler.” To an extent, Mercilla is able to contain the Lion’s violence: although he is described as both “huge” and “great,” the Lion is positioned as a weak captive, submissive under Mercilla, unable to move amid the confines of his iron bands, causing his “hardie courage” to be made pale. Even though she employs a less violent punishment than she does with Malfont, Mercilla still is able to contain the Lion’s royal roar, reducing it to a murmur that only hints “softly” at his savage anger.

Like the punished Malfont, the imprisoned Lion at Mercilla’s feet demonstrates the inherent paradox exposed in portraying idealized Justice amid the moral decay of the fallen world: in her attempt to reform her sinning subjects, Mercilla must utilize all the means of justice at her disposal—monarchical authority, wrath, and even brutal force—signaling the tension in the canto between the justice’s divine agent and its very earthly administration. Restrained by Mercilla’s “yron” bands, the Lion demonstrates that rebellion can only be kept at bay with Iron-Age instruments: the lion’s violence can be quelled only by Mercilla’s use of scorn. The mute emblems positioned on or around the person of the queen speak subtly to her negotiation of scorn and mercy, statically signaling Mercilla’s struggle to accommodate divine justice to the fallen world. In her trial of Duessa, which immediately follows this description of Mercilla, readers see the whole Mercilla, consisting of heavenly and earthly justice, Litae and Lion, in action.

275 The lion’s antipathy for his captor is made more clear by Spenser’s use of the possessive “rebellions” in the original printing of the second half of The Faerie Queene.
The Trial of Scorn and Mercy

Representing the allegorical battle between scorn and mercy, the trial of Duessa is positioned as the poetic focus of the legend of justice and presents Spenser’s most complete statement regarding the instrumental value of these two emotions in dispensing justice. Through the trial performed in Mercilla’s court, Spenser animates the static, if ambivalent, allegory of Mercilla enthroned, demonstrating her active participation in justice and her negotiation of pity and scorn. Recalling the language of Seneca’s De Clementia, Spenser opposes the allegorical construction of scorn, represented by the prosecution, to that of pity, represented by the defense. Both allegorize the extremes of mercy: while Zele is characterized as the scornful derider of vice who cruelly castigates the villainess Duessa for the crimes she allegedly has committed against Mercilla, the defense, begun with Pittie, argues for the mitigation of Duessa’s punishment on the grounds of her birth and sex. Seneca’s text prefigures this balance, speaking of perfect mercy by asserting that which it is not. On the one hand, mercy is not vengeance: clementia est temperantia animi in potestate ulciscendi vel lentias superioris adversus inferiorem in constituendis poenis. However, mercy also can go too far in the other direction, resembling pity: misericordia est aegritudo animi ob alienarum miseriarum speciem aut tristitia ex alienis malis contracta, quae addidere immerentibus credit. Flanked by the knights Artega and Arthur who are to be instructed by the trial, Mercilla sits in judgment of scorn and pity, tasked with dispensing her brand of justice “with indifferent grace” (36.4) to a fallen and treasonous subject.

276 “Mercy means restraining the mind from vengeance when it has the power to take it, or the leniency of a superior towards an inferior in fixing punishment.” Seneca, De Clementia II, iii.1.

277 “Pity is the sorrow of the mind brought about by the sight of the distress of others, or sadness caused by the ills of others which it believes come undeservedly.” Seneca, De Clementia II, v.4.
The knights Arthur and Artegall are instructed in the ways of justice through the didactic trial performed before them. Meant as an educational exercise, the trial of Duessa gives occasion for Mercilla to increase the storehouse of Arthur and Artegall’s knowledge of justice—and, indeed, presents one of the few instances in *The Faerie Queene* where Arthur is presented as a student rather than a savior. To this end, she invites them to take part in the trial so that they might “understand” and “witnesse forth aright” the case before them (37.4,5), learning how “lawes oughte to be fashioned unto the manners and condition of the people to whom they are meante”:\(^278\)

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Taking them up unto her stately throne,} \\
&\text{Where they mote heare the matter thoroughly scand} \\
&\text{On either part, she placed th’ one on th’ one,} \\
&\text{The other on the other side, and neare them none. (37.4-9)}
\end{align*}
\]

By placing them on either side of her throne, Mercilla refigures the scales in which she, marked as Justice personified, will balance the pity argued of the defendant and the scorn urged by the prosecution.\(^279\) Mercilla elevates the two knights onto her throne in order that they too will be able to judge reasonably the case before them: but, over the course of the trial, the two knights will come to reflect the two extremes of mercy being argued. Arthur, with “great ruth” will side with Pittie, while Artegall, forever scornful of transgression, will side with Zele (46.6). Mercilla alone will strike the proper balance. Showing the two knights their “doctrine by ensample” rather by “rule,” Mercilla perfects Artegall and Arthur in the administration of justice.\(^280\)

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\(^{278}\) Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*, 20.

\(^{279}\) Michael Dixon asserts that the position of Artegall and Arthur is rather the base of a triangle, the apex of which is Mercilla: according to this reading, Artegall and Arthur are “derivative aspects of Mercilla” their power subordinated to that of Mercilla who maintains the “power to punish or pardon…absolutely” (*The Politicke Courtier*, 145).

\(^{280}\) Spenser, “Letter to Raleigh.”
The Defense:

Embodying Seneca’s conception of pity, Duessa’s affirmative defense consists wholly of emotional appeals, articulated to mitigate the sentence against her rather than to prove her innocence. Before she ever speaks, Duessa is regarded as an object of pity, the guilt of her sins overwhelmed by her beauty, rank, and wretchedness:

Then was there brought, as prisoner to the barre,  
A Ladie of great countenance and place,  
But that she it with foule abuse did marre;  
Yet did appeare rare beautie in her face,  
But blotted with condition vile and base,  
That all her other honour did obscure,  
And titles of nobilitie deface:  
Yet in that wretched semblant, she did sure  
The peoples great compassion unto her allure. (38)

In this passage, the conflict between Duessa’s original virtues and her present corruption is poetically realized by Spenser’s consistent use of contradiction: he begins four of nine lines with transitions, each signifying a change in perspective. His description of her begins in praise of Duessa’s beauty and rank, moves to condemnation of her sins, returns to praise of her beauty, counters the assertion with her “condition vile and base” and then closes with Spenser’s argument that, despite—or perhaps because of—her crimes, she is pitied for her wretchedness.281 Building upon the compassion elicited from her appearance, Duessa mounts her defense to argue, as Michael Dixon asserts, “the indecorum of treating her as an

281 Spenser’s use of contrast here recalls Artegaill’s battle with Radigund and his subsequent defeat, enabled by his unreasonable pity of her plight:

But when as he discovered had her face,  
He saw his senses straunge astonishment,  
A miracle of nature’s goodly grace,  
In her faire visage voide of ornament,  
But bath’d in blood and sweat together ment; …

At sight thereof his cruel minded hart  
Empierced was with pittifull regard,  
That his sharpe sword he threw from his apart,  
Cursing his hand that had that visage mard. (v, 12.1 – 13.4)
object of punishment rather than ‘great ruth.’”

To achieve that goal, she calls allegorical witnesses that plead for mitigation and pardon under a dubious interpretation of the laws of equity rather than her innocence according to the laws of justice. She begins her case with Pittie, who “with full tender hart” argues for compassion from the judges before her, and augments her claims with those of Regard of womanhead, Daunger, who “threatens hidden dread,” Nobilitie of birth, “that bread / great ruth through her misfortunes tragicke stowre” and closes with the arguments of Griefe, who couples her pleas with tears for Duessa (45.2-9). Indeed, some of her arguments work: after hearing her case, Arthur is “inclined much unto her part” (46.3).

Spenser’s description of Arthur’s pity for Duessa is derived almost certainly from Seneca’s conception of misericordia in De Clementia, where he argues that, a sign of weak nature, unreasonable pity should be avoided by truly wise men. Momentarily falling from virtue into what Thomas Elyot calls “vain pity,” the Briton Prince is persuaded by the arguments of Pittie and Nobilitie of birth, who argue for the tempering of Duessa’s punishment. Characterized by his waning indignation, Arthur is moved “in tender hart” to pity her “dreadfull fate” (46.1,4), his anger at her sins abated by his “great ruth” for her wretched plight (46.6). Such unmanly and unreasonable pity weakens the natural “courage” of Arthur, and, as Seneca argues, is brought about by the plight of others, with no consideration of the cause or the righteousness of such suffering. Whereas mercy is governed by justice and equity, pity seeks to replace justice with a compassion that would

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283 Seneca De Clementia II, v, 1.


285 Seneca De Clementia II, v, 1.
pardon all offense regardless of what is fair and right. Arthur’s pity for Duessa must be countered and corrected by Zele, who represents in his scorn of transgression the opposite vice, cruelty.

The Prosecution:

In contrast to the affirmative defense articulated by Pittie and Nobilitie of birth, who make no attempt to mask their client’s guilt but instead appeal to the judges’ pity, Zele’s case against Duessa represents justice’s scorn of transgression. Informed by a prosecutor’s moral and legal authority, Zele works to disclose Duessa’s sins in order to procure a guilty verdict against her. Defined by Thomas Becan as “anger meddled with and mixed with love,” zeal embodies the power of godly scorn and righteous indignation to reform vice. Spenser seems to agree, introducing his Zele in complementary terms and aligning him with legitimate anger. Spenser justifies his occupation and praises him for his insight:

Then up arose a person of deepe reach  
And rare insight, hard matters to revele. (39.1-2)

Here, Spenser charges Zele with the hard task of bringing to light the sins he discovers, divulging wrongdoing to the world that the perpetrator might be discovered and corrected. His “deepe reach” and “rare insight” make him ideally suited for the job of revealing “hard matters” that would otherwise be concealed and lie beyond the scope of justice and reformation. By doing so, he exemplifies zeal. Spenser’s description of his allegorical prosecutor resembles Bishop Sandys’ encouragement to punish the sinful: “It is not sufficient

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287 Zele here appears like Angelo in Measure for Measure, who asserts that it is “What’s made open to justice, / That justice seizes. … what we do not see, / We tread upon, and never think of it” (II, i, 21-22, 25-26). William Shakespeare, Measure for Measure (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997).
to mislike sin,” he argues, “one must proceed against it, zealous in God’s cause.”

Sandys affirms the necessity of a thorough punishment of vice, arguing that “if inequity do abound for want of punishment, they which have authority … to repress sin, must answer for it.”

Despite his insistence that magistrates and governors are responsible for putting down vice, Sandys remains vague about what type of reproof will best serve the purpose of reformation. By simply asserting that one should “proceed” against vice, Sandys leaves unanswered the question which also plagues Spenser: what is the best method and manner of reproving vice?

Zele’s actions against Duessa attempt to puzzle out the same question. Proceeding against vice, Zele attempts to make the difficult easy and the opaque clear in order to reform Mercilla’s subjects. Because of Zele’s actions, Malfont’s crime, once veiled in slander and unknown to his judge, is now “plainely red,” exposing him and his crime to the infamy of Mercilla’s courtiers so that they may be instructed. Zele intends to do the same with Duessa, whose guilt the reader need not doubt.

As a prosecutor of crimes against the state, Zele is linked with justice’s scorn of transgression; his ability to “charm his tongue,” more specifically links Zele with satire. Spenser’s description of the prosecutor associates Zele with a great facility of language, constructing Zele as more than a good orator:

That well could charm his tongue, and time his speech
To all assayes; his name was called Zele. (39.3-4)

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288 Sandys, *Sermons*, 247-248, my emphasis. Earlier in his sermon, Bishop Sandys affirms the role of punishment and even violent correction: “the best that can be said of a state, a king, or a man is that they are eaten up by God’s zeal…for the rod in the hand of the pastor is as necessary as the staff, yea, perhaps more, because they are more whom fear doth constraine than whom love doth allure to be come virtuous” (247-248). See Edwin Sandys, *The Sermons of Edwin Sandys*, ed. Jo. Ayre for The Parker Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1841).

289 Ibid., 248.
On a narrative level, Spenser asserts that Zele knows what to say, when, and to whom, judging from the occasion the appropriateness of his speech and style. Interpreted more skeptically, however, Spenser’s insistence that Zele is able to “charm his tongue” to procure a verdict likens the speech of the legitimate prosecutor to that of the malevolent scorners wreaking satiric havoc in *The Faerie Queene*. Most overtly, Zele’s tongue reminds the reader of the discordant and railing tongues of villains throughout *The Faerie Queene*: while Malfont’s tongue figures prominently in this study, Occasion, Ate, Slaunter, and the Blatant Beast are all introduced through their destructive instruments of criminal articulation. These vice-spewing tongues, who figuratively attempt to destroy their targets by inflaming their passions or destroying their reputations with slander, have their historical root in earlier “incantational satire,” a mode of discourse among Celtic bards that sought to cause the real destruction of the poet’s target through satiric curses, rhythmic chanting and magical incantations, a mode Spenser evokes through his use of the verb “charm” to denote Zele’s oratorical mastery. The early Celtic satirist was said to chant bitter verses of disdain, repeating the name of his enemy in order cause his opponent bodily harm or, as Mary Claire

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290 Spenser’s descriptions of Detraction, Envy and the Blatant Beast emphasize their tongues as instruments of crime: Artegaill witnesses Envy’s snack of a serpent, which continues to whip around like an unrestrained tongue (V, xii, 30). Conversely, Detraction’s tongue is likened to a poisonous snake: “her cursed tongue full sharpe and short / Appeard like Aspis sting, that closely kilts, / Or cruelly does wound” (36.3-5). The Blatant Beast is the most dangerous of the three, with his tongues, that bark and bray at virtue (41.7). At the close of book six, the Beast’s tongues are emphasized again, this time totaling over a thousand and resembling those of multiple animals: “But most of them were tongues of mortall men / Which spake reproachfully, not caring where nor when” (VI, xii, 27).

291 A term coined by Fred Norris Robinson, “incantational satire” presents to its readers the Celtic root of modern day invective, which has lost its accompanying magical support. Such magical cursing was not the first satire to cause harm, however; supposedly, Lycambes and his daughter hung themselves after reading Archilochus’s disdainful poetry. The Celtic cursers and magical bloodletting was termed satire—and, likewise, the creators of such magical verse were termed satirists—from its earliest stages. For more information on the links between magic and satire, see Robinson’s article, “Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature,” *Studies in the History of Religions* (New York: McMillan Co., 1912), 95-130.
Randolph argues, “word-death.” Spenser links harmful tongues to magical incantation throughout *The Faerie Queene*, beginning as early as the first canto: Spenser introduces his readers to Archimago, who, in a manner very similar to that of Zele, could “file his tongue as smooth as glas” (I, i, 35.7). Like Zele’s ability to “charm his tong” in order to procure his judge’s disdain of Duessa, Archimago’s magical speech represents the destructive qualities of oratory and satire. Zele and Archimago present two sides of the same coin: they represent the very real harm of scorn, but while Zele represents the legitimate use of scorn in justice, castigating his target in order to enumerate her crimes and discover her guilt, Archimago is associated with the slander of perfect divine virtue. As Spenser proceeds in his description of Zele’s methods of achieving justice, however, the initial gulf between the righteous scorn of transgression and cruel slander begins to contract.

Initially, Zele’s prosecution of Duessa resembles that of his monarch: he distances himself from his use of scorn by casting Duessa as the author of her own punishment. In doing so, Zele attempts to efface his role through his emphasis upon Duessa’s obvious guilt and the righteousness of her punishment. As Spenser does in his arraignment of Malfont, Zele constructs Duessa as the sole actor of her punishment, presenting her crimes and sins as evidence of her wickedness. Zele is supported in this by Spenser, who credits providence with the discovery of Duessa’s “cursed plot” and insists upon the righteousness of the conspirator’s punishment. Spenser asserts that, in plotting against Mercilla, “th’actors won the meede meet for their crymes. / Such be the meede of all, that by such mene / …false
Duessa now untitled Queene, / Was brought to her sad doome” (42.5-6.7-8). Equating the means and the discovery of her plot through his alliteration and internal rhyme structure, Spenser demonstrates that Duessa has brought herself to her “sad doome.” Such tight and exclusive association between the criminal, the crime and the punishment attempts to efface Zele’s complicity in her prosecution and reiterate his scorn as a justified and morally appropriate response to her actions. Like Malfont, Duessa appears to damn herself rather than appearing to be damned by Zele’s scorn. Zele indicts her finally “for vyld treasons, and outrageous shame, / which she against the dred Mercilla oft did frame” (40.8-9), presenting damning evidence of Duessa’s own making. Zele employs the testimony of her accomplices Blandamour and Peridell to solidify her guilt, letting her own actions damn her in the eyes of the judges. To this evidence, Zele adds the testimonies of the weighty authorities Kingdomes care, Authority, Nations, Religion, and Justice. Calling upon her collaborators and the ethos of abstract virtues, Zele builds a compelling case for Duessa’s guilt. Indeed, Duessa makes little attempt to refute the charges presented; instead, she pleads powerfully for pity and compassion to mitigate the sentence before her. These appeals to unreasonable and unjust pity must be countered by Zele, who appeals to the opposite vice in order to enforce her guilt among the judges.

More overtly employing the language of satire, Zele embodies the scorn of both a prosecutor and a satirist: he scornfully arraigns Duessa for her sins in order to expose her to infamy, urge her prompt execution by the state, and to quell the pity of the judges who might be tempted to mitigate her sentence. While the incantational satire of early Celtic bards attempted to kill a man through words alone, Zele seeks to counter Duessa and the pity she engenders through his ability to “procure” her destruction (39.9). Although ultimately he
will argue for Duessa’s execution at the hands of the state, here, his violent upbraiding also works to counter another foe, the potential pity of the judges:

He gan that Ladie strongly to appele  
Of many haynous crymes, by her enured,  
And with sharpe reasons rang her such a pele,  
That those, whom she to pitie had allured,  
He now t’abhorre and loath her person had procured. (39.5-9)

The violence of Zele’s language reflects satire’s penchant for flailing its victim in order to demonstrate its authority and re-substantiate virtue. Zele’s corporal language juxtaposes the prosecutor’s rational and legal reasons for procuring a guilty verdict with the language of violent rebuke in order to quell the judges’ weakness: while rational, his reasons are “sharpe” and he uses them to ring “her such a pele.” Like Artegall and Talus’s punishment of Sanglier, Pollente, and Munera, Zele’s linguistic battery of Duessa is administered to amend the judges’ unreasonable pity of the villainess rather than to bring about the criminal’s reformation. He berates Duessa to instruct the knights in the dangers of indulging their pity of transgression, encouraging them to view Duessa skeptically, to “abhorre and loath her person.” To emphasize this goal, Spenser’s description of her arraignment positions Duessa as an instrument of Zele rather than the ultimate goal of justice: although she is the one on trial, Duessa is made another agent by which he will instruct the foreign knights in the ways of justice. Like his description of Malfont, Spenser continually marginalizes Duessa and her crimes, subordinating the specifics of her behavior and prosecution in order to privilege the education of Arthur and Artegall:

Strongly did Zele her haynous fact enforce,  
And many other crimes of foul defame  
Against her brought, to banish all remorse,  
And aggravate the horror of her blame. (43.1-4)
Zele seeks not to reform Duessa, but to convert the judges’ compassion for her into a more actionable hatred and loathing of her sins. He “strongly” berates her for her vices, reminding her audience of her “crimes of foul defame” in order to remove their pity for the vile transgressor and to prevent their pardon of her sins.

Enumerating her sins in order to defame her, Zele’s arguments here align the prosecution with satire’s punitive employment of infamy. Resembling Mercilla’s treatment of Malfont, Zele will re-substantiate his authority by transforming Duessa from an emblem of criminality into a vehicle upon which he may exert his scorn. Unlike Mercilla, however, Zele is prone to cruelty: he aggravates “the horror of her blame” to argue for the ultimate fairness and rectitude of rigorous justice over subjective and fraudulent pity. To achieve his goal of banishing the judges’ remorse of her, Zele scornfully acts upon Duessa, subjecting her to the wrath of the law and his own rigorous interpretation of it. When his appeals to authority, her certain guilt, and the dangers of pity prove unable to counter Pittie’s emotional argument, Zele changes tactics.

To instruct Arthur to shun unreasonable pity for Duessa, Zele adds cruelty to his “earnest fervour,” transforming his scornful speech of Duessa to “despight,” erasing the moral distance between himself and the criminal railers who people The Faerie Queene.

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294 Seneca commands the merciful monarch to avoid dishonest means of controlling his subjects: *agat princeps curam non tantum salutis, sed etiam honestae cicatrice* [The aim of the prince should be not merely to restore the health, but also to leave no shameful scar] (*De Clementia*, I, xvii.2).

295 In this, he resembles more Angelo in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*. Angelo counters Isabella’s encouragement to “show some pity” for her brother with the absolute statement, “I show it most of all when I show justice; / For then I pity those I do not know, / Which a dismiss’d offence would after gall, / And do him right that, answering one foul wrong. Lives not to act another. Be satisfied; / Your brother dies tomorrow.” In response, Isabella accuses Angelo of tyranny (II, ii, 100-110).

296 As A. C. Hamilton notes, Spenser allegorizes “Despight” eight times in *The Faerie Queene*. He consistently employs the word in a pejorative sense: in book one, “Bitter despight” follows Wrath in the House of Pride (I, iv, 35.4); in book two, “Despight” is mother to Pyrochles and Cymochles (II, iv, 41.6); later in book two, “rancorous Despight” sits next to “Cruel Revenge,” guarding Pluto’s cave (II, vii, 22.2); in book three,
Faced with Arthur’s “great ruth,” Zele must “augment” his rebuke of Duessa to convince the Prince of the heinousness of her crimes and the justness of her strict punishment (46.8-9). By doing so, Zele embodies Seneca’s definition of cruelty: *Crudelitas, quae nihil aliud est quam atrocitas animi in exigendis poenis*. The cruel, Seneca argues, are *qui puniendi causam habent, modum non habent.* However much Seneca would rebuke him, Zele exhibits harshness that works. He is able to persuade Arthur to scorn Duessa by calling his second set of witnesses against her. Zele’s relentless and ruthless pursuit of justice highlights the problem of administering justice in the fallen world to fallen subjects: while godly anger must remain untarnished by personal vengeance, concerned instead with the public moral good, the administration of punishment is unavoidably personal. On one hand, godly anger is useful to justice, checking the spread of sin; on the other hand, anger, however godly, tarnishes justice’s impartiality. Christianity charges justice to punish the sin and not the sinner, placing Christian judges in a quandary as to how best to curb the vice of a kingdom: through Christian mercy, which would forgive crime against the state, or through cruelty, which would punish criminals.

To correct Arthur’s unreasonable sympathy, Zele examines Duessa with cruelty. Beginning with the discord-loving Ate and culminating in the sinful Murder, Sedition, "despight," accompanied by “Griefe,” “gealosie” and “scorn,” chases Malbecco (III, x, 55.5); later in book three, “Despight” and “Cruelty” imprison Amoret, leading her in the Masque of Cupid (III, xii, 19.2-3); in book four, “despight, / With many more lay in ambushment” behind Daunger, ready to pounce on those without foresight (IV, x, 20.6-7); in book six, “Despetto” (translated as ‘open malice’), “Decetto” and “Defetto” attack Timeas with the Blatant Beast (VI, v, 13); and later, in the court of Cupid, “Despight” gives evidence against Mirabella along with “Infamie” (VI, vii, 34.7).

297 “Cruelty, is nothing else than harshness of mind in exacting punishment.” Seneca, *De Clementia* II, iv. 1.

298 The cruel, according to Seneca, “are those who have a reason for punishing, but do not have moderation in it.” Seneca, *De Clementia* II, iv. 1. 3. A similar definition seems in play when Escalus, soliloquizes regarding Angelo’s strict legal interpretation: “Well, heaven forgive him; and forgive us all. / Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall” (II, i, 37-38).

299 Lactantius, *The Ire of God* (qtd. in Hester, 10).
Incontinence of lyfe, Adulterie and Impietie, Zele’s witness list embodies the vices of the private and the public spheres. Like Zele’s previous use of scornful speech, this tactic is successful because it implies, on a superficial level, that Duessa is responsible for her current situation, that “her own actions are witness against her, that she brings on her indictment as a result of her own crimes.”

Having conjured the spirit from hell, Duessa opens herself to be condemned by Ate. On another level, however, Zele’s choice of witnesses compromises his own credibility: in his fervor to prove “Duessa’s guilt, Zele paradoxically aligns himself with the very crimes he seeks to condemn.” Zele’s calling of Ate, as well as the allegorical vices which come to the stand after her, complicates any reading of Duessa and Zele as mere criminal and prosecutor: Spenser deliberately blurs the lines between these two poles to order to challenge Zele’s use of cruel scorn in his attempt to procure his verdict.

Derived from Homer’s goddess of discord, Ate is directly associated with duplicity and falsehood, her forked tongue making her a particularly unreliable witness for the prosecution. The hell-born Ate embodies the crimes of slander and scornful speech: she sews the “seedes of evill wordes and factious deeds,” which, when ripe, grow into “Tumultuous trouble and contentious iarre” (IV, i, 25.5,8). In keeping with her demonic character, Ate slanders Duessa not in the interests of justice, but in order to cause further discord:

She, glad of spoyle and ruinous decay,
Did her appeach, and to her more disgrace,
The plot of all her practice did display. (47.5-7)

Ate does not serve the aims of justice, but rather, turns the trial of Duessa into a circus for her discord. Darryl Gless associates Ate convincingly with duplicity and anarchism, seeing

300 Kaplan, The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England, 41
301 Ibid.
her orthodox turn here as disingenuous and troubling for the prosecution. While their motives still differ markedly—Zele is cruel in order to preserve the state from the ruin that would befall it should treason go unanswered while Ate merely enjoys the discord of the moment—Spenser suggests that the tactics of Zele and Ate are the same. Both are described as displaying the crimes of Duessa in order to disgrace her, accusing her in order to subject her to infamy. In order to procure a guilty verdict against Duessa, Zele, an agent of ideal justice, paradoxically aligns himself with an agent of injustice.

In addition to demonstrating Zele’s unmitigated scorn of Duessa, Spenser’s inclusion of Ate’s testimony at her trial also speaks specifically to Zele’s fervent argument against pity. The reader will recall that not only is Ate associated with slander and untruth, making her a dubious choice to put on the stand, she is also associated with a sort of willful theological despair, because she is exempt from the mercy of the Father:

… even th’Almightie selfe she did maligne,  
Because to man so mercifull he was,  
And unto all his creatures so benigne,  
Sith she her selfe was of his grace indigne. (IV, i, 30.2-5)

In his attempt to rebuke Arthur’s pity and to indict Duessa on the charge of treason, Zele calls upon the slanderer of divine mercy. Jealous of the mercy afforded to man, Ate maligns God and his works to exact her retribution. Spenser’s use of “indigne” characterizes Ate as righteously undeserving of divine grace and mercy, having committed crimes against God and his creation, but also resembles “indict,” reinforcing her status as a criminal. Herself undeserving of grace and mercy, Ate is put in the service of scorn and cruelty. Zele produces Ate, who is on the errand of the devil rather than of God, and demeans the proceedings with her presence.

Zele produces more witnesses to corroborate Ate’s testimony: the allegorical vices he calls work to augment Duessa’s guilt, charging her with a variety of offenses, from the public crimes of murder and sedition to the private vices of inconstancy, adultery and impiety. While the reader has no reason to doubt Duessa’s guilt, having been witness to her crimes and vices throughout the epic, Zele’s use of these vices’ testimonies calls into question his prosecutory ethos. More than mere prosecutorial overkill, Zele’s tactics border on the slanderous and decidedly damage his ethical credibility as an agent of the state. Spenser appears to highlight their unfitness as witnesses, introducing each through the sin they embody, the same which they accuse Duessa of committing: most hypocritically, “Abhorred Murder,” who still carries her bloody knife, condemns Duessa as a murderess (48.2) and “lewd Impeitie” accuses her “sore” of the same (48.9). The witnesses called before the bar reinforce the violence of Zele’s speech, enlarging his attack against Duessa, transforming it from a prosecution of treason to an indiscriminate verbal assault. Enlarging the charges and allegations against her to include all the public and private sins handled in *The Faerie Queene*, Zele wins his case by calling her whole character into question rather than arguing for her culpability of a specific crime.  

Through these tactics, Zele persuades Arthur to abandon his unreasonable pity of Duessa, converting his ruth into scorn of her crimes. Convinced by Ate and the personified vices before him, Arthur repents his former state:

> All which when as the Prince had heard and seene,  
> His former fancies ruth he gan repent,  
> And from her partie eftsoones was drawne cleene. (49.1-3)

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303 Gless asserts that his is able to win his case through his “piling-up of fictions” and “mal-speaking” (*Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*, 202).
Spenser asserts Arthur’s conversion from pity as a direct result of the testimony of Impietie, transitioning from her “sore” condemnation of Duessa to Arthur’s repentance and subsequent scorn of Duessa. Unlike his ineffectual pity, Arthur’s scorn is active, enabling him to deem Duessa guilty. In contrast to Arthur’s former pity, Artegall is described as having never faltered in his scorn of Duessa and her crime, having learned the potential danger of pity from his confrontation and imprisonment by Radigund. Spenser’s language reflects the Knight of Justice’s affinity with the prosecution. He is characterized “with constant firme intent / For zeale of Justice was against her bent” (49.3-4). Textually aligned with Zele, Artegall is “constant” and “firme” in his scorn of Duessa, and does not need to be corrected by the prosecutor. Spenser insists, however, that while the two knights have learned scorn, they have not yet learned justice.

The Verdict:

Although scorn wins the day, causing Mercilla to rule that Duessa must die for her crimes, Spenser admits qualification. Unlike the prosecutor who employs cruelty to procure his verdict, Mercilla judges with as much mildness as circumstances allow. Spenser describes his ideal judge in terms of not only her verdict but her emotions:

But she, whose Princely breast was touched nere
With piteous ruth of her so wretched plight,
Though plaine she saw by all, that she did heare,
That she of death was guiltie found by right,
Yet would not let just vengeance on her light:
But rather let in stead thereof to fall
Few pearling drops from her faire lampes of light;
The which she covering with her purple pall
Would have the passion hid, and up arose withall. (50)
Spenser poignantly separates Mercilla from the scorn and cruelty of Zele and the two visiting knights, with his introductory phrase “But she.” By textually contrasting their “zeale for Justice” with her mildness and reluctant execution of Duessa, Spenser sets her apart as the proper measure of pity and scorn. In contrast to Arthur and Artegall, Mercilla guards against the excesses of pity and scorn, confining both to her person rather than her office. This portrait of Mercilla corrects Arthur’s uncontrolled “great ruth” that would pardon a traitor and conspirator against the crown, with the private and reasonable “piteous ruth” that laments Duessa’s “wretched plight” but refuses to be influenced unduly by pity. By doing so, Mercilla embodies Seneca’s distinction between pity and mercy: *Misericordia non causam, sed fortunam spectat; clementia rationi accedit.*\(^304\) Likewise, she refrains from seeking vengeance on Duessa for her personal attack—while Spenser judges that such vengeance would be “just,” Mercilla guards against its influence regarding Duessa’s punishment.\(^305\) Spenser insists on the difference of the two emotions, however. Although pity is lauded as virtuous as long as it is restrained from action, vengeance is only virtuous when it is not indulged. Mercilla must “preserve inviolated right” and not depart “from the doome of right,” but she cannot relish her victory over her scorners (x, 2.3,7). She must mourn Duessa’s fall, not celebrate her demise. Finally, as if eager to close the proceedings, she rises, and the canto closes abruptly.

In the end, Spenser constructs Mercilla’s mercy as a private virtue of a Christian monarch: although he judges Mercilla’s feelings of mercy to be essential for her own salvation, mercy cannot be utilized in the justice of the state. As Mercilla does not let her

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\(^{304}\) “Pity regards the plight, not the cause of it; mercy is combined with reason.” Seneca, *De Clementia*, II, v.1

\(^{305}\) Again, this proceeds according to Seneca’s commandment that *difficilium est enim moderari, ubi dolori debetur ultio, quam ubi exemplo.* [Moderation is more difficult when vengeance serves the end of anger rather than of discipline.] Seneca, *De Clementia*, I, xxi.2.
pity or scorn of Duessa influence her ruling against her, instead basing her judgment on “right” and reason, she personifies Justice. As she admits the place of pity privately, hiding her passion behind her robe of state, she embodies Mercy, but one accommodated to the needs of earthly justice. Scorn and mercy are both confirmed as essential but dangerous instruments of justice, applicable in due measure and with pure intent.

The allegorical purpose of Mercilla’s decision to execute Duessa has never been compellingly argued, with modern critics attempting to make sense of the contradiction of her status as embodied mercy and her scornful verdict by a variety of arguments. One claims that Spenser’s allegory demonstrates the author’s commitment to early modern political theory, another suggests that he argues the limits of equity in justice; and still another argues her allegorical purity despite her verdict by engaging in scholastic hair-splitting. In contrast to these readings, I would argue that her denunciation and eventual execution of Duessa reinforce Spenser’s construction of Mercilla as an emblem of active justice. Faced with the fallen and transgressive nature of Duessa, she must portion out the proper degree of mercy afforded to the unrepentant villainess, balancing mercy, which would forgive the crimes committed against her, with scorn, which would admonish her and warn others against attempting a similar plot. Mercilla administers an accommodated justice to her transgressive subjects. Unable to embody perfect divine mercy amid the moral decay of the

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306 Zurcher has argued that Spenser’s allegorical trial reflects the political and legal philosophy of Christopher St. German, with Mercilla symbolizing the movement from simple mercy to more complex equity in her verdict against Duessa.


308 In one of the least convincing arguments of an otherwise thorough study of the iconography of book five, Icons of Justice, Aptekar positions Artegall as the executor of Duessa, preserving Mercilla’s merciful sentence.
legend of justice, Mercilla dispenses tempered scorn and private pity in order to fashion her courtiers into gentlemen.

By dispensing appropriate justice to Duessa, Mercilla builds upon and revises Una’s merciful arraignment of the villainess earlier in the epic. While in book one she is allowed to live because to sentence her to death would resemble immoral scorn and revenge, thereby hindering Redcrosse Knight’s salvation, Mercilla condemns Duessa to death, forced to act by “strong constraint” (x, 4.6). Mercilla administers her justice reluctantly, exempt from sinful despight and vengeance. Her scorn of Duessa is tempered by her tears and her “more than needfull naturall remorse” (x, 4.8). Such accommodated justice relegates mercy to a private virtue, deeming it unable to minister to the needs of the Iron Age. In the end of canto nine, Spenser has affirmed Justice as a secular and public virtue, separating its aims of social order and peace from Christianity’s focus upon salvation.

As if anxious about the allegory he has just presented, Spenser associates Mercilla with both mercy and justice in his introduction to canto X, in a passage often cited as Spenser’s self-conscious attempt to affirm Mercilla’s reputation as an emblem of heavenly Christian mercy and to make orthodox her uncomfortable execution of Duessa. Rather than erase the contradictions of the previous canto, my reading embraces Spenser’s ambiguity to demonstrate the reluctant necessity of scorn in the fallen world:

Much more it praysed was of those two knights;  
The noble Prince and righteous Artegall,  
When they had seene and heard her doome a rights  
Against Duessa, damned by them all;  
But by her tempred without griefe of gall,  
Till strong constraint did her thereto enforce.  (X, 4.1-6)

Faced with the urgency of the threat and the necessity of action, Mercilla reluctantly condemns Duessa “without griefe of gall,” demonstrating that mercy, while an admirable
Christian virtue may not be the best way to run a kingdom. By executing Duessa’s punishment free from the influence of pity or vengeance, Mercilla personifies Justice, rather than mercy, modeling the public virtue for “noble” Arthur, who was blinded by pity, and for “righteous” Artegaill, who was tainted by his zeal for punishment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused upon Spenser’s complex and contradictory interrogation of justice as a virtuous mean between pity and scorn. While Spenser portrays Mercilla as a praise-worthy administrator of her kingdom, capable of refining both pity and scorn into useful tools of justice, his portrait of the queen embraces the ambivalence inherent in such alchemy. In the next chapter, I will turn to a poet who likewise struggles to puzzle out the precise role of the Christian satirist in society, engaging both what is useful and corrupting about satire. In his satiric verse, John Donne highlights the tension between the satirist’s attraction to and repulsion from the dens of vice he would so vehemently denounce. Through his satiric literature, Donne repeatedly constructs the satirist’s attempts to reconcile the goals of the active life with those of the contemplative life. Unlike Mercilla, who affirms the utility of scorn and satire in her administration of justice, Donne’s speaker is much more pessimistic about the possibility of reforming the corruptions of society, always on the verge of retreat from the sinful infection that threatens his soul.
CHAPTER FOUR

“Shall I leave all this constant company / And follow headlong, wild uncertain thee?”

Images of Participation and Retirement in Donne’s *Satires*

*Per Rachel ho servito e non per Lae* 309

Underwriting M. Thomas Hester’s otherwise exemplary study of John Donne’s *Satires* is the argument that the five poems fulfill a unified, five-act structure that asserts the satirist’s moral and ethical education. Narrating the satirist’s progression from ignorance to sophistication through his analysis of the five poems, Hester claims that Donne creates a “dramatic portrait” of the satirist’s “journey from innocence (I) to darkness and despair (II), and finally to self-knowledge (III), suffering and God-given knowledge (IV), and obedience (V).” 310 For Hester, the sequence culminates in Satire V, in which the speaker “dramatizes the active completion of his education in the ethos of prophetic zeal,” signifying “the triumph of the satirist.” 311 Hester’s claim that Donne’s *Satires* should be interpreted as a group presenting a coherent and comprehensive argument for the application of satire to society should be met with caution, however. Collectively, the satires do not execute a cumulative or narrative argument for the satirist’s active use of his art; instead, they meditate upon the benefits and liabilities of the satirist’s participation in the corrupt society he seeks to reform.


311 Ibid.
Taken together, the satires do not narrate the speaker’s neat progression from ignorance to sophistication, nor do they consistently argue for the satirist’s engagement in early modern English society; rather, Donne posits that the social and moral consequences of satire are ever-changing and unstable. The speakers of Donne’s satires—and I would apply the same caution to a reading that relies upon a singular speaker that I apply to an interpretation that presents the *Satires* as a unified argument—present a disordered world threatening to corrupt the satirist, who struggles to maintain his moral authority in the face of obvious sinfulness. Manifesting the satirist’s anxiety, the poems present their speakers torn between their call to reform society through their active engagement and participation in its corruptions, and their desire to ensure their own salvation by retreating from such sinful temptations. In his satires, Donne does not wholly endorse either the active life of statesmanship or the contemplative life of knowledge and solitude, choosing to explode such neat binaries. Each poem strains towards a resolution that is always out of the reach of the speaker, presenting the struggle for balance and proportion as the ultimate goal of satire. Returning to this problem again and again, Donne re-envisions and re-interrogates the conflicted purpose of satire in each of his works. Satires I (“Away thou fondling motley humorist”), II (“Sir: though (I thank God for it) I do hate”), IV (“Well: I may now receive, and die”) and V (“Thou shalt not laugh in this leafe, Muse”) present their speakers as participating at some level in the society that would corrupt them, while Satire III (“Kinde pitty chokes my spleene”) presents its speaker’s retirement from the world. Yet all Donne’s satires express anxiety with the speaker’s choice.

Before I discuss further the implications of Donne’s participation in and disengagement from society, I would like to unpack the particulars of Donne’s use of the
term as it relates to his satiric verse and his audience. Donne’s conception of community is not monolithic. Rather, his portrayal of society fluctuates greatly in his poetry: on one extreme, Donne’s conception of “society” seems to be limitless, implying a wide-ranging and inclusive view of all of mankind; on the other extreme, he appears to particularize his audience to a singular wise reader. Between all and one, however, Donne constructs a variety of different societies and audiences in his Satires: these poems attempt to correct the corruptions of the City, as in Satires I and II, of the Inns, as in Satire V and the beginning of Satire III, and of the Court, as in Satire III and IV. In the satires, the communities in which Donne’s speakers participate, or refuse to participate, are not always the same.

Likewise, it is inaccurate to refer to Donne’s coterie audience as monolithic or immutable. With the exception of his Anniversaries, his elegy of Prince Henry, and a few lyrics, Donne refused to print his poetry, choosing instead to circulate his verse in manuscript among a small but fluid coterie of intimate acquaintances. “Donne’s restriction of his contemporary readership was a deliberate act,” Arthur Marotti asserts, designed to appeal to “a succession of social environments in which he functioned between his arrival in London in the early 1590s and his ordination in 1615.” According to Marotti, the Satires were confined to the coterie and withheld from public view; in support of his claim to their exclusive readership, Marotti cites a note penned by Francis Davison, the editor of the miscellany A Poetical Rhapsody (1602), who included the poet’s “Satires, Elegies, Epigrams, etc” under the heading “Manuscripts to get.” Despite Marotti’s implication that Donne

312 Marotti, John Donne, Coterie Poet, xi.
313 Ibid. He claims that Davison never gained access to Donne’s texts: “It was easier for him to obtain privately circulated poems of the Court than to lay his hands on Donne’s verse. Generally, only close friends, patrons, and patronesses had limited access to the poetry Donne wrote” (xi).
enjoyed a relatively stable poetic circle, it seems possible, if not likely, that membership in Donne’s coterie, like those of other authors, may have been quite fluid. According to Harold Love, “a reader sympathetic enough to the aims of the group to be interested in the texts that were circulating within it would probably not find it difficult to be accepted in the network.” Indeed, a list of members in Donne’s coterie remains elusive: we can only surmise from his verse letters and biography which of his contemporaries were able to read his verse. This situation is doubly true of Donne’s early verse, written during and immediately after his attendance at Lincolns’ Inn. There, according to Marotti, Donne enjoyed a “receptive audience of peers” who shared in Donne’s value system, social ambitions, and frustrations. Donne’s poetry does more than affirm his audience’s conceptions and values, however. His poetry demonstrates Donne’s fundamental anxiety about his readership. Donne’s verse, particularly his potentially volatile satiric poetry, reflects the author’s anxiety regarding the transmission of his texts and his readership. He makes numerous overtures to his coterie to restrict the circulation of his poetry, anxious that his verse be prevented from a wider, more diffuse, readership. 

314 Donne’s work has been found in over forty collections and over a hundred miscellanies, attesting to the availability of his work to his contemporaries, though it is surmised that Donne’s verse did not become more accessible until many years later. This number comes from Alan MacColl’s 1972 study of Donne’s manuscript poetry; it has since been expanded. Alan MacColl, “The Circulation of Donne’s poems in manuscript,” in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A. J. Smith (London, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1972), 29.


316 Marotti asserts, “We know, from manuscript evidence and from the poet’s own letters, that copies of single poems or groups of poems reached the hands of such friends as Sir Henry Goodyer, Rowland Woodward, … Sir Henry Wotton, George Garrard, and Sir Robert Ker…Christopher Brooke, Sir Edward Herbert, Magdalene Herbert, Sir Robert Drury, the Countess of Bedford, the Earl of Dorset, among others” (x). Marotti later details these others: Samuel Brooke, Thomas Woodward, Beaupre Bell, Sir William Cornwallis, Ben Jonson, Sir Lionel Cranfield, Joseph Hall, Sir Thomas Roe, and Sir James Hay.


318 Donne makes numerous overtures to his coterie to restrict the circulation of his poetry: in a letter to his friend Robert Ker, to whom he sent a manuscript of *Biathanatos* and some of his poetry, he writes: “it is a Book
satires enjoyed a larger circulation than some of his other poetry; for example, his *Songs and Sonnets*. But, how intimate and permeable his coterie actually was remains outside our ken. The manuscript evidence remains an inconclusive guide.

The cloudy manuscript history of Donne’s satires leaves doubt that they were ever intended to be read as a unified dramatic portrait detailing the satirist’s progress from ignorance to triumph. Despite Donne’s staunch protection of his verse, no authorial manuscript of his *Satires* survives, leaving the precise form and sequence of the poems a mystery. The Group I manuscripts, commonly employed by editors of Donne’s works as the authoritative manuscripts for much of Donne’s other poetry, do not offer a comprehensive reading of the satires: W. Milgate posits that the elusive original manuscript “X,” from which H₄₉, D, SP, Lec, and C₅₇ manuscripts derive, omitted Donne’s fifth satire (“Thou shalt not laugh in this leaf, Muse”). Moreover, the Group II manuscripts, made up of TCC, TCD, N, A₂₃ and L₇₄, offer no conclusive sequence of the satires: TCC and its copy, A₁₈, omit all of the satires; TCD and its copy, N, order the satires as I, III, IV, V, Satire 6 (“Sleep, next Society”), II, while A₂₃ contains only a partial copy of Satire IV but all of Satire V; finally, L₇₄, a derivative text of their now lost common ancestor, “Y,” positions the satires in yet another order: III, IV, V, II, The Bracelet, Satire 6 (Sleep, now Society), and I. Lastly, the

written by Jack Donne, and not by D. Donne: Reserve it for me, if I live, and if I die, I only forbid it the Presse, and the Fire: publish it not, but yet, burn it not” (22). Likewise, when he thought he might have to publish his poetry in order to pay his debts, he envisions a very limited printing of only presentation copies: “I mean to do this forthwith; not for much publique view, but at mine owne cost” (196). See *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), ed. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977).


A later Jacobean poem sometimes erroneously attributed to Donne.
Group III manuscripts, which Milgate argues do not constitute a distinct grouping with a common ancestor but a collection of various, often corrupted manuscripts and miscellanies, contain twenty different manuscripts. Of those, W (the Westmoreland MS), A_{25}, Q and D_{16} are considered the most authoritative, but the evidence is inconclusive. These four alone are uncorrupted and position the satires in what is now considered their accepted order: I, II, III, IV, and V. The profound variations between manuscript groups, as well as the flexibility afforded by Donne’s commitment to scribal publication, demonstrate the interpretive fluidity of Donne’s Satires: unified only by their form, the collective satires do not present Donne’s satiric mission statement, but rather offer their reader a series of disparate, de-centered meditations on the role of the satirist in society.

Hester’s reading of Satire V as the conclusion of Donne’s satiric duty implies Donne’s preference for the active life of public and civic duty to the commonwealth, a preference that, in my opinion, the poems do not support. Rather than present the active life of social engagement as the culmination of experience, the poems insist upon the satirist’s perpetual need to balance such charitable engagement against the godly contemplation of

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321 The Westmoreland manuscript and the HN manuscript are reported to derive from an authorial original, circulating around 1598. The W MSS must not be taken as authorial itself, however. As Marotti asserts, “there is little indication about original groupings of poems, since Woodward was arranging poems and prose in the collection by genre and, like some other copyists, transcribing texts that were scattered among loose sheets and sets of poems” (15). While the W manuscript (copied by Donne’s friend and correspondent Rowland Woodward) remains the most authoritative, containing all 5 satires in what is thought to be standard order, the HN manuscript contains only Satires IV and II, copied out by a scribe reportedly in the employ of William Drummond of Hawthornden. A note is attached to Satire IV, penned in a different hand: “This Satyre (though it heere have the first place because no more was intendt to this booke) was indeed the Authors fourth in number & order; he having wretten five in all to which this caution will sufficientlie direct in the rest” (Quoted in W. Milgate, xlvi). Occasionally known to get his facts wrong, Drummond’s note is not an authoritative source, though it does posit that an authorial order might have existed.

322 While Marotti treats the satires as biography, dismissing the texts of the satires as mere reflections of Donne’s days in Lincoln’s Inn and immediately following, charting his disillusionment with his social advancement through the bitterness of the satires, I intend to argue that his coterie environment afforded Donne a sense of balance to his work, fulfilling his charitable duty as a Christian poet while at the same time allowing him to limit his audience to a group of like-minded, godly men and women. See Arthur F. Marotti, ”Donne as an Inns-of-Court Author” (25-43) and “Donne as a Young Man of Fashion, Gentleman-Volunteer and Courtly Servant” (116-133).
retirement. A de-centered reading of the *Satires* will enable the reader to unpack more completely the conflict Donne presents between these two lifestyles, evaluating each satire as a singular poetic statement and the group as evidence of Donne’s anxious reiteration and re-thinking of the benefits and liabilities of each choice. Indeed, Donne does not stop engaging the profits and limits of society and privacy once he has completed his satiric verse: the same concerns inform his *Songs and Sonnets*, where it is reformulated as the lovers’ retirement from the prying eyes of the public; his *Anniversaries*, where he struggles to assert the correspondences of the world and man while at the same time charting its decay and corruption; and his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, where he affirms his connection to society (“ask not for whom the bell tolls”) while also ruminating upon his own isolation and singularity.323

This chapter argues for a critical re-evaluation of Donne’s *Satires*. Until recently, the *Satires* have been devalued in favor of Donne’s more well-known *Songs and Sonnets* and divine poetry, having suffered from critical neglect largely because of their ambiguous and conflicted notions regarding the goal of satire. Donne’s satiric verse attempts to puzzle out complex notions of community and privacy in early modern English society, ideas that intersect with and diverge from our assumptions about Donne’s manuscript coterie, about the conceptions of the active and contemplative life, and about the role of charity in admonition. In order to better engage these, as well as other questions posed by his *Satires*, I intend to sketch briefly the satirist’s anxious re-engagement with both the active and contemplative lives in Satires II, III, and V, but concentrate upon Satires I and IV, the two poems that

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323 Another case may be made for Donne’s Sermons in contrast to his verse—the one actively endeavors to reform his flock’s sins, while his *Holy Sonnets* are marked by an almost obsessive inwardness. It is worth pausing here to assert that my point is not to position Donne’s oeuvre into neat categories of “public” and “private,” but just the opposite. Donne’s works return time and again to the tension between these categories, never resolving the contradiction between the two.
overtly dramatize the satirist’s struggle to reconcile the charity of social and civic engagement with the godliness of retirement and separation.

**Satires II, III, and V**

None of Donne’s satires presents a wholesale endorsement of either the active or contemplative life. Rather, they dramatize the profit and liability of either choice, positioning the two lifestyles as best executed in moderation, fulfilling the Christian duties of both Lea and Rachel.\(^{324}\) While in Satire III, he expresses the desire to retreat inward to ensure his own salvation, he cannot wholly abandon his public duty as a Christian satirist. Conversely, in his most engaged and topical satires, namely Satires II and V, Donne’s exasperated speaker always seems on the verge of giving his satire up in favor of retirement.\(^{325}\)

Donne’s Satire III presents a speaker withdrawn from the corruptions of the world, meditating upon his satiric task as it relates to his own salvation and to the wretched and contentious state of religion in England. Throughout the poem, Donne’s speaker adopts a meditative stance, turning inward to examine his own “soules devotion” to his “Mistresse faire Religion” (III, 6,5).\(^{326}\) In contrast to the narrative situations posed in his other two satires, Donne does not construct Satire III as a dramatic narrative, nor does he provide his

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\(^{324}\) Marotti attributes the ambivalence of Donne’s speakers to the author’s adoption of a type of stance characterized by its “disengagement from the courtly world, a stance of (sometimes openly cynical) criticism of its rules, of its styles, and of its (deliberately exaggerated) corruptions” typical of the Inns of Court satirists (33).

\(^{325}\) In Hester’s argument, Satires III and V represent the extremes of meditation and activity, respectively. It is fitting therefore to begin with them.

Donne’s omission of these narrative strategies emphasizes the speaker’s detachment from the world and his retreat inward: attempting to work out his own salvation, Donne’s speaker satirizes the world’s Christian sectarianism in order to “Seeke true religion” (III, 43). Until he is able to puzzle out which church is she, Donne’s speaker advocates a mitigated skepticism, ironically advancing retired inaction as the only possible virtuous action. He encourages himself to “doubt wisely; in a strange way / To stand inquiring right, is not to stray… On a huge hill / Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe” (III, 77-81).

Despite its construction as a meditative satire and its emphasis upon the speaker’s quest for salvation, Satire III cannot wholly eschew the concerns of the world. Indeed, the speaker does not assert that a complete disavowal of earthly concerns would be preferable. Donne constructs his speaker as an everyman figure, his quest for Truth universally applicable to his readers. Moreover, his conceptions of religion are almost exclusively communal, concerned with the earthly manifestation of religion as much as with the heavenly: while the speaker internalizes his quest for Truth, he also envisions the world’s Christian denominations as social and political constructions of men. Donne ends his poem affirming the problematic nature of community. He concludes Satire III with the observation that “As streames are, Power is” (III, 103), advising his readers that, while they will never be separated wholly from the world, they should avoid being shaken about by temporal and earthly concerns that threaten to destroy them:

\[ \text{… those blest flowers that dwell} \]

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327 I am grateful for Hester’s admirable study of Satire III, and, for the most part, I find his analysis of the poem utterly convincing. My only complaint is that he insists on reading it as a reaction to Satires I and II: “By the end of Satyre II, we have a satirist who has anatomized dramatically his own foolishness (I) and his own ineffectiveness (II)—far from the Lucilius ardens of the classical satiric stance. What, then, is he to do? That is the subject of Satyre III” (54).
At the streames rough head, thrive and do well,
But having left their roots, and themselves given
To the streames tyrannous rage, alas, are driven
Through mills, and rockes, and woods,’and at last, almost
Consum’d in going, in the sea are lost:
So perish Soules, which more chuse mens unjust
Power from God claym’d, then God himselfe to trust. (III, 103-110)

With this final image, Donne both confirms and contradicts the poem’s meditative stance. On one hand, the image offers retirement as a welcome protection against the stream’s “tyrannous rage,” portraying the calm head of godly contemplation as a preferable alternative to the “mills, and rockes, and woods” of the world. On the other hand, the image stresses the political entanglements of faith with worldly power. Through his last image, Donne enlarges the audience of his satire to include the powerful political and religious figures of England, rebuking them for their own distance from godliness as well as their displays of favoritism and nepotism in advancing their closest friends and followers. Signaling that neither reading is sufficient, Donne allows both to coexist in his poem, leaving unanswered the question of whether the active life or contemplative life is more godly.

In Satire V, Donne turns again to this metaphor of the river in a satire concerned not overtly with faith, but with the legal corruption of the English courts and Inns. In this satire, Donne’s speaker most resembles Donne himself: he adopts an autobiographical persona “authorized” by Thomas Egerton to “know and weed out” the sin of the judicial system (V, 34). Throughout the satire, Donne’s speaker portrays himself as a political insider “who has the means, the opportunity, and the place to activate reform.”328 Despite his “insider” status, the speaker expresses his misgivings about his ability to transform such corruption into virtue: referring to Castiglione and his Book of the Courtier, he sarcastically quips, “hee being understood / May make good Courtiers, but who Courtiers good?” (V, 3-4). Indeed,

328 Hester, 98.
the speaker posits that the corruption of the system is self-consuming and self-destructive: “man is a world; in which, Officers / Are the vast ravishing seas; and Suitors, / Springs; now full, now shallow, now drye; which to / That which drownes them, run” (V, 13-16). Later, describing the waters of state that flow from Elizabeth to the tributary branches of judges, magistrates, officers and suitors, Donne more overtly marks the detachment of the monarch as blameworthy. After painting a portrait of the greed and corruption that pervades the English jurist system, affecting all of its members, from the lowest suitor to the highest officer of the court, Donne’s speaker questions,

Greatest and fairest Empresse, know you this?
Alas, no more then Thames calme head doth know
Whose meades her armes drowne, or whose corne o’rflow:
You Sir, whose righteousnes she loves, whom I
By having leave to serve, am most richly
For services paid, authoriz’d, now beginner
To know and weed out this enormous sinne. (V, 28-34)

Donne’s imagines the Thames descending from the “calme head” of Elizabeth to the corrupt tributaries, portrayed as the destructive “armes” of the river that threaten English crops, the source of life and livelihood for the city. While Elizabeth superficially escapes responsibility—indeed, both Milgate and A.J. Smith read this passage as clearing Elizabeth of wrongdoing—Donne implies that she is culpable: the speaker is “torn between idealizing Elizabeth in the customary fashion and accusing her of criminal neglect.”329 Like the satirist, Elizabeth has a responsibility to reform the corruptions in her land, and, while she gains some moral seriousness by appointing the righteous Egerton—Donne’s “You Sir”—her detachment is positioned by the satirist as reprehensible.

Nonetheless, Donne’s speaker assumes similar distance from the system he reproaches with his own ironic detachment, as well as with his caustic and exasperated tone.

329 Hester, 110.
Based upon Juvenal’s Satire XIII—to which Donne directly refers when he denounces Elizabethan England as an “Age of rusty iron” (V, 35)—Satire V constructs a speaker buffered by irony: while Juvenal’s satire is directed at the corrupt hypocrite Calvinus, Donne’s speaker gives only hypothetical advice to an indirect audience. He is shielded by his own irony and the satires’ real audience, the Lord Keeper, whose righteousness casts Donne’s satire as unnecessary.

Donne employs a similar use of irony and detachment in Satire II. On its surface, Satire II demonstrates its speaker’s disgust with the linguistic corruptions brought about by the fall of man; in opposition to them, Donne’s speaker offers his satire as charity. At the poem’s conclusion, Donne’s speaker positions his satire as a charitable “good worke,” but must acknowledge that such charity is “out of fashion now” (II, 110). While the satirist’s rebuke of linguistic and legal sins may indeed be charity, it is a charity the world does not seem to want.

In his attempt to cleanse the world of its symptoms of the fall, the speaker of Satire II employs a variety of methods: some sins he asserts as pitiable, worthy of the satirist’s reform, while others he argues can be cured only by amputation, cutting off the sinful limb to preserve the whole. The poem separates the pitiable threat posed by the poets, who “punish themselves” by prostituting their wits to patrons and claiming the regurgitated work of better minds as their own (II, 39), from the graver threat of the corrupt lawyer Coscus, who threatens all of England with his selfish abuse of the law. The speaker separates himself from the first group (the materialistic, bad poets who do “no harme” to the poets they imitate), employing the arguments of the misomusoi ironically to rail against his contemporaries’ abuse of language (II, 31). Already marginalized by their economic status,
these sad poets must be reformed and reabsorbed into society. Despite his charity to these members of the population, Donne’s speaker cannot so easily dismiss the threat of Coscus. Against his particular corruption, the satirist must exercise his “just offence” (II, 40). Envisioned as the abuser of poetic as well as legal language, Coscus threatens to corrupt not only the legal system with his sinfulness but the innocent populace as well. Donne’s satirist will reserve his charity for Coscus’s victims. It is to this category that the speaker feels an affinity and a responsibility. After he introduces Coscus and narrates his crimes, Donne’s speaker identifies himself as one of Coscus’s victims, demonstrated by Donne’s reliance upon the plural possessive “our,” which replaces the more satirically penned distinction between “I” and “they” of the first half of the poem.

While Donne constructs his speaker’s engagement as motivated by charity, he implies that such participation may be corrupting. In contrast to the charitable community asserted by the satirist, Coscus’s corruption is portrayed as thriving in “unwatched” privacy (II, 98). Away from the eyes of the public, Coscus, as well as his equally sinful clients, is able to indulge in his debauchery. Presenting both social participation and privacy as equally capable of corrupting the soul, Donne’s second satire concludes pessimistically. Attempting to argue for the legitimacy of his satire and its service to its audience, Donne actually undercuts his satire’s authority, reducing its charity to mere negation. At the end of the poem, Donne is assured only that he is not guilty of libel, asserting that his “words none drawes / Within the vast reach of th’huge statute laws” (II, 111-112).

In these three satires, Donne positions his speaker as deeply torn between an active life of civic responsibility—typified by the satirist’s employment by Egerton in Satire V and his sense of charity to his countrymen in Satire II—and a life characterized by godly
meditation as it is presented in Satire III. This conflict is dramatized more overtly in Satire I and Satire IV, where his speaker must weigh his public and private duties as a Christian satirist. Again, however, Donne refuses to satisfy his reader’s desire with a neat and easy resolution. When asked which is preferable, the active life or the contemplative one, Donne answers with a resounding “both.”

Images of Privacy and Participation in Satires I and IV

Revising and building upon the events of Horace’s Satire I.ix, Donne’s first and fourth satires are unified by their overtly ambivalent engagement with society. In these two satires, Donne dramatizes satire’s struggles to participate in a society it would rail upon. Donne’s Horatian speaker is pulled into corruption by his moral duty as a satirist, but, as he rails at the vice he discovers, he desires to retreat sinful company in order to ensure his own preservation. In Satire I, when Donne’s speaker abandons the “constant company” of his books to wander the streets with the “fondling motley humorist,” not only is his attempt to evangelize satirically to his companion portrayed as naïve and ineffectual, but the speaker hints that such engagement might imperil his salvation (I, 1, 11). The most elaborate of Donne’s court satires, Satire IV is also the most unclear. Throughout Satire IV, Donne emphasizes the limitations of the speaker’s satire: he is unable to effect reformation through his satire, and, indeed, his participation in the vice-ridden society of the court threatens his physical freedom, life, and even his salvation. Because the speaker’s motivation for going to court is unclear in the poem, the godliness of his satire is deliberately opaque. As a result, the speaker’s efforts are misinterpreted, becoming associated not with reformation, but with
slander and libel. Given the hostility and corruption of the court, the satirist turns inward, confining his satire to the singular audience of the reader.

Through both Satire I and IV, Donne takes up the broad strokes of Horace’s Satire I.ix: the speaker encounters a garrulous courtier, who proceeds to harass the speaker, delaying him with gossip and self-flattery. The drama of both Donne’s and Horace’s satires occurs in the speaker’s attempt to shake off his unwelcome companion in favor of constant solitude: in the end, Horace’s speaker is restored to privacy by an orderly justice system and Donne’s speaker must ransom himself from the treacherous talker’s company, able to escape only by the “prerogative” of his crown (IV, 150). However, while the poems appear similar in their broad outlines, the tone and urgency of the three poems are vastly different. Horace’s satire presents an ordered and just view of society. His speaker benefits from his confident moral authority, safe from the effects of the garrulous would-be courtier, who is marginalized by his lack of position. Donne remains loyal to this worldview in his first satire, which is loosely based upon the model Horace sets out. In Satire I, the world of the motley humorist and the authoritative but reclusive speaker is fundamentally just: the humorist, adulterous in his “marriage” to the speaker, in turn, is cuckolded by his lover, whose lovers beat him and drive him into the street. The humorist ends the poem where he began, in the speaker’s “standing wooden chest” (I, 2). These roles, however, are flipped in Satire IV, where Donne depicts the Elizabethan court as a scene of sinister falsehood: while the courtier who accosts Donne’s speaker is portrayed as an insider of sorts (in-the-know


331 In Satire I, Donne cleverly inverts the model set by Horace’s poem. The problem with the fondling motley humorist is that he refuses to stay, not leave.
regarding courtly gossip and acquaintance), Donne is unsure of his own position and authority. He does not benefit from the moral confidence of Horace’s speaker. Rather, Donne’s revision emphasizes the speaker’s own struggle to administer his satire to his unwanted companion, who associates satire with criminal defamation.

Importantly, neither Horace nor Donne presents successful satirists: despite Horace’s unquestioning portrayal of his satirist’s authority, his speaker, like those of Donne, ultimately is unable either to extricate himself from the bore, or to reform him. His speaker is only freed by the intervention of his companion’s legal opponent—an intervention Horace’s speaker attributes to Apollo: sic me servavit Apollo.332 In Horace’s providential world, the satire still works: the ethical consequence of the speaker’s satiric handicap is confined to the speaker’s temporary annoyance—an annoyance the poem casts in exclusively comic terms. Oddly, in Donne’s Christian world, providence is not always so reliable. The satiric speakers’ desire to participate in society is met with mixed results, ranging from the troubled annoyance at a companion’s social and moral indiscretion to the physical and moral dangers of imprisonment and damnation. In stepping out their doors into the corrupt and corrupting world, Donne’s speakers take their chances.

“Away thou fondling motley humorist”

Satire I dramatizes the contradictory impulses of satire. While it embodies the religious and civic duty of the poet to serve his society by instructing its members in virtue, satire also hints that such engagement may result in the satirist’s sinful contamination. Satire

I overtly engages the risks and benefits of the satirist’s participation in the corruption of society, revising its classical model to emphasize the poet’s reclusive tendency and to insist upon the satirist’s attempts to educate and reform the motley humorist.\textsuperscript{333} In Satire I, the speaker’s castigations of the motley humorist are portrayed as charitable acts that embody the Christian poet’s obligation to the commonwealth. For Hester, the speaker is compelled by his humanist studies and his faith to abandon his retirement in order to accompany the fop, his charity enacting what Hester terms the “folly” of reformation. According to this interpretation, “the focus of the first poem is on the way the duty of the Christian scholar leads him to satire” as a fulfillment of his charitable duty.\textsuperscript{334} Hester’s reading privileges the satirist’s public duty as morally superior to his own salvation, sacrificing the moral tension upon which, I argue, the poem repeatedly insists—the tension between the poet’s private relationship with God and his public duty of charity and prophesy. In my view, Donne’s poem presents satire not as the answer but as the question: how can the satirist serve both Lea and Rachel?

Donne emphasizes his speaker’s ambivalence between his desire for retirement and his desire to fulfill his Christian duty throughout the poem. He revises his Horation model, which presents a straightforward lampoon of the garrulous talker, to construct a satire that attempts to puzzle out the potential dangers of both solitude and society. When the poem begins, Donne’s speaker is already conflicted about his isolation. Confined in his “standing wooden chest,” he is interrupted by the motley humorist who would end his studies and drag him into the world (I, 2). Surprisingly, however, Donne’s speaker does not send his intruder

\textsuperscript{333} Erskine-Hill unfortunately dismisses Satire I as Donne’s mere regurgitation of Horace, a claim which is a disservice not only to Donne, but also to his later study of Satire IV.

\textsuperscript{334} Hester, 21.
away. Rather, he agrees to accompany him into the street although he seems to have no errand that would carry him abroad. Once among the people of the streets, the satirist rails at the vice his indiscriminate interlocutor would indulge, yet charitably and patiently—some critics assert, naively—welcomes his corrupt companion back into the fold after he repeatedly transgresses. At the poem’s conclusion, the speaker and his companion have returned to retirement, having been beaten, the humorist by his rivals, the satirist by the humorist’s neglect.

Although the speaker initially condemns his pesky visitor for intruding upon his solitude, his instinctual annoyance at the fop’s intrusion is mediated by the speaker’s sense of charity. The speaker’s language presents his own retirement as a contradiction: it is constructed first as a pleasurable withdrawal from the annoyances of the world, but later as a violation of Christian and humanist duty:

Away thou fondling motley humorist,
Leave mee, and in this standing wooden chest,
Consorted with these few bookes, let me lye
In prison, and here be coffin’d, when I dye. (I, 1-4)

The speaker demands that the fop leave him, brusquely sending him rudely “Away” in order to preserve his retirement. Despite this commandment, the speaker presents his solitude as a paradox, equating his cloistered retirement with images of the ultimate privacy of the dead and imprisoned. Positioned in his “standing wooden chest”—interpreted by modern critics almost universally to refer to Donne’s small room at Lincoln’s Inn—Donne’s speaker hyperbolically separates himself from the outside world, demonstrating his detachment by asserting his easy transition from life to death. He asserts his preference for a cloistered life,

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335 Hester rightly asserts that the speaker “recognizes this silly Elizabethan garrulus is a ‘monstrous, superstitious puritan, / Of refin’d manners’ (27-28) but cannot forget that he is a man worthy of and in need of his council” (21).
urging his companion to leave him to his studies: “let me lye…and here be coffin’d, when I dye.” By eliding his current voluntary isolation with his eventual involuntary leaving of the world, the speaker embodies a kind of monastic contemptus mundi. Later punning upon “grave divines,” the speaker’s word-play attempts to lighten the tone of such retirement while affirming his inaccessibility and detachment from the outside world. Similarly reinforcing his isolation, the speaker likens his room to a prison, an image that recurs throughout the poem in a variety of contexts but here may refer to the prison of the soul in the body as well as the physical confinement of the speaker. Again, Donne juxtaposes his speaker’s willing retirement from the active life against images of involuntary isolation. These images of death and prison may urge the reader to think of such isolation, as Joshua Scodel notes, as “an oppressive, death-like constriction upon worldly engagements.”

According to Scodel’s reading, Donne presents a profound critique of such stoical withdrawal in his portrayal of his speaker’s self-centered isolation. However, while he admittedly seems to view such cloistered isolation as the sign of an incomplete life, Donne’s speaker cannot be said to dismiss wholly the value of retirement.

The texts present in the speaker’s study also complicate any strict interpretation of Donne’s dismissal of or preference for retirement. Culled from a educational program in the speaker’s study also complicate any strict interpretation of Donne’s dismissal of or preference for retirement. Culled from a educational program

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336 Many critics, most familiarly John Carey, have asserted the psychomachia of the first satire, reading the satirist and the humorist as Donne’s division of the soul and the body. See Carey, John Donne: Life, Mind and Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 53.

337 Joshua Scodel, “‘None’s Slave’: Some Versions of Liberty in Donne’s Satires 1 and 4,” ELH 72 (2005), 369. Scodel does not elaborate on how he reads the speaker’s willing participation in this isolation.

338 Hester reads Donne’s portrait of the speaker as similar to the ideas expressed in Erasmus’s Enchiridion, where he writes that a love of learning is laudable, but should be directed not by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, but by God and “for the sake of Christ... It is better to know less and love more than to know a great deal and love not at all” (qtd. in Hester, 19).
typical of the Inns of Court, the speaker’s diverse booklist promotes his intellectual engagement with the commonwealth while it simultaneously physically isolates him from it:

Here are Gods conduits, grave Divines; and here
Nature’s Secretary, the Philosopher;
And jolly Statesmen, which teach how to tie
The sinewes of a cities mistique bodie;
Here gathering Chroniclerers, and by them stand
Giddie fantastique Poets or each land.
Shall I leave all this constant company,
And follow headlong, wild uncertain thee? (I, 5-12)

Preferring ideas rather than people, the satirist seeks the “constant company” of his books that line his cell. He “consorts” with his books rather than with men.339 Donne’s word choice here hints that the catalog of his library mimics the society he would find in the streets of London: the speaker’s booklist promotes his moral and civic responsibility to society in varying degrees, from the high-minded to the pejorative.340 As the speaker moves down the chain of scholarship from the heavenly to the natural, and finally to the earthly, Donne’s descriptions become increasingly ambivalent. Although he asserts that the speaker’s knowledge originates with God—the speaker later asserts that “With God and the Muses I

339 John Evelyn would denounce such bookish engagement sixty years later—but not without a bit of irony: “As for Books, I acknowledge with the Philosopher [Seneca], Otium sine literis, to be the greatest infelicity in the world; but on the other side, not to read men, and converse with living Libraries, is to deprive ourselves of the most useful and profitable of Studies: This is that deplorable defect which universally renders our bookish men so pedantically morose and impolish’d, and in a word, so very ridiculous: For, believe it Sir, the Wisest men are not made in Chambers and Closets crowded with shelves, but by habitudes and active Conversations.” See Public and Private Life in the Seventeenth Century: the McKenzie-Evelyn Debate, ed. Brian Vickers (Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1986), 213.

conferre” (I, 48)—the latter portion of his booklist “reveals his fascination with the rich variety of the ostensibly rejected world,” as Joshua Scodel claims.341

Initially, the speaker studies works of divinity. Specifically, he reads the work of “grave divines” who encourage the proselytizing of God’s word on earth, a divine accommodation Donne implies with his description of them as “God’s conduits.” Next, Donne’s speaker reads natural philosophy, referencing “Nature’s secretary, the Philosopher”—perhaps specifically alluding to Aristotle, to whom Eusebius refers as “nature’s private secretary” and whom Thomas Aquinas dubs “the philosopher.” The recording and observation inferred by the title “nature’s secretary” may challenge an argument for the speaker’s clear preference for the principled and removed study of science, abstracted from the messiness of experience. Donne’s speaker demonstrates a similar ambivalence regarding political philosophy. Further down the list, the texts of “jolly Statesmen” instruct their readers to involve themselves in matters of the commonwealth, “to tie / The sinewes of a cities mistique bodie.” Although Milgate argues that Donne makes room for a skeptical reading by portraying the statesmen as “jolly,” the civic duty he alludes to here cannot be dismissed as simply facetious—Donne’s education at the Inns of Court would have insisted, to some extent, upon the application of his studies. The education a young man received at the Inns was wide-ranging, but was ideally pointed towards service.342

According to one contemporary source, such study would make him “fyt for the warres and

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341 Scodel, “None’s Slave,” 369.

342 It must be said that many young men attended the Inns with little aim of entering into the legal profession. According to Wilfred R. Prest, “During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a stay at the inns was part of the conventional gentlemenly education … whether or not [such gentleman were] destined for the bar.” See Wilfred R. Prest, The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts (1590-1640) (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowan & Littlefield, 1972), 23.
fyt for peace, meete for the courte and meete for the countrey.” Likewise, the “gathering Chroniclers” Donne reads may imply the legitimate work of history and historians, credited with instilling virtue in young men through stories of valorous Briton kings and knights, but may also refer more dubiously to those “lay Chronigraphers,” who, according to Nashe, “write of nothing but of Mayors and Sheriefs, the deare yeare and the great Frost, … for they want the wings of choise words to fly to heaven.” Donne ends his study with the work of “Giddie fantastique Poets,” affirming the role of imaginative literature in liberal study in a reference that may refer to the long tradition of such literature produced by men of the Inns. Again, however, his description of the poets as “giddie” is ambivalent: it affirms the wandering mind of the scholar, free to think and range abroad while physically retired, but it also links the poetry on his shelves to the motley humorist he would condemn. In a verse letter to Roland Woodward, Donne would return to the conflicted image of “giddie” retirement: “So works retiredness in us; to roam / Giddily, and be everywhere, but at home, / Such freedom doth a banishment become.”


345 One here is reminded of the encomium of the authorial talent to be found in the Inns Jasper Haywood contained in his preface to his translation of Seneca’s Thyestes (1560): he urges Seneca to choose his next translator from among the authors of the Inns: “Go, where Minerva’s men / And finest wits do swarm whom she hath taught to pass with pen. / In Lincoln’s Inn and Temples twain, Gray’s Inn and other mo, / Thou shalt them find whose painful pen thy verse shall flourish so / That Melpomen thou wouldst well ween had taught them for to write, / And all their works with stately style and goodly grace t’indite” (ll. 83-88). Quoted in Jessica Lynn Winston, “Literature and Politics at the Early Elizabethan Inns of Court” (PhD diss., U. of California, Santa Barbara, 2002), 5.

346 Donne’s speaker will admonish the humorist a little later in the poem for his “giddinesses” (I, 51). In the next satire, Donne more vehemently disparages the work of bad poets, associating their poor imitations of good texts with excrement (II, 30).

As this short list implies, Donne’s descriptions of these texts are open-ended, allowing for two very different readings to co-exist. As Milgate argues, the texts are part of a program of service, encouraging young men to educate themselves in ways that will allow them to serve the commonwealth as they mature. Describing the milieu commonly found in the Inner Temple, Gerard Legh asserts that there, one sees “the store of gentlemen of the whole realm, that repair thither to learn rule, and obey by law, to yield their fleece to their prince and commonwealth.” Conversely, however, the booklist also implies its own sort of literary giddiness. As Goddred Gilby, a student of the Inns stated, lamenting the aimlessness of his study, “We the youth of this realme are drawn into divers and sundrye doubtfull wayes and wandering bypathes” and “know not which way to direct our studies.” According to this less optimistic reading, the satirist’s reading may subtly liken him to the giddy subject of his satire, tainting him by association.

Donne portrays the satirist as likewise conflicted about his decision to accompany the motley humorist throughout the streets of London, overtly dramatizing the tension between the civic and soteriological orientation of the Christian poet. At the same time that the speaker strives to embody the principles of the “grave divines,” viewing his satire as a charitable act of Christian love and his participation in society as his godly duty, he also implies that his engagement with corruption—even to castigate it—has the potential to


350 Scodel claims that the satirist’s library “is as various and contradictory as the social world in which the ‘motley humorist’ is absorbed” and that “as a writer of verse, the satiric speaker is himself related to (if not one of) these ‘giddy’ poets” (369). A.F. Bellette more harshly accuses the speaker of Donne’s satire of blasphemy: “There is little distinction made between the supposed isolation of the ‘standing wooden chest’ in which he is first found and the promiscuity of the humorist and his outside world…[the speaker] is already at one with the ‘cities mistique bodie,’ and the result of this blasphemous participation is a living death” (133). See A.F. Bellette, “The Originality of Donne’s Satires” in *UTQ*, 44. no. 2 (1975), 130-140.
endanger his own salvation. Hester correctly asserts that, in his first satire, Donne fleshes out the satirist’s public persona at more length than he does the private. The speaker participates in the humorist’s corrupt society under the auspices of his compassionate concern for his companion’s wellbeing, referring to his satire as a “charity” that will instruct the fop properly to avoid its evils. To effect this instruction, however, the satirist must open himself to the sinful transgression of society.

Donne constructs the speaker’s decision to accompany the humorist as morally risky. At best, Donne presents the speaker’s participation in the fop’s journey as naïve. While the satirist’s attempt to teach his student discretion admittedly would be a worthy goal if the speaker succeeded in countering the flighty tendencies of the ever-fickle humorist, Donne presents this as an unlikely possibility. Despite his repeated assertions that the fop should remain faithful in his journey out of doors, the satirist acknowledges the probability that he will be left as soon as a more attractive companion should appear. The speaker sets himself up for failure. He demands a vow of faithfulness from the humorist while he affirms the fop’s character to be one of faithlessness:

First sweare by thy best love in earnest
(If thou which lov’st all, canst love any best)
Thou wilt not leave mee in the middle street
Though some more spruce companion thou dost meet. (I, 13-16)

The speaker parenthetically denounces the fop’s inconstant love, with the aim of increasing his discretion. While his instruction of the fop aims to encourage his discretion by satirizing the types of vice he will meet in the streets, the speaker assumes that such instruction will affirm the fop’s love. Before they leave, Donne’s speaker directs the fop to avoid judging the

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351 Then again, so does Hester. Donne will balance out this assessment in Satire IV, which engages the private salvation of the satirist at more length.
quality of persons by the superficialities of apparel. He admonishes the humorist not to abandon him for a Captain (though he might shine like gold), for a Courtier (though he might smell good), or for a Justice (though he might have many well-dressed attendants).

Although it is directed toward the humorist’s reformation, the speaker’s advice applies equally to the satirist. He satirizes the humorist’s method of affirming the worthiness of his acquaintances in language that ironically recalls his previous description of his own society of books:

Oh monstrous, superstitious puritan,
Of refin’d manners, yet ceremonial man, …
That wilt consort none, until thou have knowne
What lands hee hath in hope, or of his owne. (I, 27-28, 33-34)

The speaker’s insistence that the humorist “wilt consort none” reflects the speaker’s own ambivalence regarding the benefit of social engagement. When Donne’s speaker admonishes the humorist to measure the worth of his companions with greater discretion, he implies that it is neither retirement from nor participation in society that is offensive, but rather, his companion’s lack of discrimination. Much like the satirist, who would indulge the works of grave divines as well as giddy and fantastic poets (or, equally bad, eschew all company), the humorist’s participation in society must be governed more strictly by moderation and reason. Donne may be asserting the ironic similarity between the humorist and the satirist here. Like the fop who knows the true value of nothing, the speaker, who will limit his society to only “God and the Muses,” also struggles to discern his duty as a Christian poet. Both must activate their own discretion in order to fulfill their Christian duties.

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352 Hester covers this satirical commonplace pretty thoroughly, treating the clothing of man as a sign of his fall from grace (22-24). Choosing to concentrate upon the analogies of the satirist (marriage, apparel, and imprisonment—which I will not rehearse here), Hester does not engage the aim of the satirist’s instruction: that society itself is not the enemy, but that the fop’s indiscreet and fickle love of the wrong people is.
Immediately before their departure into the vice-ridden street, the speaker begins to animate his charity towards his companion. The satirist emphasizes the necessity of the humorist’s reformation in a verse paragraph that functions as the moral center of the poem. Instructing the humorist to decipher the difference between vice and virtue, the speaker dramatizes the accommodation he has read about in his works of “grave Divines.” The speaker enacts his poetic duty through his satire of the fop, whose reformation is portrayed suddenly in terms more urgent than the speaker’s discomfort at being abandoned. Earnestly admonishing the humorist before he agrees to accompany him into more corruption, the speaker claims to embody Christian charity:

    But since thou like a contrite penitent,
    Charitably warn’d of thy sinnes, dost repent
    These vanities, and giddinesses, loe
    I shut my chamber doore, and ‘Come, lets goe.’ (I, 49-52)

The speaker’s concern for the humorist is no longer characterized exclusively by his concern of being abandoned; rather, through his imagery of the sacrament of reconciliation, he urges the humorist to consider the ramifications of such vanities upon his soul. Using the language of holy confession, the satirist positions himself in the role of priest while the fop is presented as the sinful transgressor seeking forgiveness. Donne emphasizes the humorist’s desire for reformation from his past “vanities, and giddinesses,” framing his penitence and repentance as vital acts in the Christian process of absolution. Like Paul’s sharp rebuke of the Corinthians, the speaker’s admonition of the fop is portrayed as born out of Christian love and seeks to reform the penitent to virtue. Donne confirms that the speaker’s satire of the humorist is “charitable” and, in order to do him even greater good, the speaker acquiesces to the humorist’s request to accompany him into the street.
The charity of the satirist does not come without a cost, however. Juxtaposing his “charity” to the humorist against the preservation of the speaker’s soul, Donne opposes the public duty of the Christian satirist with the private piety of the speaker. Immediately regretting his concession to the fop, the satirist hypothesizes about the injustices he will be made to suffer because of his companion’s fickle attention. Although his malcontented scenarios largely portray the satirist’s attempt to reform the humorist as no more than annoyance and futility, the speaker briefly positions his engagement with the fop as dangerous to his own salvation. The satirist speculates that while the humorist likely will be unfazed by his own social infidelity (an implication the poem later challenges), the satirist himself will be damned for accompanying him: he asks prayerfully, “But how shall I be pardon’d my offence / That thus have sinn’d against my conscience?” (I, 65-66). By seemingly blithely engaging in the corruption of London, the satirist has sinned against God. To my knowledge, no scholarship has taken this statement as a legitimate display of the anxiety of the satirist, choosing to dismiss it as a simple precursor to the issues more fully developed in Donne’s religious poetry, as a rhetorical question, and as a mere pregnant pause in the staccato enjambment of the poem. Occurring at the threshold between isolation and society—situated between the satirist’s decision to go abroad but before he has abandoned wholly his retirement—the satirist’s question serves as a counterpoint to the poem’s

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353 The precise reason for the satirist’s decision to abandon his study to accompany the humorist is never explained in the poem, though modern criticism has put forth a few possibilities. My assertion, that the satirist acquiesces to the humorist’s request out of charity—specifically out of a concern for his well-being—takes issue with the common reading that he is merely naïve. The satirist cannot be dismissed as merely gullible.

354 Joshua Scodel omits the two lines; Thomas Hester passes over the lines briefly, reading them as rhetorically signaling a “‘fall’… that confirms [the speaker’s] understanding of the necessity of grace in the lives of men” (20); A.F. Bellette observes that the question “has the ring of some of those terrible unanswered questions in the Holy Sonnets, and is very obviously not answered here—the poem redoubles its energy and in the rapid and brilliant finale one might forget that it had been asked” (133).
emphasis on the public duty of the Christian poet. Suddenly and urgently, the speaker turns inward.

The satirist’s prayer serves as a reminder that he risks his soul by accompanying the fop. Demonstrating for the reader his concern regarding his private, rather than public, relationship with God, the satirist attempts to recreate the privacy of his cell amid the chaos and hubbub of society. In his spontaneous self-rebuke, the satirist portrays his charity to the humorist as potentially irreconcilable to his own salvation:

But sooner may a cheap whore, that hath beene
Worne by many severall men in sinne,
As are black feathers, or musk colour hose,
Name her childs right father, ’mongst all those; …
Then thou, when thou depart’st from mee, canst show
Whither, why, when, or with whom thou wouldst go.
But how shall I be pardon’d my offence
That thus have sinn’d against my conscience? (I, 53-56, 63-66)

By turning to a private, meditative space, the satirist conceals his own interior relationship with God from the humorist. In effect, the speaker recreates the private and secretive space of his study in his conscience, a place inaccessible to the wandering eyes of the humorist or reader. After acknowledging the humorist’s inevitable betrayal and the futility of his satiric impulse, the satirist retreats to a place of prayerful meditation, moving from his public concern for the humorist’s reformation to reflect upon his own standing with God. Although Donne will go on to develop the tension between the Christian poet’s public and private responsibilities more overtly in Satire IV—where the reader becomes privy to that speaker’s divine trance and innermost thoughts—here, the reader remains outside the scope of the speaker’s meditation. Despite his attempt to recreate a space free from sinful

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contamination, the speaker proceeds directly into the society he intends to denounce, working to teach the fop discrimination at the expense of his own soul.

Narrating his struggle to reform the fop’s perspective, the satirist repeatedly describes the humorist as debasing himself, signaled by his lowered head, the center of his reason:

…as fidlers stop low’st, at highest sound,
So to the most brave, stoops hee nigh’st the ground.
But to the grave man, he doth move no more.

Now leaps he upright, joggs me, and cryes, “Do’ you see Yonder well favour’d youth?’ ‘Which?’ ‘Oh, ‘tis hee That dances so divinely.’ ‘Oh,’ said I, ‘Stand still, must you dance here for company?’

Hee droopt, wee went.

… ‘Him whom I last left, all repute
For his device, in hansoming a sute,
To judge of lace, pinke, panes, print, cut, and plight,
Of all the Court, to have the best conceit.’
‘Our dull comedians want him, let him goe.
But Oh, God strengthen thee, why stoop’st thou so?’
(I, 78-81, 83-87, 95-100)

This series of satiric situations demonstrates the stubborn ignorance of the humorist, who, despite all proper instruction, will not reform his indiscriminate and fickle ways. More than simply satires of musicians, foreign travel, effeminate behavior, and the changing fashions of the court, these moments in the text signal the humorist’s willful disavowal of reason, offered to him in the form of the speaker’s satire. As the satire progresses, the humorist is portrayed repeatedly in a stature that emphasizes his debasement to an almost sub-human level: in response to social stimuli, the humorist stands upright or stoops and droops, demonstrating not only the failure of the satirist’s efforts to reform his companion’s giddy indiscretion, but also the humorist’s subsequent fall from grace. With the humorist’s stooping and drooping,
Donne refigures the fall of man in the fop’s journey through the streets. Pleading for God to “strengthen” the humorist, Donne’s speaker affirms his companion’s descent into sin. His spontaneous prayer marks his own frustration and despair regarding his companion’s stubborn desire to doom himself. Replacing the role properly held by God alone with the sinful society of London gallants, the humorist risks his soul’s salvation. Despite the speaker’s repeated admonition and satiric affirmations of its corruption and vice, the lure of sin proves too much for the humorist, who falls into the corruption that surrounds him. The satirist’s charity fails.

The utter debasement of the humorist at the conclusion of the poem reinforces the poem’s vexed relationship with both satire and solitude: while the humorist ends the poem justly returned to the isolation of the satirist’s cell, Donne refuses to allow Satire I to be reduced to a mere encomium of solitude. Even in the relative privacy of the speaker’s cell, Donne insists upon the importance of the speaker’s charitable duty to his companion. Having been beaten and thrown from a prostitute’s home by rivals for her affection, the humorist returns to the safety of the speaker’s company, where he is taken in by the satirist:

At last his Love he in a window spies,
And like light dew exhal’d, he flings from mee
Violently ravish’d to his lechery.
Many there were, he could command no more;
He quarrell’d, fought, bled; and turn’d out of dore
Directly came to mee hanging the head,
And constantly a while must keepe his bed. (106-112)

356 I observed this ominous “descent” of the humorist before reading Hester’s similar observation. He goes on to assert the various meanings of the satirist’s likening the fop to various animals presumably displayed around London at the time through traditional allegorical and emblematic interpretations of the animals (26-28). In referring to the animal acts in and around London, Donne insists upon his own engagement in the society he would denounce, employing topicality to draw in his audience so that he might charitably satirize the type of the humorist.
Having violently shaken off the charitable satirist yet again, the humorist makes himself vulnerable to the physical abuse administered by his rivals, debasing himself through his sinful ignorance. Finally returning to the speaker, “hanging the head,” the humorist is cared for with Christian kindness rather than rebuke. Indeed, at the conclusion of the poem, charity overtakes satire. While the speaker’s satire has failed to bring about the humorist’s reformation—nowhere does Donne assert that the humorist has repented his actions in the streets—the speaker fulfills his charitable duty to the humorist by opening his home to his inconstant companion. Because of his indiscretions, he is laid flat, and “must keepe his bed,” isolated from the corruptions of the streets of London. The satirist’s Christian duty shrinks from the community of posers and miscreants found in the London streets to include only the humorist. The speaker’s charity thrives in the confines of the intimate relationship. His duty is ultimately to only one.

Despite the speaker’s failure as a satirist, the poem remains a success. The satirist’s charity to the humorist at the poem’s conclusion offers the reader a virtuous though muted alternative to the corruption portrayed in the streets of London. In the end, Donne presents his speaker’s charity as a powerful affirmation of the duty of the Christian poet towards his readers. By ending the poem with the satirist and the humorist within the speaker’s cell, Donne demonstrates his Christian duty to his readers. Indeed, Satire I attempts to refigure the relationship between the author and reader of satire through Donne’s portrayal of the satirist’s instruction. Although the world of the poem finally dismisses satire as ineffective—the satirist’s righteous instruction of the fop is overwhelmed by the temptations of the streets of London—the poem itself may succeed in teaching its audience discrimination. Ultimately, the goals of the satirist portrayed in the poem and the author of the poem are reconciled
through their charitable acts: the satirist’s Christian duty to his companion mirrors Donne’s responsibility to his reader as a Christian poet.

“it enough shall bee / To wash the staines away”

A similar pattern of participation and retreat emerges in Satire IV, but the poem is dominated by a pessimism that Donne’s earlier satire avoided. The sense of urgency and sobriety that pervades Donne’s fourth satire wholly eschews the comedy of Satire I, replacing the speaker’s concern for his charitable duty with a cynicism that questions the ability of satire to participate in a society so degraded by the fall. Donne develops more fully the contradiction between the satirist’s social and personal goals in Satire IV, where the tension between the satirist’s public and private duties reaches a breaking point.

While throughout the satires Donne appears deeply ambivalent regarding the power of satire to reform the corruption of the soul, Satire IV represents a bleak argument for satire’s inability to cleanse society’s sinful nature. Allegorizing the repeated failure of satire’s charity through the speaker’s ineffectual visits to the court, Donne limits the ability of satire to accomplish reform. He acknowledges early in the poem that, in its going abroad, satire is tainted by the very sin it would denounce. He argues that, once corrupted, satire will no longer be regarded by those it intends to save as a pure, godly endeavor motivated by charity; rather, the targets of its scorn will misinterpret satire, maligning it as libel, motivated by the poet’s self-interest. To preserve its own godliness, satire is forced to retreat inward, to the privacy of the reader. Donne, with “Macchabees modestie,” must content himself with the intimate audience of his coterie of understanders, hoping that some “wise” reader will “esteeme [his] writs Canonickall” (IV, 243-244)
Divided into roughly five parts, Satire IV presents two different temporal moments directed at two different audiences. The frame of the story, illustrated as a confession of the satirist’s sin, is addressed to Donne’s audience of readers, while the narrative situation being depicted retrospectively offers a satire of the court directed to those who would inhabit the den of vice. His motives for journeying to this “picture of vice” remain unclear in the poem, leading Donne’s satirist to fall by guilty association with what he ostensibly would condemn (IV, 72). A courtier approaches, who, in conversing with the satirist, begins libeling officers in the court; the satirist, eager to rid himself of his unwanted interlocutor, cannot shake his new companion. Finally, the courtier leaves, having asked for and received a crown from the satirist. After this misadventure, the satirist retires, retreating to the isolation of his home, where he is visited with a satiric trance. He awakens and returns to satirize the court again, only to retreat in defeat for a second time. The speaker ends the narrative portion of the poem isolated, defeated by the corruption of the hellish court.

Despite such a seemingly bleak ending, the concluding portion of the poem evaluates the satirist’s task as more than a mere waste. Having returned to his confessional frame, Donne’s speaker contents himself with the knowledge that satire is effective even if its scope is limited. While his courtly society can be redeemed by God alone, the speaker’s satire, like his confession, is capable of cleansing his own soul, and, by hopeful extension, that of his reader.

Departing from the narrative situations presented in his other satires, Satire IV is framed as a confession directed to his coterie of readers rather than his narrative audience. Donne portrays the speaker’s admission of his guilt as a personally redemptive exercise, but one that assumes the shared value system of his audience of coterie readers. The satirist’s
bitter and even sarcastic repudiation of the court limits the effectiveness of his satire to those readers who would recognize their own anti-court bias in Donne’s railings against the court. The speaker’s statement of guilt attempts to balance the satirist’s concern for his own salvation, marked by the satirist’s acknowledgment that his admission can cleanse his own soul, with his concern for his audience of understanders who would recognize his sarcastic denunciation of the court as an admonition to avoid its contamination. In other words, by constructing his satire as a satiric confession, Donne emphasizes the speaker’s responsibility and guilt. Through his recollection of his experience in the court, Donne hopes to profit his readers by providing them a charitable epideictic “map” of his “sin of going” (IV, 11):

Well; I may now receive and die; my sin
Indeed is great, but I have been in
A purgatory, such as feared hell is
A recreation, and scant map of this. (IV, 1-4)

Satire IV portrays the speaker’s confession as both a meditation and a conversation. Donne’s satirist denounces the court as a vice-ridden hell, but does so with such sarcasm and irony that the entire statement may be taken as a sort of jest that casts Donne’s speaker in the same light as those he would denounce. By recreating his own bitter experience in the court, demonstrating his own sinful dalliance there, Donne’s speaker perhaps hopes to instruct his readers to eschew the physical and moral dangers of the court, enacting a satiric charity similar to that of the poet of Satire I. He publicizes the vice of the court in order to admonish his readers towards virtuous action. In contrast to Satire I, however, the goal of Donne’s satirist is personal: he cautions his audience not through his satire of others, but through a narration of his own folly and experience. As it functions as the speaker’s private confession meant to cleanse his soul, the satire works as a self-admonishing purgative.
While satire may be an effective method of instructing his readers to avoid the corrupted and corrupting court, Donne insists upon its limits. By framing his satire as a confession privy to his readers alone, he sharply divides his audience into two groups: those wise readers who will recognize Donne’s satire as godly work, and those morally bankrupt courtiers that people his narrative. In contrast to Donne’s godly readers, who will read and ponder his satire of sin while they laugh at its targets, the audience in the poem will disregard his satiric task, associating his satire not with godliness or charity, but with malice and libel.

It is this audience of courtiers that Donne’s speaker goes to court to satirize. In going to court, however, the satirist is infected by the very sinfulness he would castigate. Ultimately, he is unable to separate himself from the vice he would denounce:

My minde, neither with prides itch, nor yet hath been
Poyson’d with love to see, or to be seene,
I had no suit there, no new suite to shew,
Yet went to Court; But as Glaze which did goe
To’a Masse in jest, catch’d, was faine to disburse
The hundred markes. So’ it pleas’d my destinie
(Guilty’of my sin of going,) to think me
As prone to’all ill, and good as forget-
Full, as proud, as lustfull, and as much in debt,
As vaine, as witlesse, and as false as they
Which dwell at Court, for once going that way” (IV, 5-16)

In the passage, Donne’s speaker likens himself to Glaze, who attended a prohibited Mass “in jest” and was caught and punished. In his poetry, Donne employs “jest” in two ways, both of which coexist in this particular allusion. His less common use of the phrase occurs in his “Song (Sweetest love, I do not go),” where his use of “jest” presents the speaker’s departure

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357 As far as I can tell, while many critics have engaged Donne’s use of the Glaze metaphor as it speaks to Donne’s recusancy, none have concentrated on the adverbial phrase “in jest.” In my opinion, the key to the metaphor, and perhaps the poem, exists there. As is often the case, Hester comes the closest, arguing that the satirist is plagued for abandoning his loyalty to “mistress truth” by betraying his satiric task (82).
from his beloved as a mimicry of death. In that lyric, he uses the term as a innocuous simulacrum of something potentially more sinister. Far more commonly, Donne employs the term to denote the sardonic ridicule of either an individual target or type. In short, Donne equates “jesting” with a form of Horation satire that would laugh at “worne maladies” (III, 4). In this particular instance, Donne uses the term to signal his speaker’s professed goal in journeying to the court: like Glaze, he attends the court in order to ridicule it. And, like Glaze, Donne’s satirist becomes associated with its sin. The speaker acknowledges his “sin of going” to court, a sin that Donne portrays to be as vague as it is damnable. He plainly refutes all conventional motivations for journeying to the court: he does not desire to go to court out of pride, lust, or vanity, nor is he engaged in courtly business that would necessitate his presence.

Despite his apparent lack of sinfulfulness, the speaker falls quickly into corruption:

So’it pleas’d my destinie
(Guilty’of my sin of going,) to think me
As prone to’all ill, and good as forget-
Full, as proud, as lustfull, and as much in debt,
As vaine, as witlesse, and as false as they
Which dwell at Court, for once going that way. (IV, 11-16)

358 In the poem, Donne states: “Sweetest love, I do not go, / For weariness of thee, / Nor in hope the world can show / A fitter love for me; / But since that I / Must die at last, ‘tis best, / To use my self in jest / Thus by feigned deaths do die” (ln. 1-8). John Donne, The Complete English Poems. ed., A. J. Smith (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996).

359 In “Obsequies to the Lord Harrington,” for example, Donne expresses his commendation of his subject by asserting that he is above reproach: “Men might at Pompey jest, but they might not / At that authority, by which he got / Leave to triumph, before, by age, he might (ln. 233-238). Contained in The Complete English Poems.

360 As might be expected, he employs the term most often in his satires—Satire IV and V each contains two occurrences of “jest”—but he also uses the term in his verse letters, his poetry of patronage, and his divine poetry, returning to engage the liability of satire throughout his career.

361 In a rather unconvincing moment, Bellette argues that the speaker attends court simply out of boredom (134).
By textually separating his guilt, the satirist tries to limit its effect upon his moral authority. But the satirist is unable to separate himself from the sin he would denounce, and he falls “for once going that way.” In particular, the weak endings and repeated enjambments of these lines demonstrate the tortured nature of the speaker’s engagement in that which he despises. Donne’s use of severe elisions and enjambed lines try to separate the speaker (“me”) from the besmirched reputation of those who inhabit the court, who are “As prone to’all ill.” The painful enjambment of the phrase “good as forget-/full” mimics the descent of the speaker into sin, his memory of goodness quickly overwhelmed by the sin to follow in the next lines. Once coupled with such sins, the satirist is hindered in his ability to urge the reformation of his targets, his moral authority impaired by his sinful association with vice.

Having sullied his moral authority by journeying to court, the speaker is punished for his sin. Donne portrays the courtier as the instrument of divine wrath, a scourge of God who takes the shape of the poetic opposite of the satirist. Created by God as a fit antagonist with whom to instruct the speaker, the courtier allegorizes the dangers of the satiric occupation. The satirist’s criminal double, he embodies the misinterpretation of satire that would associate such pleas for reformation with the illegitimate speech-acts of gossip and libel. Conversely, Donne’s speaker represents the struggle of satire to retain its virtue by retreating inward. At the beginning of their exchange, the two sides are clearly delineated and defined. Although the satirist portrays himself as the linguistic opposite of the courtier, as the exchange between two progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the two apart: the satirist’s sarcasm starts to resemble the flattery and libel of the courtier, the difference between them corroded by the satirist’s engagement with the vice of the court. Despite his sarcastic attempts to undermine and rid himself of his interlocutor, the speaker consistently
fails to separate himself physically or poetically from his libelous companion. By erasing
the linguistic distinction between the satirist and the courtier, Donne associates the public
execution of satire with libelous gossip and treachery, and later, with brutal and self-
glorifying rebuke.

In his initial satiric description of the courtier, the satirist repeatedly tries to
differentiate himself from the courtier, working to portray both his own legitimacy and the
legitimacy of his art. Presenting his own satire as beyond the jurisdiction of criminal
defamation, Donne’s satirist insists, like he did in Satire II, that his “words none drawes /
Within the vast reach of th’huge statute lawes” (II, 111-112). Whereas the satirist describes
himself as a conscientious though fallen man, concerned with the reformation of the court but
unsure how to bring it about, he associates the courtier with monstrosity, duplicity, and
criminality. The satirist likens the courtier to a monster, a foreigner, a Jesuit in disguise, an
agent provocateur, and a criminal. Attempting to distinguish himself from the courtier who
approaches, the satirist struggles to encapsulate his vice:

…Towards me did runne
A thing more strange, then on Niles slime, the Sunne
E’r bred; or all which into Noahs Arke came;
A thing, which would have pos’d Adam to name;
Stranger then seaven Antiquaries studies,
Then Africks Monsters, Guianaes rarities.
Stranger then strangers. (IV, 17-23)

The speaker works diligently to set himself apart from the courtier, compiling a portrait of
the courtier from classical and early modern natural histories, biblical legend, chroniclers,
Tudor proclamation, and even gossip. At first, the speaker and courtier are portrayed as
wholly different. He initially portrays the courtier as a “thing” of monstrosity, created of
Egyptian sludge or from Noah’s ark and a sinful “thing,” unclassifiable by the father of man;
later, he presents him as a yet undiscovered “monster” or “rarity” from an unexplored land; lastly, he defines the courtier as simply something other than himself, arguing that he is finally only “stranger than strangers,” more like a Dane than an Englishman. By the end of the sequence, the satirist has narrowed the difference between himself and his unwanted companion: while he first describes him first as a monstrous “thing” unrecognizable as a man, the satirist soon recognizes the courtier as a “stranger.”

Not able to distinguish himself physically from his companion, the speaker more specifically attempts to differentiate his satiric art from the compliment and flattery of the courtier. He casts himself as the victim of his aggressive companion, unprepared for the assault of the courtier: “But Pedants motley tongue, soldiers bombast, / Montebankes drugtongue, nor the termes of law / Are strong enough preparatives, to draw / Me to beare this” (IV, 40-43). While the speaker is unprepared, the courtier is portrayed as the aggressor, his linguistic dexterity positioned as a threat to the satirist. The courtier’s tongue is capable of great flattery, subterfuge and even outright deceit: “his tongue, call’d complement … can win widdowes, pay scores, / Make men speake treason, cosen subtest whores, / Out-flatter favorites, or outlie either / Jovius, or Surius, or both together” (IV, 44-48). Whereas the satirist is innocent—he describes himself as “seelily” willing to engage the courtier in conversation—the courtier is condemned as a deceitful flatterer, not to be trusted.

Despite the satirist’s initial claims, Donne complicates the satirist’s distinction between himself and his parodic companion, presenting the differences between the courtly satirist and the courtier to be of degree rather than kind. The satiric banter between the humorist and his unwilling interlocutor muddies the distinction between the Horatian sarcasm of the speaker, who attempts to shake off his companion through his willful
misinterpretation, and the insipid conversation of the courtier, who simply refuses to leave. Despite their contradictions of purpose, their similarities are apparent as soon as they speak: their conversational material is derived from the same sources, their poetic cadences are largely identical, and both employ a willful ignorance or misinterpretation of the other in the pursuit of their own goals. As Howard Erskine-Hill argues, both the courtier and the satirist utilize biblical mythology to mock the other: when the speaker ridicules the courtier for his self-praise, saying “If you’had liv’d, Sir, / Time enough to have been Interpreter / To Babells bricklayers, sure the Tower had stood” (IV, 63-66), the satirist reminds his audience of the courtier’s earlier claim that the “Apostles were / Good pretty linguists” (58-59).\(^{362}\) The voices of the satirist and the courtier even merge together at one point, literally blurring the distinction between the two:

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He knowes who’hath sold his land, and now doth beg
A licence, old iron, bootes, shooes, and eggge-
Shels to transport; Shortly boyes shall not play
At span-counter, or blow-point, but they pay
Toll to some Courtier. (IV, 103-107)
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With no indication of a change of speaker, the voice of gossip, obsessed with the wealth and social condition of others, turns to satire, bitterly commenting upon the material corruption of society. The similarity between the two soon becomes more pronounced, and more dangerous, as the conversation turns from such “triviall household trash” to the moral and political sins of the court (IV, 98).

Although Hester asserts that the courtier “transforms the ‘termes’ of satire into libelous trash,” the distinction is much more nuanced than such a condemnation would

indicate. In response to the courtier’s statement that the speaker would benefit from a life at court—“If of court life you knew the good, / You would leave your lonenesse” (IV, 67-68)—the satirist argues for the vice of his surroundings, condemning the Elizabethan court as a den of sin:

… I said, “Not alone
My lonenesse is. But Spartanes fashion,
To teach by painting drunkards, doth not tast
Now; Aretines pictures have made few chast:
No more can Princes courts, though there be few
Better pictures of vice, teach me vertue.” (IV, 67-72)

In the mouth of the courtier, however, the generalized satire of the Elizabethan court—the speaker singles out no member of the court, nor does he condemn a particular crime—becomes actionable and even treasonous in its specificity:

He, like a priveleg’d spie, whom nothing can
Discredít, Libells now ’gainst each great man.
He names a price for every office paid;
He saith, our warres thrive ill, because delai’d;
That offices are entail’d, and that there are
Perpetuities of them, lasting as farre
As the last day; And that great officers,
Doe with the Pirates share, and Dunkirkers.
Who wasts in meat, in clothes, in horse, he notes;
Who loves Whores, who boys, and who goats. (IV, 119-128)

In the first passage, Donne’s speaker expressly directs his diatribe to the court, which he denounces as a den of sin. However, the satire is also self-directed. Again, he narrows the difference between his own satire and the libel of the courtier, acknowledging that his own art, like that of the courtier, is consumed by and with vice. Like the Spartans, who would show young men the slovenly deeds of drunken men to make them abhor sin, and “Aretine’s pictures” that promise to make “few chast” through their pornography, satire’s portraits of

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363 Hester, 82.
vice divorce it from its goal of reformation, replacing its concern for the moral health of its
targets with salacious depictions of sin.

Donne spotlights the similarities between satire and libel more than their differences.
Although modern scholarship would assert the legitimacy of one and the criminality of the
other, Donne’s poem actively and repeatedly blurs the moral and legal distinction between
them. Annabel Patterson has argued that, by ventriloquizing the more severe and salacious
satire of the court through the mouth of the courtier, Donne is able to distance himself from
the charge of libel and its accompanying punishment.\(^{364}\) By portraying his speaker as an
unwilling audience of the courtier’s slanders, Donne is able to give voice to juicy gossip
about members of the court—because who would not want to hear “Who loves Whores, who
boys, and who goats”—but also is able to construct his speaker’s disapproval of such
defamation as an authorial safeguard.\(^{365}\) While I agree that it is likely Donne is indulging his
audience’s desire for topicality through a satirical sleight of hand, Patterson’s reading hinges
upon the satirist’s clear condemnation of the courtier’s libels, a condemnation that occurs in
only muted form in the satire itself.

Although Donne drastically shifts the tone of his satire immediately after the
courtier’s satiric monologue—perhaps realizing that it is necessary to contradict the
courtier’s message—the shift leaves unsatisfied the reader’s desire for condemnation. From
this moment onward, Satire IV replaces the Horation model of satire, characterized by the
speaker’s witty repartee and sarcasm, with images of contamination and infection. Indeed,

\(^{364}\) Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 101.

\(^{365}\) Patterson goes on to assert that Donne’s aim in Satire IV is fundamentally subversive: Donne “articulates,
with fine insight, the psychological consequences of a repressive culture.” She goes on to argue that Donne is
able to thwart the conventions of state criticism through his “strategy of having another figure, of whom he
purports to disapprove, do his libeling for him” (101) While I enjoy her analysis, I am not sure I can agree
wholly with her argument.
the satirist remains silent for the rest of the interaction with the courtier.  

This imagery of contamination is commonly interpreted as Donne’s fear—allegorized through his speaker—of prosecution. In this reading, the fear of prosecution comes from outside: as Hester asserts, “Just as Glaze, ‘catch’d, was faine to [suffer] the Statutes curse’ (9-10), so, the satirist realized, he might be implicated for complicity in the bore’s treasonous slime.”

While the satirist does fear the prosecution and imprisonment that threaten traitors and libelers of public officials, he fears more keenly his own moral complicity in the libelous conversation.

Fearing his own complicity in the courtier’s libels, the satirist retreats inward to examine his own soul, comparing the courtier to Circe and himself to her prisoners in an image that supports both his condemnation of his companion and his admission of his own guilt. He laments, “I more amas’d then Circes prisoners, when / They felt themselves turne beasts, felt my selfe then / Becoming Traytor” (IV, 129-131). Most overtly, Donne’s metaphor casts the libelous courtier as a mythological force that would reduce the satirist to a criminal, as Circe reduced her prisoners to beasts. Such a admonitory reading of the Circe myth was common, denouncing Circe as a witch, a whore, and a shrew, the men she bewitches as innocent victims of the enchantress. This reading of the satirist’s impotence

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366 Hester argues that the distinction in tone marks the failure of the satirist’s art: “When this linguistic Circe (129) turn[s] from idle conversation (51-60), self-flattery (61-67), gossip (95-108), and the affectation of foreign manners to lies, ‘Libells,’ and scandal-mongering (120-28), the satirist’s wit and Horatian ridicule fail […] him altogether” (78).

367 See Patterson, Censorship and Interpretation, 101-104.

368 Hester, 78.

369 In his Emblemata (1531), Andreas Alciati presents what Judith Yarnall calls a “popular woman-on-top topos”: he adapts the Circe myth to warn men of the dangers of prostitutes—cavendum a meretricibus—but also of the dangers of being subjected unnaturally to the domestic rule of women. Geoffrey Whitney likewise admonishes men to beware of their own sexual appetites, lest they be similarly enchanted. See Chapter 5,
recalls the seemingly unstoppable insinuation of Spenser's Sclaundr, whose defamatory railings “passing through the eares, would pierce the hart, / And wound the soule it selfe with griefe unkind … Her spitefull words did pricke, and wound the inner part” (IV, viii, 26.6-7.9). 370

But Donne’s use of the Circe myth in Satire IV also makes the satirist, like the men of Ulysses, an accomplice to his own degradation. In Chapman’s Homer, as well as in many other early modern allegorical interpretations of the Circe myth, the author implies the potential justice of Circe’s transformation of her masculine visitors. In his translation of The Odyssey, Chapman honors the mild rebuke implicit in the original, labeling the sailors of Ulysses “unwise” and as “Fooles” for journeying to Circe’s court; Mercury likewise rebukes Ulysses as “erring” before he gives him the moly that will protect him from Circe’s charms. 371 In another adaptation, Circe’s prisoners are changed into beasts that represent their own vices and sinful proclivities: Natale Conti’s Mythologiae interprets the legend allegorically, arguing that Homer means the legend as an admonition for men to bridle their sinful passions. 372 Still other commentators go further, extending the imprudence of the sailors that Homer implies to outright blame. In his book of emblems, Emblemata (1531),


371 George Chapman, Homers Odysseys, Translated according to ye Greeke (London: Richard Field, 1615), 151-152.

372 “That’s why Ulysses’ companions were changed into animals while he remained invincible, because of his wisdom, which is God’s true gift. For it seems to me that Ulysses represents the rational part of our soul, while Circe stands for Nature, and Ulysses’ companions the mental faculties conspiring irrationally with our bodily desires” (477). Earlier, he is not as diplomatic in his rebuke: “each one of Ulysses’ men was turned into a different kind of brute animal, depending on which repulsive vice he embraced. Those who lusted after sensual pleasures became pigs, the angry types became lions or bears, and the rest also became animals matched to their vices” (476). See Natale Conti’s Mythologiae. 2 vols. trans. John Mulryan and Steven Brown (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).
Andreas Alciati uses the myth to condemn men who abdicate their rational masculinity to unfit women. Likewise, in Geoffrey Whitney’s *A Choice of Emblems* (1586), the author adapts the story from Ovid to demonstrate the prisoners’ desire to remain as beasts: “those foolish sort, whome wicked love doth thrall, / Like brutish beasts do passe their time, and have no sense at all. / And though he that wisdome woulde, they should againe retire, / Yet, they had rather Circes serve, and burne in their desire.”

Donne’s insistence upon the emerging and infectious guilt of his speaker complicates any easy distinction the reader might make between satire and libel, signaling Donne’s ambivalence regarding his chosen mode.

Although the author is careful to portray the speaker as an unwilling accomplice, his speaker’s sense of shared guilt elides the artificial separation that would cast satire as legitimate rebuke and portray libel as criminal defamation. While Joshua Scodel has argued that “The satirist has reason to fear both prosecution and contamination” from his interlocutor, interpreting Donne’s metaphor of contamination to separate the two conversationalists, I would argue that Donne works within the system of prosecution and contamination to problematize any clear denunciation we as readers might make of libel.

In a letter to Henry Goodyer, dated April, 26th 1612, Donne attempts to recuperate the morality of libel, attributing to such criminal defamation the goal of reformation more commonly attributed to more “legitimate” satire. Speaking harshly of the libels that sought to defame the deceased Salisbury, Donne marks the difference between the rebukes that aim towards amendment and those that cowardly defame the dead:

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374 Scodel, 371.
But I would all these (or better) had been made then, for they might then have wrought upon him; and they might have testified that the Authors had meant to mend him, but now they can have no honest pretense. I dare say to you, where I am not easily misinterpreted, that they may be cases, where one may do his Countrey good service, by libelling … For, where a man is either too great, or his Vices too generall, … there is no way, but this extraordinary accusing, which we call Libelling.\footnote{John Donne, \textit{Letters to Severall Persons of Honour} (1651), 90-91.}

Here, Donne credits the goal of reformation as the necessary distinction between legitimate rebuke and criminal defamation. He marks the slipperiness of criminal speech in the same letter, commenting that some libels, such as those defaming dead emperors, through “ignoble and useless…escape the nature of libels, by being subscribed and avowed: which excuse would not have served the Star-chamber, where sealed Letters have been judged libels.”\footnote{Ibid., 91-92.}

On one hand, the fear his speaker expresses regarding the “Giant Statutes” that would “ope his jaw / To sucke” in the speaker overtly criminalizes the courtier’s speech, marking the distinction between the courtier’s defamation and the speaker’s. On the other hand, Donne’s speaker cannot be characterized as resolutely condemning the libelous talk of the courtier: despite his “loathing,” he enables the courtier to defame men and officers of the court for a variety of offenses, whether true or untrue. Neither Donne’s speaker nor the courtier can claim his speech as legitimate. As the courtier slanders these men, the satirist is portrayed as a passive recipient of the courtier’s news. He makes himself—at least in his own mind—the bearer of the courtier’s sin, sharing his guilt willingly. Specifically, he portrays himself in sexual congress with the courtier, the slanders of the courtier transforming the satirist’s body from a pure entity to a sordid and diseased vessel of sin: “as burnt venom’d Leachers doe growe sound / By giving others their soares, I might growe / Guilty, and he free” (IV, 133-
136). In the end of their conversation, nothing is resolved. Donne closes the episode not with denunciation, but with greater acquiescence: the conversation ends because the courtier leaves, not the speaker.

When the satirist returns to court after his retirement, he is presented with yet another type of defamatory speech, what Hester has called “another perversion of man’s ‘gift of utterance.’” For Donne, Glorius represents a type of self-satisfied and self-absorbed satire, a version of admonitory speech that has replaced the laudable goal of reformation with an ambitious self-interest that would rail at everything and everyone. Donne’s portrait of Glorius demonstrates that Glorius has distorted satire by divorcing it from its search for truth, twisting it into something reprehensible:

But here comes Glorius that will plague them both,
Who, in the other extreme, only doth
Call a rough carelessnesse, good fashion;
Whose cloak his spurres teare; whom he spits on
He cares not; His ill words doe no harme
To him; he rusheth in, as if “Arme, arme,“
He meant to crie; And though his face be‘as ill
As theirs which in old hangings whip Christ, yet still
He strives to looke worse, he keepes all in awe;
Jeasts like a licenc‘d foole, commands like law. (IV, 219-228)

Donne constructs the two extremes of bad speech: flattery, portrayed by Donne’s parodic preacher-wooer, Macrine, and abuse, portrayed by Glorius. In contrast to Macrine’s adulation, Glorius would abuse everything indiscriminately, guided only by his selfish interests: Donne insists that “whom he spits on / He cares not; His ill words doe no harme / To him.” Demeaning the gift of speech to mere spit, Glorius divorces the goal of reformation

377 Hester, 88.

378 Scodel’s argument for the speaker’s recourse to the Aristotelian mean here is very insightful. See “‘None’s Slave,’” 375; for his argument of such extremity and mean in the rest of Donne’s poetry, see the first chapter of Excess and Mean in Early Modern English Literature (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), 37-38.
from the exercise of railing, “His ill words” do not instill virtue, but “harme.” By returning to the enjambment of the first portion of the poem in his assertion that his “words doe no harme / To him,” Donne suspends Glorius’s damnable self-absorption until the next line to highlight the difference between his self-serving satire and that of the speaker. According to Hester, Glorius, “unlike Donne’s satirist,…is stirred only by personal ambition and greed.”

Donne’s portrait condemns Glorius for his selfish purposes, but also for his satiric indecorum. Self-consciously fashioning himself as a composite of the rough-born, harsh-spoken satyr figures popular at the time of Donne’s writing, Glorius takes the role of the scourge of the court, but he misuses satire, directing it indiscriminately at all members of the court. He converts righteous satire into mere abuse: caricaturing satire, he puts on the mask of “rough carelessness,” or disdainful rusticity, manufacturing himself as the popular satyr figure who ought to “goe rag’d and bare: / And show his rougher and his hairy side.”

Glorius misinterprets the ethics behind the satiric personae, however: as Thomas Lodge puts it, the satirist assumes the rustic identity for protection, so that men “might wiselye, under the abuse of …[the satyr’s] name, discover the follies of many of theyr foolish fellow citizens.”

Of course, Glorius’s unpleasant demeanor does not come from a genuine concern for mankind, but from the idea that such disdain is “good fashion.” His spurs that rip his affected cloak stand inappropriately ready to shred violently his opponent, signaling “the

379 Hester, 88.

380 Glorius, like Shakespeare’s parodic malcontent Jacques, “will rail against all the first-born of Egypt” for lack of a better target. William Shakespeare, As You Like It, II, v. 63.


382 Thomas Lodge, Defense of Poetry (1579), I: 80.
‘course attire’ of his assaults.” 383 Donne portrays Glorius as a morally flawed version of a satirist, skulking around the court railing indiscriminately at anyone he desires to rail against. Glorius, like the courtier before him, represents the flawed public administration of satire, easily misdirected against goodness instead of vice, often motivated by self-interest or ambition rather than a concern for reformation.

Again, however, the satirist is not able to completely distinguish his own art from the self-promotional and indiscriminate satire of Glorius. Donne’s speaker returns to the court for no known reason. Having railed to God against the unnaturalness of the court, the speaker suddenly appears in its midst, without explanation or clear agenda. Indeed, positioning himself in the presence chamber, Donne’s satirist is more deeply entrenched in the court than even his previous inexplicable visit to the “picture of vice.” He associates himself openly with the sinful inhabitants of the court, observing that “All whom the Mues, / Baloune, Tennis, Dyet, or the stewes / Had all the morning held, now … in flocks, are found / In the Presence, and I, (God pardon mee.)” (IV, 175-179). Donne’s speaker likens himself to those courtiers who amuse themselves with a variety of pleasures, from the more virtuous horse riding (Mues) and recreational athletics such as hand-ball (Baloune) and tennis, to the more sinful pleasures of whoring (Dyet and the stewes). Like them, the speaker is found in the court. The speaker acknowledges his “sin of going” again, asking God to pardon him his offense, but the speaker’s attraction to the court is too strong. While he may not go to court with the express purpose of self-promotion, the speaker offers no virtuous explanation of his actions. Left to surmise as to his motivation, Donne’s audience may see him very much like Glorius.

383 Hester, 88.
Attesting to the volatile relationship between the satirist and his audience, the courtier and Glorius represent the malignant interpretation of public satire as libel and as ambitious cruelty. Throughout his career, Donne expresses a nervous anxiety about the possibility of misinterpretation, couching many of his satiric comments in terms of caution. Articulating his concern that his satire will be disregarded or maligned, Donne appears apprehensive about his political future, as Patterson asserts, but also about the godliness of his satiric occupation. For example, in the letter to Goodyer quoted above, Donne balances his satiric authority with a statement that speaks to his anxiety: “I dare say to you, where I am not easily misinterpreted…” In a statement that could refer equally to Satire IV as well as Donne’s letter to Henry Goodyer, Annabel Patterson points out, “Donne’s language is more informative than, perhaps he knew. ‘I dare say,’ which momentarily invokes the satirist’s own audacity, is quickly counteracted by the now-characteristic note of caution, ‘where I am not easily misinterpreted.’”

Donne attempts to ensure the correct interpretation of his satires by shrinking his audience to those who would understand the proper meaning and goals of his satire.

Although it is tempting to read the satirist’s flight from court as a simple repudiation of society, Donne prevents his readers from reducing his satire to a mere encomium of the removed contemplative life. Far from a solution to the corruption of the court, the speaker’s retreat is presented as an equally problematic moral choice, one that would sacrifice the courage and charity of satire for the speaker’s salvation. Reeling from his encounter with the courtier, Donne’s speaker retreats from the corrupted and corrupting court to the retirement of his home, content to separate himself finally from his libelous companion. Donne portrays his retreat to be one of flight from the claustrophobia of the sinful court: “I, (which did see /

384 Patterson, Censorship and Interpretation, 105.
All the court filled with more strange things then he) / Ran from thence with such or more hast, then one / Who fears more actions, doth make from prison” (IV, 151-154). Once he is released from the courtier, freed from the “prison” of the courtier’s libel, the satirist is able to see clearly the sin around him and fly the corruption that would stain his soul. Separated from the court’s sinfulness, the satirist reprimands himself for visiting such an avatar of sin. Donne’s poem does not conclude with the speaker’s satiric self-rebuke, however. The speaker is not allowed to rest in the easy isolation of his study; instead, Donne portrays the retirement of the speaker, like his visit to the court, as yet another instruction in his satiric art.

Having realized the depth of his “sin of going” through his tortuous conversation with the courtier, the speaker abjures the court’s moral infection in favor of the “wholesome solitariness” of isolation. Once he has removed himself physically from the court, the speaker attempts to restore himself, struggling to balance properly his charity toward the members of the court and his scorn of their sins:

At home in wholesome solitariness
My precious soul began, the wretchedness
Of suitors at Court to mourn, and a trance
Like his, who dreamed he saw hell, did advance
Itself on me, such men as he saw there,
I saw at Court, and worse, and more; low fear
Becomes the guilty, not the accuser; then
Shall I, none’s slave, of high-born, or raised men
Fear frowns? And, my mistress Truth, betray thee
To th’ huffing braggart, puffed nobility? (IV, 155-164)

Temporarily isolated from the corruption that infects the court, “in wholesome solitariness,” the speaker turns inward to examine and heal his own soul. Having endured the satiric education of the court, the satirist is converted from his “sin of going,” but has yet to consider fully his own salvation. Only in the quiet retirement of his home can the satirist
interrogate the state of his “precious” soul, which, except for a few parenthetical asides, has been largely absent from his journey to the court.

However, the satirist’s full consideration of his “precious” soul ironically reaffirms his duty to the courtiers he has left behind. The satirist’s meditation on the state of his salvation causes him to consider the members of the court. Although they are now physically separated from the satirist, as he desired, the “wretchedness” of their souls causes the satirist to pity his former targets. Having preserved his own soul, the satirist is capable of empathy; his charity is reinvigorated and re-centered. The satirist’s soul begins “to mourne” the sinfulness of the courtiers he had met, re-establishing his charity for the members of the court. His pity of the courtiers is not sufficient, however. Now separated from the moral corruption that pervades the court, the speaker must balance his charitable pity to the sinful courtiers with righteous anger at their sins.

The speaker’s pity and his anger may be irreconcilable. The Dantean trance that comes upon the speaker instructs him to counteract his pity with a righteous scorn that is grounded in his moral authority as a satirist. In order to motivate his satiric instruction, the trance encourages the speaker to reinvigorate his satire with an anger that is interested perhaps less in reformation than in punishment. As Dante is guided through the Inferno, encouraged by Virgil to scorn violently the sins of the damned, so Donne’s speaker is instructed to rebuke with anger the sins of the courtiers. In the world of the trance, there is little room for pity.

385 Hester argues a slightly different chronology: he asserts that the Dantean trance that comes over the speaker acts as a reward for his pity of the courtiers: according to Hester, the trance occurs “only after the satirist’s ‘precious soule’ (one manuscript reads ‘piteous soule’) respond[s] charitably to the sinners of the court” (85). While this sequence works within the larger trajectory of the five satires, reinforcing a reading of the speaker’s struggle to portion out pity and scorn justly, Hester’s interpretation skims over the very real dangers witnessed in the court by Donne’s speaker.
The trance visited upon the speaker revises his earlier experience in the court in order to correct his previous satiric impotence. Constructed in a very similar manner to the speaker’s foray to the court, the trance elicits the same anxiety in the speaker as that of his encounter with the courtier. First, Donne asserts the speaker as an unwilling participant in the trance: it “did advance itself” upon the speaker, a phrase that recalls his earlier portrayal of his aggressive companion, “towards me did run / A thing more strange” (17-18). Next, the speaker increases the amount and severity of the sin inhabiting the court to create a hellish parody of the court that is ready to burst at the seams: “such men as he saw there / I saw at Court, and worse, and more” (IV, 159-160) Correcting his satiric failure of his previous visit, where he was likened to the libelous conversation of the courtier, the trance, encourages the speaker to assert his righteous anger. The trance initially encourages the speaker to direct such anger inward, acknowledging his former “sin of going” before the speaker can pluck the beams out of the courtiers’ eyes. By first admonishing himself, the satirist is able to reassert and rectify his earlier satiric impotence: berating himself, he claims “low fear / Becomes the guilty, not the accuser.” Raising himself past the heights of those he would correct, the satirist demonstrates his call to satire: “Shall I, none’s slave, of high-born, or raised men / Fear frowns?” For the first time in the poem, the speaker unapologetically asserts his moral authority, constructing himself as an “accuser” of vice and reaffirming his loyalty to his “mistress truth” even in the face of misinterpretation. Demonstrating his reinvigorated satiric authority, the speaker calls on God to witness the vice of the court, asking Him, “Thou which since yesterday hast beene / Almost about the whole world, hast thou seen, / O sun, in

386 Narrating the suffering of his political enemy Filippo Argenti, Dante is motivated by a self-righteous and momentarily self-interested scorn. Speaking to Virgil, Dante pleads to witness his suffering more: “‘O master, I am very eager / to see that spirit soused within this broth / before we’ve made our way across this lake.’ And he to me: ‘Before the other shore / comes into view, you shall be satisfied; to gratify so fine a wish is right’” (Inferno VIII, ln. 52-57). Dante Alighieri, Inferno, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).
all thy journey, vanity, / Such as swells the bladder of our Court?” (IV, 166-168).

Dramatizing the speaker’s newfound satiric courage as a prayer for God to stand witness to the court’s sinfulness, Donne portrays his speaker’s satire as an expression of godly disdain.

After Donne’s speaker rails to God, decrying the unnatural sinfulness of the court, he immediately and inexplicably appears back in the very corruption and sinfulness he had earlier admonished. At once attracted to and repulsed by the court, the satirist has no clear reason for being in the presence chamber. Once there, however, he realizes the futility of his task: he can satirize the ladies as ships and men as pirates, he can mock Macrine, whose self-conscious primping would make “Heraclitus laugh,” and denounce Glorius for his ambition and cruelty, but the satirist cannot change their behaviors, much less their souls (IV, 197). In fact, he cannot separate his own rebuke from the self-promotional railings of Glorius. Confronted with the knowledge that his satire, while godly, will always either be disregarded or maligned, Donne’s speaker leaves the court a second time, meditating upon his own satiric authority.

Initially, Donne portrays the speaker’s final retreat from the corruption of the court as a defeat. The speaker is resigned to his satiric impotence, “Tyr’d” from his satiric foray into the den of sin (IV, 229). Described leaving the court, “pleas’d so / As men which from gaoles to’execution goe,” the speaker seeks the isolation of retirement, refiguring the *contempus mundi* of the first satire by withdrawing from the corrupt world into a coffin-like isolation (IV, 229-230). Radiating pessimism, the speaker ridicules the impotence of satire, questioning why the great chamber is “hung / With the seaven deadly sins,” when such displays of vice do so little to bring about the reformation of their audience (IV, 231-232).  

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387 Milgate notes that Donne’s question is “answered” by Richard Corbett: “And look’t soe like the Hangings they stood nere, / None could discerne which the true Pictures were” (See Milgate’s note to ln, 231-2).
Although resigned to satire’s inability to urge reformation, the satirist does not abandon his art. Confident in his moral imperative to satirize the court, he departs the court in a final satiric fury, privately proclaiming the moral bankruptcy of the “Ascaparts,” who are unfit for their job of guarding the Queen, caring for nothing besides their own rank and appetites (IV, 233-236). The narrative of the poem closes on the satirist’s retreat from court, but, in contrast to his previous flight, he acknowledges the muted authority of his satiric task, affirming himself to be a “Spie” for mistress truth (IV, 237). He presents his satire with a more limited scope, transforming his once public stance to that of a detached and private satiric persona.

Despite the speaker’s resignation in the narrative of the poem, Donne prevents his reader from dismissing his satire as wholly ineffective; rather, the conclusion of his satire returns his reader to the same ambivalence and irony that marked the speaker’s initial confession of his sins. In the concluding lines of the poem, the speaker reconstructs the frame of his confession, his soul’s salvation assured by his satiric duty, his public duty as a Christian satirist re-envisioned as a commitment to his faithful reader(s). He asserts:

…Preachers which are
Seas of Wit and Arts, you can, then dare,
Drowne the sinnes of this place, for, for mee
Which am but a scarce brooke, it enough shall bee
To wash the staines away; Though I yet
With Macchabees modestie, the knowne merit
Of my worke lessen: yet some wise man shall,
I hope, esteeme my writs Canonicall. (IV, 237-244)

Acknowledging that his satire will be misinterpreted by those outside his sphere of influence who are unfamiliar with his moral authority, Donne’s speaker retreats to an audience of wise and understanding readers, leaving the task of wide-ranging moral reformation in the hands of preachers, whose moral authority is well established by their godly lives. While the
satirist admits that his audience is limited to those who know and accept his moral authority, he does not abandon his satiric task. Instead, he shrinks his commitment to charity in the final moments of his poem, asserting that he will limit his satires to his intimate friends. He posits that his satires will help those “wise men” and women who will read them, deeming his “writs canonical” for their fidelity to the truth (IV, 244). The speaker’s reference here to “Macchabees modesty” returns to the same ambiguity that riddled the satirist’s opening confession. The last lines of II Maccabees (xv. 38), to which Donne apparently alludes, humbly petitions their readers: “If I haue done well and as the storie required, it is the thing that I desired: but if I haue spoken sclenderly & barely, I haue done that I coulde.”

The corresponding humility of Donne’s speaker cannot be taken as equally genuine, however. While he affects the modesty of his biblical source, his protestation rings hollow next to his confidence in the “knowne merit” of his work and his hope that “some wise man” will agree with him. Restricting the audience of his satires is not a cure-all for Donne’s problems. Donne limits the audience of his satires to “wise” understanders in order to prevent misinterpretation. By doing so, he restricts the ability of his satire to reform its audience. In short, the godly and the good do not need satire.

“I would have no such Readers as I can teach”

Conceiving of his audience as a group of likeminded individuals, Donne addresses “himself with stylistic boldness to a receptive audience of peers” but acknowledges that even such a restricted audience is not perfect. Donne reinforces his desire for a reciprocal

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388 The Bishops Bible (London, 1568).
understanding with his audience in his prefatory remarks to his topical *Metempsychosis*: "I would have no such Readers as I can teach." Collectively, Donne’s satires not only reflect his coterie’s writing styles and intellectual curiosities, they also define and restrict Donne’s audience: according to Harold Love, Donne considered the circulation of his poems within the coterie “as remaining in the private sphere.” By all accounts, the coterie environment appears to be intimate. “In context,” Marotti argues, “these [satires] proclaimed not only the values and attitudes poet and readers shared, but also the primary audience’s personal knowledge of Donne’s experience and behavior.”

Even this like-minded community of Jonsonian understanders was not without anxiety, however. Despite its claims to privacy, Donne’s verse was still published in a scribal medium; rather than relegate his poetry to the fire, he had it copied out and presented to a group of respected acquaintances, who were themselves empowered to copy it yet again and circulate it further afield. In his letters and verse, Donne often expresses his unease with even this limited publication of his verse, lamenting in “The Triple Fool” that he must hear his love verse spoken aloud:

> I am two fools, I know,  
> For loving, and for saying so  
> In whining poetry;  
> But where’s that wiseman, that would not be I,  
> If she would not deny? …  
> I thought, if I could draw my pains  
> Through rhyme’s vexation, I should them allay.  
> Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,  
> For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse.

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But when I have done so,
Some man, his art and voice to show,
Doth set and sing my pain,
And, by delighting many, frees again
Grief, which verse did restrain. …
And I, which was two fools, do so grow three;
Who are a little wise, the best fools be. (1-1-5,8-16, 21-22) \(^{393}\)

In this verse, Donne posits that the audience of his work is singular, limited to Donne himself. He writes in order to “allay” his pains, taming and fettering his “grief” to the meter and rhyme of his poem. Donne’s purpose is served in his process of invention and execution; the reading and re-reading of his verse is positioned as an unnecessary embarrassment. While the “public” release of his love poetry might cause Donne annoyance, the disclosure of his satires might cause Donne distress. It is understandable that he would be cautious. In a letter accompanying Donne’s poetic and prose paradoxes, he writes, “to my satyrs there belongs some feare and to some elegies, and these perhaps, shame…Therefore I am desirous to hyde them with out any over reconing of them or their maker.”\(^{394}\) Whether fearful of running afoul of the authorities or of his Creator, Donne endeavored to keep his poetry’s circulation restricted.

Having embodied the lessons of his satiric meditations, Donne confines his satiric commentary to the privacy of letters directed to specific friends and acquaintances rather than a potentially unlimited public. Restricting their audience to a singular reader selected by the author, Donne’s satires flourish. Removing himself from the world of the court, Donne continues to articulate anti-courtly satire—some of it even resembling the earlier libelous satire of the courtier—but reserves such volatile commentary for his private correspondence.


While the familiarity of the recipient and the relative privacy of letters presumably afforded Donne more freedom than manuscript poetry, he is still noticeably guarded about his participation in the court.\textsuperscript{395} He still puzzles out how precisely to satirize a corrupt and potentially corrupting court without becoming tainted by its infection.\textsuperscript{396}

In his letters to Henry Wotton, “Here’s no more newes, then vertue” and “Sir, more than kisses,” written contemporaneously to his fourth satire, Donne refigures and even repeats some of the same questions he engaged in Satire IV. As in Satire IV, Donne satirizes the active life of court politics in “Here’s no more newes,” written to the country-dwelling Wotton. In his letter, Donne acknowledges his reluctant participation in the corrupt society of courtiers, presenting the dangers of the court as relatively benign:

\begin{quote}
Here’s no more newes, then vertue:’I may as well
Tell you Cales, or S’ Michaels tale for newes, as tell
That vice doth here habitually dwell…

Then let us at these mimicke antiques jeast,
Whose deepest projects, and egregious gests
Are but dull Moralls of game at Chests.

But now ’tis incongruity to smile,
Therefore I end; and bid farewell a while,
At Court; though From Court, were the better stile. (1-3, 22-27)\textsuperscript{397}
\end{quote}

Donne begins his letter to his friend by pronouncing the lack of virtue at court to be so commonplace that the stale news of its vice need not be rehashed. Donne’s verse letter is

\textsuperscript{395} The privacy of verse letters (as opposed to satiric poetry circulated in a manuscript coterie) can be overstated. According to Love, the potential existed, even in such a seemingly private medium, for limitless replication; he points out that such replication would require “nothing more than a pen and a willingness to use it” (43).

\textsuperscript{396} W. Milgate argues that the most satiric verse letters, in particular the two I discuss below, are found commonly with the satires, so a distinction between the two may be artificial (lxv-lxviii). Nevertheless, the verse letters appear to have suffered (or perhaps benefited?) from a more limited circulation.

riddled with contradiction, however, speaking to a conflicted mind struggling to reconcile himself to his environment. His aversion to the courtly life notwithstanding, Donne admits that he still “haunts” the court (6); he insists, however, he does so only to sweeten his later retirement. In the second half of his letter, Donne affirms the benefit of scorn and his own satiric task as a means of protection and entertainment, encouraging those of the court to regard each other with “Suspitious boldnesse” and for his retired friend to join him in his “jeast” of the superficial concerns of the courtly inhabitants (16, 22). Donne contradicts himself again, positing in his letter’s conclusion that “tis incongruity to smile” at such sin. In the end, Donne closes his letter apologizing for his mere presence at court, affirming his preference for the retired life by closing “At Court; though From Court, were the better stile.”

In “Sir, more then kisses, letters mingle Soules,” Donne presents a darker version of the active life, one that promises its participants only the infection and corruption of vice. In the first half of the letter, Donne muses on the differences between the country, the city and the court, ultimately denouncing each as unfit for habitation. He dismisses them all: “so pride, lust, covetize, being severall / To these three places, yet all are in all” (31-32) 398 The differences between them do not pose a fit alternative to vice: in the country, “men become beasts,” in the city they are “blockes,” and, in the “lewd court, devils” (27-28). This letter demonstrates Donne rehearsing privately the same questions he posed in his fourth satire. He questions whether it is possible for a man to participate in the world but not be contaminated by it. Conversely, he ponders whether the isolation of private life is preferable. By the time he writes to Wotten, Donne has not yet reconciled the contradiction.

Marotti interprets the letter to be a blanket disavowal of public life. He bases his argument on Donne’s condemnation of prodigality, “Let no man say there, Virtues flintie wall / Shall locke vice in mee,’I’ll do none, but know all” (35-36). Asserting that Donne “suggests that the man involved in the world lies to himself and to others if he claims that he can participate in an evil environment but remain innocent,” Marotti argues that Donne’s verse letter presents “the moral solution” as “stoical withdrawal.” To make his case, Marotti must overlook the moral work of Donne’s satire as well as contradictory evidence in the poem that would praise Wotton for his active engagement in the world:

… Sir, I’advise not you, I rather doe
Say o’er those lessons, which I learn’d of you:
Whom, free from German schisms, and lightnesse
Of France, and faire Italies faithlesnesse,
Having from these suck’d all they had of worth,
And brought home that faith, which you carried forth,
I thoroughly love. (63-69)

Donne credits Wotton with what he had previously deemed impossible: the ability to refine the gross vice of public life to a substance of worth, engaging in the corrupt societies of Germany, France and Italy, taking the good and leaving the ill. Wotton perfectly embodies Donne’s self-sufficient yet engaged snail: “the snaile, which every where doth rome, / Carrying his owne house still, still is at home, / Follow (for he is easie pac’d) this snaile, / Bee thine owne Palace, or the world’s thy Gaole” (49-52). By balancing the self-sufficiency of stoic detachment and the charity that comes with participating in the world, the snail is able to refine the best of both worlds. In his letter to his friend, Donne enlarges the imprisonment of his satiric study onto the world: while in Satire I, his “standing wooden chest” contains him in his retirement, isolating him both physically and morally from the

399 Such a claim would reduce the satiric persona to a mere platform from which to announce the satrist’s own moral distinction from that which he would denounce. Marotti, John Donne, Coterie Poet, 121, 122.
contamination of the world, in “Sir, more than kisses,” Donne allows for the possibility of a pure, though detached, engagement with society. Even though Donne speculates that the pedagogical goal of his letter is unnecessary, that his friend should receive Donne’s praise rather than his feeble advice, his compulsion to proselytize runs throughout the letter. It is only in the very final moments of the letter that Donne redirects his advice from his self-sufficient and snail-like companion to himself. At the end of the sixteenth century, Donne’s satiric task continues to turn inward. He hints that he writes not for others after all, but for himself.
By the time the bishops banned the printing and circulation of satire in 1599, Donne had abandoned the mode, confining his satiric spirit to the privacy of letters and correspondences with his friends. He is joined in his rejection of satire’s goal of reformation by other verse satirists of the 1590s, namely Joseph Hall and John Marston, both of whom disavow their own satiric verse later in life. While they were writing satiric literature, however, their evaluations of the mode were not as rigid.

Joseph Hall is more optimistic than Marston. In his *Virgidemiarum*, he portrays a limited view of the power of satire to make society better. While satire promises to “Check the mis-ordered world, and lawlesse times,” it also seems to imperil its executioner (24):

I first adventure, with fool-hardie might
To tread the steps of perilous despight:
I first adventure: follow me who list,
And be the second English Satyrist.
Envie waits on my backe, Truth on my side:
Envie will be my Page, and Truth my Guide. (1-6) 400

Portraying his satiric task as “fool-hardie” and his satire as “despight,” Hall questions the godliness of his art while also positioning himself as a target of the misdirected scorn and envy he would reform. Despite this momentary pessimism, Hall closes his *Virgidemiarum* confident that satire may accomplish some good, asserting “the end of this paines was a Satyre, but the end of my Satyre a further good, which whether I attaine or no I know not, but

400 Joseph Hall, “Prologue,” in *Virgidemiarum.*
let me be plaine, with hope of profit.” Like Donne, Hall offers his satires as a singular experience of reformation, limited to the wise reader of his verse. He relegates satire to the private and intimate experience of reading. Even so, Hall expects to suffer some injury for attempting to reform his readers: he looks to be “set upon the racke of many mercilesse and peremptorie censure” by those who will judge his book “unlawfull … because a Satyre.”

John Marston is much more cynical than Donne or Hall, dismissing satire as a vain and violent attempt to mitigate the moral problems of society. Marston eventually concludes that satire is unable to reform the world’s overwhelming sins, resigning himself to his own satiric impotence:

Now Satyre, cease to rub our gauled skinnes,
And to unmaske the worlds detested sinnes.
Thou shalt as soone draw Nilus river dry,
As cleanse the world from foule impietie. (157-160)

According to Marston, satire can only bruise and harden the skins of the scourged with its discovery and exposure of vice. Much darker than that of the other verse satirists, Marston’s worldview presents the impiety of the world as entrenched and rampant, impossible to transform into virtue. Encountering such a Herculean task, Marston turns railer, the veneer of reformation that once authorized his satire gone, replaced with vengeance. In contrast to the charity and hope exercised by Donne and Hall in the face of corruption, Marston will enact his rage in the form of a fist:

Preache not the Stoickes patience to me,
I hate no man, but mens impeitie.
My soul is vext, what power will’th desist?

401 Joseph Hall, Virgidemiarum, 99.
402 Ibid., 97.
Marston’s desire to inflict punishment upon his audience is greater than his desire to reform them. Later in the same poem, he asserts, “O what dry braine melts not sharp mustard rime / To purge the snottery of our slimie time? … vengeance pricks me on” (70-73). Marston is urged by vengeance rather than godliness, and it is his vengeance that must be satisfied. It is this threat of vengeful destruction that poses the largest concern for the bishops.

The bishops recognized that, having been divorced from its goal of reformation, satire had become a much more dangerous, amorphous form of malicious speech that had replaced its assertion of moral good with a zeal for criticism and destruction. As Donne’s Satire IV prefigures, satire was associated with libel, its interest in society’s reformation replaced with an interest in defamation. The bishops’ ban represents an exasperated attempt by the authorities to curtail the malicious speech that threatened power structures and scourged political and religious institutions. If such unauthorized speech were to remain unchecked, the authority of the church, court and even parliament would be questioned, opening them to the charges of hypocrisy, false dealing, and even heresy. Having transformed from godly rebuke to mere defamation, such “booke[s] of the nature of theise,” were put down.

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