Allegories of Fanaticism

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This chapter explores how Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* struggles to represent religious fanaticism with one metaphor and one simile—the 'organ' of divine might and the 'swarm' of flies, respectively—and it examines the consequences these figures have for the poem's thinking about divine inspiration and action.[1] I define fanaticism as it was often understood in the wake of the Anabaptist Peasant Uprising in Germany at the dawn of the Reformation: a dual process of self-annihilation and self-transformation that turns a person into an instrument of God's violence.[2] This is an understanding of fanaticism that ripples through the long Reformation, at least through the English Civil War; and Spenser's inquiry into it, though rarely studied, is no less powerful than Milton's in *Samson Agonistes*. I propose that at the centre of Spenser's transformation of Redcrosse at the end of Book 1 into an 'organ' of divine might lies an epistemological and representational crisis, a crisis that provokes a series of productive yet destabilising questions with which the poem will ever after wrestle, most threateningly in Book 5's likening of a fanatical collectivity to a 'swarm' of flies.

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Spenser's engagement with fanaticism asked in different ways whether the fanatic was a wilful agent or a divinely inspired instrument, and whether his countrymen, their readers, or the fanatic himself could tell the difference. To explore the significance of fanaticism in *The Faerie Queene*, I begin with a reading of Redcrosse's transformation at the end of Book 1 and the interpretative dilemma that arises around its reception early in Book 2. I then show how the poem grows more worried about its capacity to distinguish true instruments of the divine, and I locate this anxiety at its acutest in the Egalitarian Giant episode of Book 5, where the poem works ambivalently to expel fanaticism's antinomian threat. In tune with this book's focus on form and knowledge, this chapter claims that Spenser considers the relationship between knowing and unknowing in the fanatic's violent act *in* and *as* allegory, allegory understood to encompass verse techniques for producing personifications to teach by example. Indeed, representations of fanaticism in the poem suggest that allegory in its purest form may no longer be allegory and may itself become fanatical: the emptying out of a character and incarnation of divine will.

Organs of Divine Might

'THE LEGENDE OF THE KNIGHT OF THE RED CROSSE/*OR*/ OF HOLINESSE': this is how the first page of Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* describes its contents.[3] This '*OR*' raises a question about whether the book will primarily be about Redcrosse as a character or about holiness as the book's central virtue. The usual way of answering the question, no doubt influenced by Spenser's own suggestions in the 'Letter to Raleigh', is to say that the book's aim is to 'fashion' Redcrosse the character into a proper personification of holiness. In the analysis that follows, I suggest the opposite: Redcrosse does not simply become 'fashioned' into 'holiness' but in fact holiness unfashions him as a character.

In his third attempt to fulfil his mission and destroy the dragon that holds Una's parents captive, Redcrosse seems to become, finally, the personification of holiness that he was destined to be, and yet in that moment of triumph the poem elides his agency:

> And in his first encounter, gaping wyde,
>> He thought attonce him to haue swallowed quight,
>> And rusht vpon him wth outragious pryde;
>> Who him rencountring fierce, as hauke in flight,

> Perforce rebutted backe. The weapon bright
> Taking aduantage of his open iaw,
> Ran through his mouth with so importune might,
> That deepe emperst his darksom hollow maw,
> And back retyred, his life blood forth with all did draw. (1.11.53)

The pronominal ambiguity in this stanza is significant: the 'he' and 'his' that refer to Redcrosse and the dragon become especially difficult to track in the first four and a half lines.[4] In the second sentence, Redcrosse disappears as a grammatical subject entirely, supplanted by his weapon, which becomes, paradoxically, a medium for unmediated divine violence: 'The weapon bright/Taking aduantage of his open iaw,/Ran through…'. The rhyming of 'bright' and 'might' further underscores that the force seems to emerge from the sword rather than from Redcrosse. This is perhaps the most difficult allegorical crux at the end of Book 1, a book that has been especially concerned, from the very first stanza, with the problem of how to know who or what something is: Redcrosse suddenly made new by God, finally 'fashioned' into the virtue of holiness, is at the same time unmade as subject and agent. The 'importune might' of God becomes manifest in the world of the allegory through him by erasing him.

As is common in *The Faerie Queene*, characters gather to interpret a particularly difficult moment like this one. At the beginning of Book 2, Redcrosse hands off the baton to Guyon, but Guyon's sidekick, the Palmer, takes a moment to gloss the end of Book 1:

> Ioy may you haue, and euerlasting fame,
>   Of late most hard atchieu'ment by you donne,
>   For which enrolled is your glorious name
>   In heauenly Regesters aboue the Sunne,
>   Where you a Saint with Saints your seat haue wonne:
>   But wretched we, where ye haue left your marke,
>   Must now anew begin, like race to ronne;
>   God guide thee, *Guyon*, well to end thy warke,
> And to the wished hauen bring thy weary barke.
>
> Palmer, him answered the *Redcrosse* knight,
>   His be the praise, that this atchiu'ment wrought,
>   Who made my hand the organ of his might;
>   More then goodwill to me attribute nought:
>   For all I did, I did but as I ought. (2.1.32–33)

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

Readers attentive to Spenser's theology, from A. S. P. Woodhouse to Daryll Gless, often take Redcrosse's correction as a didactic lesson about the theology of grace, a Protestant hero correcting the mistake of a presumably Catholic Palmer.[5] But more is at stake in this interpretative divergence than doctrinal precision. Redcrosse does more than remind the Palmer that willed temperance is not sufficient for salvation or for the violent execution of God's will. Rather, he insists that he himself was not the agent of that violence. 'His be the prase, that this atchieu'ment wrought' counters the Palmer's earlier attribution of agency to Redcrosse and renders the actual agency of the 'atchieu'ment' ambiguous. 'Wrought' is equivocal in its ascription of agency; it fails to disclose who actually 'wrought' the 'atchieu'ment'. And this line tracks in two directions syntactically. If 'atchieu'ment' is a subject, then the line suggests that the 'atchieu'ment' itself wrought the praise that is due to God. But if achievement is a direct object, then it is the praise (perhaps Redcrosse's own performance of praise in the past) that wrought this 'atchieu'ment'. The grammatical doubleness at once draws our attention to Redcrosse's desire to highlight God's achievement and makes it literally difficult to determine the agent of the 'atchieu'ment'. The next dependent clause—the next line—seems meant to clarify the situation. 'Who made my hand the organ of his might' retroactively renders it unambiguous that God transmuted Redcrosse into an 'organ', and thus God was the agent and Redcrosse's hand a passive vessel. But in the following line, Redcrosse asks to have 'goodwill'—though no more than 'goodwill'—'attribute[d]' to him, and this is hard to square with the sense that he undertook the 'atchieu'ment' only as an 'organ'. What does 'goodwill' look like when one is not in control of one's own will, or when the divine empties an individual's will to make him an organ of violence? 'Attribute', too, is more ambiguous than it first seems; if 'goodwill' needs to be attributed, it is not inherently present. In his correction of the Palmer, Redcrosse opens up a series of questions about the will that the poem does not resolve. In what sense does a passive organ have 'goodwill', except perhaps as an external force that God supplies to it?[6] Or, in a distinction familiar from a recent philosophical discussion by Daniel Wegner,

might we attribute to Redcrosse the *experience* of 'goodwill'—perhaps the only mode in which his mind, as it tries to recollect its own annihilation after the fact, can register the presence of God—without concluding that that experience implies his will as cause?[7] Or is it rather that the transformed Redcrosse cannot even properly be said to have experience, since he was annihilated so that God could inhabit him? In this sense, 'goodwill' would be the affective passivity opened up at the moment Redcrosse is transformed into an organ—the very opposite of an act undertaken by his own will.

Redcrosse's response to the Palmer draws our attention to the fact that these stanzas are thinking about the ambiguity of Redcrosse's transformation precisely through the poetic techniques by which they are 'wrought'— and the use of repetition and rhyme are significant for how stanza 33 in particular develops a sonic texture to address Redcrosse as an organ. Redcrosse's slightly pat but cryptic 'For all I did, I did but as I ought' raises more questions about the agency driving this *doing* than it answers. The repetition obscures the chain of causation that 'made' Redcrosse's 'hand' do God's will. The stanza's rhymes reverberate that concealing anadiplosis: 'ought' is conjoined with the rhyme words 'wrought' and 'nought', making the question of duty and will all the more difficult to surmise. 'Ought' (duty) is contained within both 'wrought' (which refers ambiguously to the agency of this 'atchieu'ment') and 'nought' (which refers to Redcrosse's lack of agency). Redcrosse's achievement—the fulfilment of the 'ought' for which he was 'wrought'—renders his will 'nought', emptied out at the very moment he is re-fashioned into the achieved allegory of holiness. This is more than an instance of what Gordon Teskey calls allegorical capture, where the poem's disordered and wandering meaning gets coercively straightened into an orderly didactic personification.[8] In an instant we witness—or at least this is what Redcrosse's account wants to argue for—the totality of divine capture, where allegory itself is evacuated in the face of sacred presence: Redcrosse becomes holiness insofar as he becomes purely an instrument of divine violence.

Andrew Escobedo has claimed that one of Spenser's greatest innovations in Book 1 is the synthesis of Redcrosse's apocalyptic and national identities in the final canto, suturing sacred time within earthly time and inscribing a moment of apocalyptic violence within a genealogy of English nationhood.[9] Yet before he is safely converted to Saint George, he is reducible to neither the allegorical consolidation of holiness nor the epic ambitions of retrospective nation-founding. He is, rather, an absolute manifestation of God's violence. But fanaticism also offers an epistemological and ethical problem, one that the Palmer's re-description of

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Redcrosse's 'atchiu'ment' poses acutely. After all, the poem authorizes neither the Palmer's attempt to demystify Redcrosse's violence as willful heroism nor Redcrosse's interpretation of his own divine inspiration (which has its own equivocations). The reader is left to choose without definitive evidence, pushing Book 1's epistemological concerns, which we thought we had left behind at the start of Book 2, to a kind of breaking point. How can spectators—the Palmer, we the readers—know whether Redcrosse has truly become a tool of divine violence, or whether such a violent act is really a 'most hard atchieu'ment by [him] donne'?

This question is worked out through both the form and content of Redcrosse's transformation; and it leads Spenser to reflect, with increasing ambiguity as the poem unfolds, on how allegory can—or cannot—represent the violent manifestation of the divine in the poem. It will be useful here to explain how critics often describe the way allegory works as a kind of possession in Spenser's poem, and to register the difficulties that fanaticism presents for this mode of thinking about allegory. Criticism on allegory, in particular the Spenserian kind, has long been concerned with its structural dependence on the negation or destruction of individual will. Most influentially, Angus Fletcher considered allegory as a medium in which daemonic possession and compulsion act as structural norms.[10] More recent theorists have developed the formal contours of the daemonic in allegory, elaborated in Gordon Teskey's claim that allegory literalises Neoplatonic *raptio*.[11] But these accounts have not explicitly addressed what place there is in Spenser's allegorical poem for the absolute expression of God's will. Fanaticism poses this question, and in doing so it is a radical case of Susanne Wofford's claim that '[m]oments in which the figurative scheme of the poem must be made to have effect within the action become fictionally moments of compulsion or possession […], with the resulting moral and aesthetic difficulty that no means for distinguishing a divinity from a daemon can be proposed within the text'.[12] What happens, then, when Redcrosse as allegorical sign becomes an organ of divine violence that has effect within the world of the poem?

Following Isabel MacCaffery, theorists of Spenserian allegory tend to agree that the mode is 'analytic' in its purest sense; allegory breaks things down, seeks to order meaning in and against the disorderly genre of romance.[13] It explains the motives of characters and illustrates why they act in certain ways by reducing them to a stable meaning. Allegory, in other words, assumes at a structural level that the fictional world it upholds is like a puzzle, in which each singularity can be represented as one interacting part within a whole. But fanaticism is or at least purports to be absolute: the

fanatic is not an emblem of an individual impulse in God's creation, but a pure, unrefracted expression of God's will. The fanatic *is* the whole, an absolute manifestation of divine might that forces the whole of the poem into its service, if only for an instant. Redcrosse becomes holy violence by losing himself, by having his will annihilated and replaced with the might of God. And yet as soon as the poem arrives at his personification, it also introduces doubt about allegory's capacity to help spectators and readers tell the difference between a truly inspired and divinely authorised knight and an insurrectionary or zealot who fraudulently claims that he enacts God's will. If the metaphor of the 'organ' of divine might is meant to reveal Redcrosse as an instrument of sacred force, the guarantee of English sovereignty itself, then it also threatens to obliterate the allegorical distinctions that the poem depends on to produce its mythopoesis of sovereignty.

Fanaticism is, then, indistinguishable from the workings of allegory in Redcrosse's transformation. For this reason fanaticism threatens allegory in at least two ways. First, it demands that we look back to an origin, to trace the source of divine inspiration or misdirected passion, yet it continually forces us to discover that we are barred from that origin—thus introducing an epistemological irresolution. Second, to return to the initial claim about Redcrosse's 'unfashioning', fanaticism unsettles the poem's didactic project. In the 'Letter to Raleigh', Spenser claims that the purpose of allegory is to 'fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'.[14] Yet in his conversion to an 'organ', Redcrosse comes to allegorise the *un*fashioning of 'virtuous and gentle discipline', an annihilation of the virtuous self the poem has been haphazardly building across Book 1. Redcrosse's transformation into a vessel of divine force requires that the narrative must risk losing both the personification of his sacred agency and the national didactic lesson he is meant to teach, since God's violence can be bound by neither. The poem has trouble sustaining, for more than the length of a canto, its confidence in Redcrosse's metamorphosis; it strains to discriminate between Redcrosse's claims to be an instrument of God and a range of supposedly false assertions of it that proliferate elsewhere in the poem.

Swarms

Spenser brought to light fanaticism's epistemological aporia with uncanny complexity; his manner of doing so through the form and content of his poem would prove extremely influential for Renaissance poetics. Yet rather than turning elsewhere to track the influence of Spenser's innovation, the

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

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

> For why, he sayd they all vnequall were,
>   And had encroched vppon others share,
>   Like as the sea (which plaine he shewed there)
>   Had worne the earth, so did the fire the aire,
>   So all the rest did others parts empaire.
>   And so were realmes and nations run awry.
>   All which he vndertooke for to repaire,
>   In sort as they were formed aunciently;
> And all things would reduce vnto equality.
>
> Therefore the vulgar did about him flocke,
>   And cluster thicke vnto his leasings vaine,
>   Like foolish flies about an hony crocke,
>   In hope by him great benefite to gaine,
>   And vncontrolled freedome to obtaine.
>   All which when *Artegall* did see, and heare,
>   How he mis-led the simple peoples traine,
>   In sdeignfull wize he drew vnto him neare,
> And thus vnto him spake, without regard or feare. (5.2.32–33)

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

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

The next stanza works to undo this vision of redemptive revolution. It re-casts the Giant's vision as demagoguery attractive only to the dipterous and self-aggrandising 'vulgar'. The narrator's exposure of opportunism as the real motive of the Giant and his followers is meant to demystify their claim to intimate knowledge of divine creation along with their call to return to its original 'equality'. The simile ('Like foolish flies about an hony crocke') suggests a worry, though: the possibility that the crowd follows the Giant not only for purposes of self-aggrandisement but also because they suffer from an instinctual attraction to his ideas. His rhetoric is sweet and sticky, drawing people in like flies looking for honeyed sustenance. In their 'cluster thicke', the people here create a new multiplicity, a momentary assemblage, a communal swarm. This is, after all, one of the great fears fanaticism provokes from Martin Luther onward: it causes people to be drawn to ideas and language that make them not only disobedient but also illegible to political and religious authority. Luther's original term for the fanaticism of the Anabaptists he denounced was '*Schwärmerei*', an indistinguishable swarm of flies.[16] But there is an unsettling ambiguity here, a difficulty in determining whether the danger inherent in this mass of people pre-exists the Giant's honeyed words or whether it is the honeyed words that make them so dangerous. The fact that the vulgar are rendered *like* flies underscores the narrator's self-conscious uncertainty about the vulgar. Are they always like flies, endogenously able to cluster together and foment rebellion at any moment, forever longing for 'uncontrolled freedom'? Or do they require a single instrumental leader to stir the honeyed pot, his rebellious words catching them like a contagion they may want to exploit but can never really resist?

The Giant and his flies wish to level not only the hierarchal structure of economic inequality but also the allegory of justice intervolved with it. Artegall recognises this in his accounts of the binding together of allegory and cosmos in the name of heavenly justice:

> Such heauenly iustice doth among them raine,
>   That euery one doe know their certaine bound,

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

Artegall's perspective could not be more dissonant with that espoused by the narrator in the proem to Book 5, for whom 'all things else in time are chaunged quight./Ne wonder; for the heauens reuolution/Is wandred farre from, where it first was pight' (Proem 4). By contrast, Artegall's 'heauenly justice' consists of everyone always knowing his place within the whole, his 'certaine bound'—implying both limitation and bondage. In this way heavenly justice resembles an overwrought allegory, a hyperbolically ossified example of what Angus Fletcher calls allegory's inclination toward the imposition of topocosmic unity, where 'euery one' has its place, remaining fixed in time, space, and meaning.[17] Over-reacting to the Giant's projected levelling, Artegall claims 'All change is perillous, and all chance vnsound'. Heavenly justice is absolute stasis, a perpetual 'retaining' of the course of things as they are and are meant to be—allegory at its most totalitarian, a cosmic naturalisation of a state in which every single being is bound to its place, and legible precisely because it remains there.

Such ordering of proper places, the cosmological hierarchy that binds them, and the allegorical structure by which heavenly justice can be read in political and environmental stasis—all require the Giant and his multitude's conversion or containment. The Giant is hardly convinced:

> Therefore I will throw downe these mountaines hie,
>   And make them leuell with the lowly plaine:
>   These towring rocks, which reach vnto the skie,
>   I will thrust downe into the deepest maine,
>   And as they were, them equalize againe.
>   Tyrants that make men subiect to their law,
>   I will suppresse, that they no more may raine;
>   And Lordings curbe, that commons ouer-aw;
> And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw. (5.2.38)

These levelling actions do not only threaten to redistribute wealth and property. The project to 'equalize againe' also hopes to undo utterly Artegall's

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

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

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

Artegall's 'certain bound' cannot be undone because it is God's 'mighty will'. Where Redcrosse averred that he momentarily became an organ of divine might, Artegall suggests that every action is reducible to God's agency. The Giant never contradicts Artegall's claim of God's sovereign agency. Instead he disputes the claim that God's will supports Artegall's hierarchical order and conception of justice. While Artegall's erasure of will yields an allegorical world of hierarchical, eternal stasis, the Giant implies that his will has been dissolved into the divine command to reduce the earth to its original state of shared plenitude. Here we have two visions of divine agency pitched in irremediable conflict. Artegall's encounter with the Giant introduces into *The Faerie Queene* the possibility that there can be two conflicting prophetic visions, both of which posit God as the author of all of men's actions.

The Giant's egalitarian project echoes the slogan supposedly uttered by the Anabaptist agitator and peasant organiser Thomas Müntzer at his execution in 1525, which itself echoed across the long Reformation: *omnia sunt communia*.[18] From the German Peasant Revolts of the 1520s through the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, fanatics like the Giant make the claim that God's will can be the primary agent of action, and might lead to the transformation of the world, a revolution in its social and political organisation. Artegall's and the Giant's prophetic claims—one to divine order, one to divine equalisation—cannot really be argued out. They meet in the form of what Jean-François Lyotard has described as a '*différend*', a conflict 'that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule

of judgment applicable to both arguments'.[19] Both parties posit but cannot present the divine will that could adjudicate the claims. Neither readers of the poem nor witnesses to this scene, including the crowd soon to be dispatched by Talus, can know which vision of the world God has authorised, and how they should act in order to live in accordance with divine 'band'.

Talus realises the problem this *différend* introduces both to the narrative and to allegorical design itself. This is why, without a word from Artegall, he approaches the Giant and 'shouldered him from off the higher ground,/And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him dround' (5.2.49). The demands of allegory and of Artegall's vision of heavenly justice require the violent expulsion of the Egalitarian Giant's threat. The only levelling allowed to—or rather inflicted on—the Giant is that his 'high aspyring' is 'humbled' with a correspondingly 'huge ruine' (5.2.50). He is levelled into a broken sign of equalisation's aspiration.

Although the poem violently expels the Giant in order for the allegory of justice to move forward, the description of the Giant's punishment offers resistance to the allegorical tableau that such violence tries to create:

> Like as ship, whom cruell tempest driues
>   Vpon a rocke with horrible dismay,
>   Her shattered ribs in thousand peeces riues,
>   And spoyling all her geares and goodly ray,
>   Does make her selfe misfortunes piteous pray. (5.2.50)

The narrator seems to pity the ruin: the tempest is 'cruell'. He tries to attenuate this touch of compassion by depicting the ship as having, somehow, made 'her selfe' into 'misfortunes piteous pray'. But the simile's assignment of agency to the inanimate ship does not entirely 'shatter' the sense that the Giant did not deserve this punishment, not any more than a ship could ever deserve to be so 'spoiled'. The detail of 'the shattered ribs' of the ship seems to signal a misfire in the allegory, too, since these ribs are also, of course, the *ribs* of a broken body. The simile collapses the allegorical and the bodily, registering a trace of the struggle to convert this brutalised body into the legible allegorical sign of 'high aspiring'.

Thus, the Giant's fanaticism introduces a series of theological, epistemological, and political problems that threaten the correlation between allegorical stability and judicial order. These problems extend to the main instrument of justice, too. The poem's response to the *différend* that arises between Artegall and the Giant is an ambivalent unleashing of Talus's mechanical violence. Talus finds the Giant 'lewdly minded' ('Whom when

so lewdly minded Talus found' [5.2.49]), and that seems to justify his violent outburst, but Spenser's syntax leads us, momentarily, to apply 'lewdly minded' to Talus as well, suggesting that the instrument of justice may have caught his contagious fanatical vulgarity. This syntactic ambiguity registers the potential of fanaticism to spread not only to the swarm surrounding the Giant but also to the machinery of justice. If Talus himself can appear 'lewdly minded', if only for an instant before readers iron out the reference, is the poem worried about whether his actions in fact secure heavenly justice and allegorical hierarchy?

It is Talus's violence against the cluster of people who witness his execution that embodies this worry most acutely:

> That when the people, which had there about
>   Long wayted, saw his sudden desolation,
>   They gan to gather in tumultuous rout,
>   And mutining, to stirre vp ciuill faction,
>   For certaine losse of so great expectation.
>   For well they hoped to haue got great good;
>   And wondrous riches by his innouation.
>   Therefore resoluing to reuenge his blood,
> They rose in armes, and all in battell order stood.
>
> Which lawlesse multitude him comming too
>   In warlike wise, when *Artegall* did vew,
>   He much was troubled, ne wist what to doo.
>   For loth he was his noble hands t'embrew
>   In the base blood of such a rascall crew;
>   And otherwise, if that he should retire,
>   He fear'd least they with shame would him pursew.
>   Therefore he *Talus* to him sent, t'inquire
> The cause of their array, and truce for to desire.
>
> But soone as they him nigh approching spide,
>   They gan with all their weapons him assay,
>   And rudely stroke at him on euery side:
>   Yet nought they could him hurt, ne ought dismay.
>   But when at them he with his flaile gan lay,
>   He like a swarme of flyes them ouerthrew;
>   Ne any of them durst come in his way,
>   But here and there before his presence flew,
> And hid themselues in holes and bushes from his vew. (5.2.51–53)

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

Meanwhile, Artegall, concerned about the possibility of his noble hands getting dirty with base blood, sends Talus 't'inquire/The cause of their array'. The poem's layered indecision about the group's motivation prepares the reader to experience this rebellious force as a fragmented and opaque totality, one then materialised in the image of the swarm of flies.

This swarm is significant in part because it evokes Luther's fanatics, *Schwärmer*, those Anabaptist peasants who revolted in Germany in the 1520s in the name of a communist utopia.[20] Luther claimed that these fanatics could not be reasoned with, and that they could not be punished and folded back into the civic order—they were, as Spenser's narrator says, a lawless multitude, and constitutively so. But what is interesting about the episode in Spenser is that Talus does not, and perhaps even cannot, kill them. So if Luther's swarms were too animalistic to deserve any fate other than death, why do Spenser's flies survive, and what are the consequences of their dispersal?

Of course, Talus overthrows the rout like a swarm of flies, which implies that they are relatively powerless. It is important that becoming like flies is not their punishment for being so frenzied, disorganised, collective, vulgar—they are already like flies, and Talus only needs to scatter them. That seems to be the end—Artegall and Talus do not feel threatened enough by the rout to kill them all; they simply leave. (Their response is less murderous than Luther recommends.) But the flying away and hiding of the flies is more significant than it might seem, precisely because they escape and unsettle Artegall's image of heavenly justice as an allegory of a settled, legible world-order. Swarms are constitutively resistant to that model of hypertrophied allegorical order. As Peter Fenves has argued, members of a swarm are impossible to distinguish from one another; they cannot 'even be called *members* of the swarm', because 'instead of belonging to a stable collective according to which they would

be recognized and named, each one is a temporary participant in an act of swarming or *Schwärmerei*.[21] The poem forecloses the possibility of understanding the motivations, let alone of re-binding the significance and political place, of each fragmentary being in the uprising by turning them into a swarm of flies.

The swarm's illegibility and capacity for fugitive evasion continues even after its dissolution. Consider how the flies fly away:

> He like a swarme of flyes them ouerthrew;
> Ne any of them durst come in his way,
> But here and there before his presence flew,
> And hid themselues in holes and bushes from his vew.

There is an equivocation between lines six and seven. 'Overthrew' doubles the punishment of the Giant, who had been 'thrown' down into the sea. But what does overthrowing a swarm look like? 'Ne any of them durst come in his way' suggests total evasion, especially when contrasted with Talus's palpable 'shouldering' of the Giant. This is extended by 'But here and there before his presence flew', with the temporal and spatial meanings of 'before' implying that their flight is always one step ahead of Talus's presence. Though the poem inclines toward eliding the difference between dispersal and defeat, the fact that these flies have hidden themselves from Talus's view suggests how irrepressible they are, how they resist incorporation into allegory and withdraw from the poem's efforts to control and contain them, to render them legible and meaningful. Talus and the narrator lose track of them. Talus has 'overthrown' their current assemblage, but they have, for now, escaped the territorial bounds of justice and allegory. Though the Giant himself is hugely ruined, his multitude has hidden itself away, resisting justice's lesson. Instead of becoming divinely and politically bound to their place within the poem's geography and allegory, these rebels-turned-flies simply disappear, become unknown to justice and to the readers. Their animalisation is their condition of escape, which makes this simile so fundamentally different from, say, Milton's famous swarm of bees in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, where the very act of comparing devils to a swarm reduces their threat and 'straightens' them, placing them within what Geoffrey Hartman has famously called the 'counterplot' of their predestined management.[22] We do not know where Spenser's swarm goes. 'Here and there'—which is to say, potentially everywhere and nowhere—they hide, possibly to re-group for yet another act of fanatical

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

Joseph Campana has recently argued that images of swarms in early modern English texts, 'of hovering, leaderless collectivities', 'pose a threat to the idea that sovereignty was, whether by monarch or the people, necessary'.[23] I want to add to this a sense of the way this swarm in *The Faerie Queene* registers how a leaderless, vertically in-flight multitude causes an epistemological crisis that threatens both the political state and the allegorical meaning that the poem is working to construct. In this episode Spenser's poem reveals how allegory and one version of its most extreme political fantasy, in Artegall's eternally stable and bound cosmos, fails, and must fail. Though Book 5 becomes increasingly committed, with varying degrees of success, to destroying collective gatherings, in 5.2 the poem can only gesture toward the swarm's disappearance into the poem's underground, hidden from view. They leave entirely the allegorical cosmos that Artegall wants to build, and about which Spenser is endlessly ambivalent. The swarm is in but not of the poem, and we could think of their disappearance as a departure to a world, unseen and unknown to us, in which life stolen from the allegory can foster a fugitive community, one where 'uncontrolled freedom' is the condition of possibility for the enlivening of what the Giant refers to as a new, but also ancient, commons.[24]

Knowing and Unknowing

When confronted with the fanatic as 'organ' or 'swarm', *The Faerie Queene* tends to use allegory as an analytic tool for distinguishing between true inspiration and false claims to divine prompting. The poem looks to separate true instances in which characters become instruments of a divine will that consolidates sovereignty (e.g., Redcrosse's transformation) from false claims to inspiration or to knowledge of the divine that threaten both the political order and the procedures of allegory itself (e.g., the Egalitarian Giant). It includes these fanatical figures in part to diagnose and incorporate them into the lessons the allegory can offer, to coax a structure of meaning from fanaticism's threat. As with the example of Malengin later in Book 5, who stands in for the threat of Irish rebels and must be lured out of the 'dreadfull depth' of his unfathomable underground hiding place ('how deepe no man can tell' [5.9.6]), the fanatic must be drawn out of his supposedly internal divine inspiration and shown for what he is: a false prophet, a dangerous demagogue, a guileful seducer of a gullible rabble.

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

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

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

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

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, citations of *The Faerie Queene* are from Hamilton's edition (2007).
2. Thomas Müntzer, designated by Martin Luther as the exemplary fanatic, offers this definition in, among other places, *Schriften und Briefe*, pp. 241–63. See Spannheim, *Disputationum Anti-Anabaptisticarum* (1646) and *Englands VVarning by Germanies Woe* (1646) on the long-lasting fear of Anabaptist revolt in England and elsewhere.
3. Spenser, *Fairie Qveene* (1590), A 2.
4. Hamilton's note calls attention to disagreements over how to read this pronominal ambiguity in Hale, 'Spenser's *Fairie Queene*', pp. 6–7, and McDermott, 'Spenser's *Fairie Queene*', pp. 198–99. The last lines of the canto recall the difficulty of such discernment in this violent encounter. The canto ends with an alexandrine that contains a pronoun that could apply as easily to God as to Redcrosse: 'Then God she [Una] praysd, and thankt her faithfull knight,/That had atchievde so great a conquest by *his* might' (1.11.55, my emphasis).
5. Gless, *Interpretation and Theology*, p. 179; Woodhouse, 'Nature and Grace', p. 13l; see also Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory*, p. 8.
6. David Landreth reads 'goodwill' here as something external to Redcrosse, as the force that 'replaces his own control over what his hands accomplish with the agency of God.... Redcrosse's mental faculties of "reason" and "will" succeed by effacing themselves into a holy instrumentality' (Landreth, *Face of Mammon*, p. 88). I have found Landreth's analysis clarifying, but it does not account for the ambiguity of Redcrosse's transformation, or the fact that the poem never finally authorises Redcrosse's interpretation as the *right* corrective to Palmer's emphasis on wilful achievement, which I discuss in greater detail shortly.
7. Wegner, *Illusion of Conscious Will*.
8. Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*.
9. Escobedo, 'Daemon lovers', p. 122.
10. Fletcher, *Allegory*.
11. Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, p. 18; see also Escobedo, 'Daemon lovers'.
12. Wofford, *Choice of Achilles*, pp. 276–77.
13. MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory*, pp. 37–38.

14. In Hamilton (ed.), *Fairie Queene*, p. 714.
15. Dolven, 'Panic's castle'.
16. The essential texts by Luther on fanaticism are collected in volume 15 of Luther (1883–1929). For a philological map of the passage of *Schwärmerei* to the English 'fanaticism', via French, see Colas, *Glaive et le Fléau*.
17. Fletcher *Prophetic Moment*, p. 52.
18. See Stayer, *German Peasants' War*, pp. 107–23.
19. Lyotard, *Le Différend*.
20. On this historical analogue, see Lowenstein, *Treacherous Faith*, pp. 172–76; and Padelford, 'Spenser's arraignment'.
21. Fenves, *Arresting Language*, p. 101. See also Rosenfeld, 'Artificial life', p. 78, on the swarming attack on the House of Alma in Book 2.
22. Hartman, 'Milton's counterplot'.
23. Campana 'The bee and the sovereign', p. 60.
24. This claim is influenced by Moten and Harney, *Undercommons*: see p. 26 for the importance of the idiom 'in but not of' that I borrow.
25. In Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, l.1382.

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