

Rereading ruins: Edmund Spenser and Scottish Presbyterianism

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How did English, and New English, protestant writers in Edmund Spenser's lifetime remember the dissolution of the monasteries? This chapter argues that monastic ruins were not only regarded as monuments to an earlier moment in reformation history but that they were also seen as monitories, or warnings, reflecting writerly anxieties over the prospect of further, puritan, reformation for the established English and Irish churches. Recent decades have witnessed a sea change in our understanding of English and Irish protestantism, one that emphasises the sheer variety of confessional identities that the churches established under Elizabeth and the Stuarts were willing to accommodate. No longer regarded along lines of George Herbert's characterization of the 'British Church', as an ideologically uniform *via media* between Rome and Geneva, the English church in particular has now come to be characterized, not by ideological uniformity, but by the shifting boundaries of orthodoxy and conformity.¹ This was a church grounded on 'often deliberately ambiguous national policies and foundation documents', Peter Lake and Michael Questier argue, accommodating to all but catholic recusants, on the one hand, and presbyterian separatists on the other.²

This revisionist historiography is prompting its own 'religious turn' in studies of early modern literature, as critics apply what Gillian Woods terms the 'nuanced vocabulary and framework' of religious historians to a conversation about how faith—in all its early modern permutations—represents itself in plays and poetry.³ Spenser has been a notable beneficiary of such scrutiny, with studies challenging conventional characterisations of Spenser's puritan leanings and repositioning the poet within the protestant mainstream—among the 'moderate puritans' whom, Lake argues, balanced their commitment to gospel purity with commitment to the structures and services of the episcopal church.⁴ Such studies of Spenser and religion still remain largely Anglocentric, however, with responses to Spenser's *Blatant Beast* and his

¹ 'The British Church', in Helen Wilcox (ed.), *English Poems of George Herbert* (Cambridge, 2007), 389-94. Daniel W. Doerksen, 'Recharting the *Via Media* of Spenser and Herbert', *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 8.3 (1984): 215-25.

² 'Introduction', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), ix-xx (xix).

³ Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford, 2013), 1-24 (5).

⁴ John N. King 'Was Spenser a Puritan?', *Spenser Studies* 6 (1985): 1-31, also King, 'Spenser's Religion', in Andrew Hadfield (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Spenser* (Cambridge, 2001), 200-16 (205). Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982).

destruction of the ‘sacred Church’ and monastery in *Faerie Qveene* VI.xii.23-25 a case in point.⁵ Philip Schwyzer is among critics to take seriously, in light of the new revisionism, Ben Jonson’s claim to William Drummond in 1618-9, that ‘by the Blating Beast the puritans were understood’—a claim traditionally dismissed as contrary to conventional assumptions concerning Spenser’s own puritan sensibilities.⁶ But while Jonson’s hint that *Faerie Qveene* VI should be read as anti-puritan satire is gaining critical traction, scholarship is yet to consider the specifically Scottish context of Jonson’s comments to Drummond. Willy Maley is one of few critics to argue for Scotland’s place in Spenser’s writing, but Maley focuses on Spenser’s mistrust of Scotland’s Celtic, catholic fringe.⁷ No study has yet considered how Scottish presbyterianism may also have fuelled the ‘anti-Scottish’ attitude that Maley recognises in Spenser’s later writings.

Translating Spenser’s mistrust of puritan separatism to presbyterian Scotland, this chapter reads Spenser’s representation of the ruined monastery in *Faerie Qveene* VI in light of his anxieties, at the time of his composition of Book VI in 1595, over the emerging alliance between James VI of Scotland and the kirk’s presbyterian ministers. The chapter explores Spenser’s fears that a Stuart succession would unleash the ‘beast’ of Scottish presbyterianism upon England’s and Ireland’s episcopal churches, setting Spenser’s disquiet over the religious violence committed by the Blatant Beast alongside the anxieties he voices in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (c.1596) over the influx of English and Scottish presbyterians into late Elizabethan Dublin, and their detrimental impact on the ‘seemely forme’ of established religion in Ireland.⁸ The chapter begins with an introductory section that brings my later discussion of Spenser’s specific reaction to the monastic ruins of *Faerie Qveene* into dialogue with how other of Spenser’s English contemporaries remembered the dissolution of the monasteries. In so doing, the chapter offers a case study for how we might read monastic ruins more generally in early modern English writing—as monuments that not only remembered the monastic dissolutions under Henry VIII but also warned of the threat

⁵ *The Faerie Qveene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2nd edn, rev. Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Susuki (Harlow, 2007), VI.xii.25.1.

⁶ Ben Jonson, ‘Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden (1619)’, ed. Ian Donaldson, in David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (eds.), *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols (Cambridge, 2012), V: 351-91 (368). Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford, 2007), 72-107 (95).

⁷ Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (Houndmills, 1997), 136-62.

⁸ Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds.), *A View of the State of Ireland: from the first printed edition (1633)* (Oxford, 1997), 155.

of further, puritan reformation ahead.

Monasteries as monitories: *The Faerie Queene* and the fear of further reform

The dissolution of the monasteries left an indelible scar on the landscape of early modern England and Wales: some 645 abbeys, at William Camden's reckoning, were ruined in the late 1530s, while a further ninety colleges, 110 religious hospitals, and 2,374 chantries and guild chapels were suppressed under Edward VI.⁹ Ruins cast as long a shadow over the nation's conscience as its countryside, and a spate of antiquarian studies of monasteries appeared in the first decades of the seventeenth century—sparked, Margaret Aston writes, by nostalgia for the monastic past.¹⁰ But nostalgia was not the only motivation for why writers chose to remember monastic ruins in the early modern period. In *Britannia*, Camden balances nostalgia for these 'Monuments, of [Christian] piety' with protestant moralizing on the 'weeds [that] grew out over-ranckly' in these 'seed-gardens [of] Christian Religion'—a combination of antiquarian pity and protestant piety even starker in Speed, who regrets 'the destruction of so many beautifull Monasteries', even as he compares monks to 'false Prophets ... hauing stings like vnto Scorpions'.¹¹ In these accounts of the dissolution, the stones of monasteries are resurrected only to be ransacked anew in the iconoclastic language of reformation apologists, whose memories of these 'Monuments, of piety' also remember the rank weeds within. Thus William Lambarde, in his *Perambulation of Kent* (1576), tempers 'pitie' for Canterbury's monasteries with 'prayse' for their ruination. The dissolution, he argues, had 'raced to the grounde all Monumentes of building, erected to superstition and ungodlynnesse'.¹²

But many monastic 'Monumentes' had not been 'razed to the ground' at all. As ruins (from the Latin *ruīna*: a falling down, collapse), they were by definition visible, if vitiated, edifices, their stonework and statuary defaced, not effaced.¹³ Ruins in this respect might be regarded as examples of what Jonathan Gil Harris calls 'palimpsested time', whereby a past erased by succeeding generations stubbornly shows through. A palimpsest reflects a battleground between competing versions of the past, and Gil Harris writes that palimpsests

⁹ As recorded in John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine* (London, 1611), 778.

¹⁰ Margaret Aston, 'English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 36 (1973): 231-55 (255).

¹¹ William Camden, *Britain*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1610), *5r; cp. *Britannia* (1607), **1r. Speed, *History*, 786, 778.

¹² William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (London, 1576), 235-6.

¹³ 'ruin, n.' (etymology of), *OED Online* (Oxford, 2017), accessed 20 July 2017.

need not necessarily speak for the victors of that ideological contest.¹⁴ Monastic ruins were thus potentially unruly mnemonics of reformation in this period. As palimpsests they might reflect Lambarde's triumphalism, but might also be read in ways that made the catholic 'under-text' more visible.

One group to exploit the unruly potential of monastic ruins in early modern England were the recusants and 'conformist fellow travellers' who in the 1590s, as Eamon Duffy argues, used nostalgia for England's catholic monasteries as a form of traditionalist protest against protestant sins.¹⁵ Yet we also hear similar protests against protestant sins sounded by protestant writers in this period. In his meditation 'Vpon the ruines of an Abby', the Calvinist bishop of Exeter, Joseph Hall, begins by echoing the anti-catholic triumphalism of Lambarde and Speed: the very stones of the monastery, he claims, 'hath a tongue to accuse the Superstition, Hypocrisie, Idlenesse, Luxury of the late owners'.¹⁶ But Hall goes on to remind readers that the 'just hand' who had punished the monks might also punish the sins of his own generation. 'It is not for us to be high-minded but to feare', he writes; 'No Roofe is so hye, no Wall so strong, as that sinne cannot leuell it with the Dust'.¹⁷ The stones of Hall's monastery speak out against monks, but Hall also turns their tongue against protestant sins, projecting his fears of future ruin onto the ruinous monasteries of the past.

Hall's tactic of using monastic ruins to target protestant sins was later co-opted by the royalist John Denham, whose meditation on monastic ruins, in *Coopers Hill* (1642), was written against the backdrop of the parliamentary debates of 1641 surrounding proposed 'root and branch' reforms to established religion.¹⁸ In a poem that casts its chorographical eye upon the landmarks of the Thames Valley region—from St Paul's Cathedral westwards towards Windsor Castle—Denham uses the ruins of Chertsey Abbey, near Egham, Surrey, to attack the sins of parliamentary presbyterianism, likening its proposed reforms to the 'sacriledge' of Henrician reformers, and expressing the hope that 'no such storme | Fall on our times, where ruine must reforme'.¹⁹ Denham finds it more difficult than Hall to blame the

¹⁴ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, 2009), 13-19 (15).

¹⁵ Eamon Duffy, 'Bare ruined choirs: remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare's England', in Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (eds.), *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare* (Manchester, 2003), 40-57 (56, 41).

¹⁶ Joseph Hall, *Occasional Meditations* (London, 1630), 191.

¹⁷ Hall, *Occasional Meditations*, 192-3.

¹⁸ Brendan O Hehir (ed.), *Expans'd hieroglyphicks: A critical edition of Sir John Denham's Coopers Hill* (Berkeley, 1969). I quote from the 1642 edition (Draft III), 109-34.

¹⁹ *Coopers Hill*, in O Hehir (ed.), ll. 160, 149-50.

monks themselves for the monastic ruinations. If monks were guilty of ‘Luxurie, or Lust’, Denham writes, these were just as surely the crimes of that ‘Christian King’, Henry VIII, who ‘having spent the treasures of his Crowne, | Condemnes their Luxurie, to feed his owne’.²⁰ For Denham, the monasteries were less hotbeds of vice as victims of Henry VIII’s own unchristian ‘lust’.

Denham’s efforts to distance himself from forms of protestant iconoclasm—whether as practised by Henrician reformers, or proposed by Long Parliament presbyterians—exemplifies exactly the ‘high church’ myth of reformation that Diarmaid MacCulloch roots in the church of Charles I’s last archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, and his chaplain and apologist, Peter Heylyn.²¹ Both men, MacCulloch argues, emphasised the Caroline church’s continuities with the pre-reformation past, glossing over the state-sanctioned iconoclasm of Tudor regimes as motivated by a minority group of ‘puritans’—the predecessors, they write, of parliamentary presbyterians in the early 1640s. But such remembrances of the Henrician reformation are by no means confined to ‘high church’ mythmaking among Laudian apologists. Denham’s particular approach to monastic ruins—as remembrances of unwonted violence under Henry VIII and warnings of similar puritan ‘storms’ ahead for the established church—is more common in early modern writing than MacCulloch suggests.

We see these ‘high church’ strategies in Spenser’s own approach to the dissolution of religious houses in Ireland—an event remembered, in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, for exposing the sins, not of Irish monks and friars, but of those who had benefited from the sale of Ireland’s religious houses under Henry VIII. Certain Irish towns that were ruined by rebellion in the time of Henry VIII were ‘begged by gentlemen of the Kings, under colour to repaire them’, Spenser’s speaker, Irenius, writes, but the same gentlemen have since ‘endeavoured to keepe them waste, least that, being repaired, their charters might be renewed and their Burgesses restored to their lands, which they had now in their possession’. A similar greed, Irenius continues, also governed the actions of those who took possession of the incomes attached to ‘those old monuments of abbeys, and religious houses’ at the time of the dissolution: ‘For which cause it is judged that King Henry the Eight bestowed them upon them, conceiving that thereby they should never bee able to rise againe’.²²

²⁰ *Coopers Hill*, ll. 153, 152, 157-8.

²¹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, ‘The Myth of the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies* 30.1 (1991): 1-19.

²² *A View*, 158.

Spenser's fullest response to the dissolution of the monasteries comes in his account of the monastery ruined by the Blatant Beast in *Faerie Qveene* VI.xii.23-25. The involvement of this unpalatable figure in the suppression of 'a Monastere' hardly casts a positive light on the Henrician dissolutions that the Beast's actions here recall, for while Spenser censures the 'filth and ordure' of the monks, in the next line he brands the Beast itself as 'foule'.²³ Nor does the Beast confine its violence to the 'cloysters' alone. 'From thence', we learn, 'into the sacred Church he broke',

And robd the Chancell, and the desks downe threw,
And Altars fouled, and blasphemy spoke,
And th'Images for all their goodly hew,
Did cast to ground, whilest none was them to rew;
So all confounded and disordered there.²⁴

Spenser's description of this 'catalogue of desecrations' is, for Schwyzer, 'deeply traditionalist, indeed essentially Catholic' in tone.²⁵ But however 'catholic' Spenser's concern for the sanctity of church architecture and ornament, his views on puritan violence were also shared by leaders of the established church in the 1590s, as the fate of separatists like Henry Barrow makes clear. In *A Briefe Discoverie of the False Church* (1590), Barrow calls for the utter desecration of English parish churches, which are so inherently 'Romish', Barrow writes, that they 'can never be clensed ... until [they] be desolate, laid on heapes, as their yonger sisters, the abbaies and monasteries are'.²⁶ Like the Blatant Beast, Barrow wants to destroy churches and monasteries together, but while Spenser pays lip service to the 'filth and ordure' of monasteries, he balks at the Beast's efforts to extend this iconoclasm to church, attacking the 'filth and ordure' of such intentions by implying that they befoul the 'sacred Church', even as the Beast befouls its altar.²⁷ Spenser's attack on such extremism was not uncommon at the time Book VI was being written in 1595. The noose was tightening around the necks of puritan separatists in the early 1590s, as Barrow and his fellow separatist,

²³ *Faerie Qveene*, VI.xii.23.8, 24.5, 6.

²⁴ *Faerie Qveene*, VI.xii.24.1; VI.xii.25.1-6.

²⁵ Schwyzer, *Archaeologies*, 96. In 'Monasticism and Idleness in Spenser's Late Poetry', *SEL* 54.1 (2014): 59-79, Joshua Phillips argues that Spenser may even here express sympathies towards monasticism.

²⁶ Henry Barrow, 'A Brief Discoverie of the False Church', in Leland H. Carson (ed.), *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590* (London, 1962), 259-673 (468).

²⁷ *Faerie Qveene*, VI.xii. 24.5; 25.1.

John Greenwood—both hanged at Tyburn in April 1593 for publishing ‘seditious’ religious views—discovered to their cost.²⁸

That Spenser intended the Blatant Beast as a satire on puritan separatists is itself implied by the idea Ben Jonson broached to William Drummond in 1619, that ‘by the Blating Beast the puritans were understood’. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—from G.L. Craik up until the revisionism of John N. King in the 1980s—critics tended to agree to disagree with Jonson’s reading of the Beast as anti-puritan satire.²⁹ As a puritan himself, it was assumed, Spenser would hardly have used the Beast to attack puritan calls for further reformation. Challenging this, King refashioned the poet as a religious conservative, an advocate of ‘an episcopacy owing obedience to the queen’, who combined a ‘quasi-Puritan’ commitment to preaching with ‘attacks [on] the excesses of Protestant iconoclasm’ that imply deep suspicion of puritan zeal.³⁰ This revisionism is in turn leading to a reassessment of Jonson’s claims over Spenser’s puritan satire, with Schwyzer arguing that ‘in his gauging of Spenser’s mature religious sympathies, Jonson may not have been far from the truth’.³¹ Mary Claire Moroney has also acknowledged Spenser’s sympathies for the ‘sacred Church’, arguing that the Beast’s actions blur distinctions between sacrilege and ‘sanctioned iconoclasm’.³²

However welcome, such readings are nevertheless limited by their tendency to assume an *English* ecclesiastical context for Spenser’s ‘sacred Church’, and in this sense they mirror the Anglocentrism of studies of Spenser and religion more generally, which typically focus on *The Shepheardes Calender* and Spenser’s early life in southeast England, without attention to how Spenser’s youthful religious views translated to Ireland or Scotland in the 1580s and ‘90s.³³ This is in spite of readings that set the politics of *Faerie Queene* V and VI in an Irish and, to a lesser extent, Scottish context—an approach exemplified by the work of

²⁸ Patrick Collinson, ‘Barrow, Henry (c.1550-1593)’, in **H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.)**, *ODNB [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography]*, 60 vols (Oxford, 2004), IV, 95-6 (96).

²⁹ For a critical history, see King, ‘Was Spenser a Puritan?’, 24 (n. 3); Ronald B. Bond, ‘Blatant Beast’, in A.C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto, 1990), 96-8 (96).

³⁰ King, ‘Spenser’s Religion’, 205, 215.

³¹ Schwyzer, *Archaeologies*, 95.

³² Maryclaire Moroney, ‘Spenser’s Dissolution: Monasticism and ruins in *The Faerie Queene* and *The View of the Present State of Ireland*’, *Spenser Studies* 12 (1991; 1998): 105-32 (115).

³³ See, for example, King’s focus on *The Shepheardes Calender*, in ‘Was Spenser a Puritan?’ and Andrew Hadfield’s focus on Spenser’s ‘Grindalian’ connections in southeast England, in ‘Spenser and Religion—Yet Again’, *SEL* 51.1 (2011): 21-46.

Willy Maley and Andrew Hadfield. Hadfield writes that Books V and VI reflect anxieties over the pace of rebellion under Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, and make the case for why Ireland needs the martial discipline of Artegall, whose brutal execution of justice in battles against Irish and Iberian catholicism the majority of Book V relates.³⁴ In V.ix, the focus also falls on Scotland, with Artegall presiding over the trial of Duessa, a thinly veiled allegory for Mary, queen of Scots.³⁵ Artegall's efforts to restore justice to catholic Ireland collapse when he is recalled to the Faerie Court at the end of Book V—an event, Hadfield argues, which sets in train the savagery of Book VI. For Hadfield, the Brigands who destroy the shepherd community in VI.x, and the Blatant Beast who roams freely throughout Book VI, are symptomatic of Elizabeth's failure, in Spenser's eyes, to take seriously the need for strong-armed justice in Ireland.³⁶ This critical emphasis on Spenser's immersion in British-Irish politics in the final books of *Faerie Qveene*, has not, however, translated to readings of the 'sacred Church' in Book VI.³⁷ Redressing this, the final section of this chapter offers one such British-Irish reading of Spenser's 'sacred Church', arguing that it is as much to the threat of Scottish presbyterianism, as to Scottish and Irish catholicism, that Spenser's reaction to the ecclesiastical ruins of *Faerie Queene* VI responds.

The Blatant Beast and Spenser's *View* of Scottish presbyterianism

One reader to recognise Scotland as a theme in the final books of *The Faerie Qveene* was James VI of Scotland himself. In November 1596, Elizabeth I's ambassador in Scotland, Robert Bowes, reported how James:

hath conceaued great offence against Edward Spenser publishing in prynte in the second p[ar]t of the Fairy Queene and ixth chapter some dishon[our]able effects (as the K. demeth thereof) against himself and his mother deceased.³⁸

³⁴ Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Savage Soyle* (Oxford, 1997), 146-84.

³⁵ See Richard A. McCabe, 'The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI', *ELR* 17.2 (1987): 224-42.

³⁶ Hadfield, *Wilde Fruit*, 183-4.

³⁷ Readings that assume an English ecclesiastical context for the 'sacred Church' include John N. King's *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton, 1990), 47-58 and Moroney's 'Spenser's Dissolution', in which Moroney contrasts Spenser's sympathies for the dissolution of the 'sacred Church' with what she sees as his more hardline attitude to the wholesale reformation 'of the Irish ecclesiastical establishment', in *A View* (124).

³⁸ Robert Bowes to Lord Burghley, 12 November 1596. PRO SP 52/59, 67v, calendared in *CSP: Scotland, 1547-1603*, xii, ed. M. S. Giuseppi (1952), no. 291.

Both Hadfield and Richard McCabe emphasise the audacity of Spenser's attack on James's mother, Mary, queen of Scots, in *Faerie Qveene* V.ix—an attack, Hadfield explains, that singles out Spenser 'as a notable opponent of the Stuart claim' to England.³⁹ Maley moves from the 'anti-Stuart' attitude of *Faerie Qveene* to argue for Spenser's more general 'anti-Scottish' attitude in *A View*.⁴⁰ Maley shows how Spenser adopts George Buchanan's claim for the consanguinity of Scots and Irish in *A View*, using this to forge a history of ancestral relations between Scots and Irish that helps fuel Spenser's fears of a pan-Gaelic alliance against the New English in late Elizabethan Ireland.⁴¹

When Spenser writes in *A View* to urge that the Scots be kept out of Ulster, he must have been writing with recent events in mind, for the summers of 1594-5 had seen armed rebellions by catholic earls, first in Scotland, under the earls of Huntly and Erroll, then in Ulster, under Tyrone.⁴² Both rebellions sent shockwaves through Whitehall, with Elizabeth I writing to Ambassador Bowes, in September 1594 to criticise James for allowing the buds of catholic rebellion to blossom.⁴³ Official correspondence also reveals the extent of Scottish involvement in Ulster in 1594-5, with the clan chief, Dòmhnall Gorm Mòr [Donald Gorme], an ancestor of the MacDonald lords of the Isles, leading troops from the Hebrides to support Ulster rebellions in both summers.⁴⁴ These events may well be behind Spenser's references to the abortive alliance between 'the Prince of Picteland' (James VI of Scotland?) and the 'Lord of Many Ilands' in *Faerie Qveene* VI.xii.⁴⁵ They may also be registered in the destruction of the shepherd community by a troop of 'Brigands' in VI.x.39-44. Hadfield identifies the

³⁹ McCabe, 'Masks of Duessa', 241; Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Matter of Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), 122-36 (125).

⁴⁰ Maley, *Salvaging Spenser*, 148.

⁴¹ *A View*, 45-55. For Spenser and Buchanan, see Maley, *Salvaging Spenser*, 138-42; McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford, 2002), 142-64.

⁴² *A View*, 79-80. Ruth Grant, 'George Gordon, sixth Earl of Huntly, and the politics of the Counter-Reformation in Scotland, 1581-1595', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh (2010). Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567-1625: Sovereignty, Polity, and Liturgy* (Aldershot, 1998), 57-60.

⁴³ Elizabeth I to Bowes, 16 September 1594 (dispatched 27 September). *CSP: Scotland, 1547-1603*, xi, ed. Annie I. Cameron (1936), no. 363.

⁴⁴ In the summers of 1594-5 Gorme sailed to Ulster to support Tyrone's rebellion. See John L. Roberts, *Feuds, Forays and Rebellions: History of the Highland Clans 1475-1625* (Edinburgh, 1999). Bowes was an anxious observer of these events, writing several letters to Burghley in August-September 1594 to report Gorme's movements. See *CSP: Scotland*, xi, nos. 340, 350, 375.

⁴⁵ *Faerie Qveene*, VI.xii.4.6, 2.

Brigands with Tyrone's Ulster rebels.⁴⁶ But 'Brigantes', as George Buchanan writes in *Rerum Scoticarum historia* (1582), were historically a Gaulish tribe from northern Spain who had settled in Scotland as well as Ireland.⁴⁷ Spenser, who acknowledges Buchanan as a source for claims about the mixed ethnography of Scots and Irish in *A View*, may also draw on Buchanan for his depiction of the Brigands in *Faerie Qveene* VI. If so, then the Brigands' destruction of Pastorella's shepherd community refers, not just, as Hadfield notes, to the lawlessness of Ireland, but to collusion between the consanguineous Ulster Irish and Hebridean Scots, and the specific threat this collusion posed to Ireland's New English community at the outset of the Nine Years' War. In the years when Spenser was writing Book VI, the Hebridean influence in Ulster was hard to ignore.

From the evidence of his later writings, therefore, Spenser was both anti-Stuart and 'anti-Scottish', profoundly uneasy about England's prospective union with a scion of Ireland, ruled over by the son of a catholic queen. Recent criticism has helped colour our awareness of Spenser's Scotland as a place of papist plots and Gaelic animosity, but no study has yet considered how far Scottish presbyterianism may also have fuelled Spenser's Scoto-phobia in the mid-1590s. The idea that the Blatant Beast is an attack on Scottish presbyterianism first emerges from the manuscript context in which Ben Jonson's comments to William Drummond appear. Jonson's comments are recorded in Drummond's 'Informations', his record of what Jonson related to him during his visit to Hawthornden Castle, near Edinburgh, in January 1619. But it is clear from Drummond's thematic arrangement of his manuscript notes, and from his use of Scotticisms throughout, that the 'Informations' is far from a verbatim witness of Jonson's words. Ian Donaldson suggests we think of Drummond as an editor rather than amanuensis of Jonson's remarks.⁴⁸ Donaldson's suggestion that Drummond restructured and reshaped Jonson's reading of *Faerie Qveene* helps explain the thinking behind Drummond's decision to couple Jonson's comments on Spenser's anti-puritan allegory of the Blatant Beast in the same sentence as he notes Jonson's identification of Duessa as an anti-papist allegory of Mary, queen of Scots.⁴⁹ There is little narrative reason for juxtaposing these comments, Duessa and the Blatant Beast occupying different books in

⁴⁶ Hadfield, *Wilde Fruit*, 183-4.

⁴⁷ George Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (Edinburgh, 1582), D2v ('Principio autem cum vtrique, id est Hiberniae incolae, & coloni eorum in Albium missi Scoti appellarentur...'). That both the Irish and Scots are descended from the Gauls of northern Spain is clear, Buchanan writes, from reference to 'Brigantes' in Ireland and Scotland, in Ptolemy, Tacitus, Seneca, and other classical authorities (*Rerum*, E1r).

⁴⁸ Introduction to Donaldson (ed.), 'Informations', in *Works of Jonson*, V.353-6 (354).

⁴⁹ *Works of Jonson*, V.368.

Faerie Queene, but there is a particular application to the religious politics of Jacobean Scotland. The Scottish kirk had exemplified puritan as well as papists extremes under James VI, and so Drummond's decision to couple both allegories plausibly lay in his sense of the significance of Duessa and the Blatant Beast for Spenser's views on Scottish religion.

Jonson gives no clue as to which puritan traits he thought Spenser was satirising in the Blatant Beast, but 'blatant' is itself a Scots term, defined as 'bellowing like a calf'. Such 'bellowing' was particularly associated with the Scottish presbyterian pulpit in the mid-1590s.⁵⁰ The decision of Francis Stewart, earl of Bothwell, to join forces with the catholic earls, Huntly and Erroll, in September 1594 had the effect of galvanizing James VI's previously fraught relations with his kirk's presbyterian leaders, inaugurating a period of unprecedented cooperation between king and kirk that lasted throughout 1595 and the early months of 1596. These relations again took a downturn after Huntly's return to Scotland in summer 1596, an event it was rumoured that James had helped orchestrate.⁵¹ Presbyterian ministers responded by renewing their pulpit attacks on James' alleged papist—and English protestant—sympathies. The most explosive of these presbyterian sermons came from the pulpit of David Black, minister of St Andrews, and sometime schoolteacher in England. In a letter to Lord Burghley written on 1 November 1596, Robert Bowes encloses correspondence from Roger Aston, his agent at Linlithgow, who reports how:

about xiiij days since Mr David Blacke minister of Saint Andrewes in two or three of his sermones ... most unreverently sayd thatt her Ma[jesty] [i.e. Elizabeth I] was an atheist and thatt the religion thatt was profest there was but a show of religion guyded and directed by the bishopes injuncciones and they ... would perswad the K. to bring in the same here and thereby to be debarred of the liberty of the word.⁵²

We have already seen that Elizabeth had accused James of incompetence in his handling of the rebellion of the catholic earls in autumn 1594. Now, two years later, David Black was openly declaring James' rift with presbyterian ministers, and Black's outspokenness and

⁵⁰ *Works of Jonson*, V.368. 'Blatant (ppl. adj.)', in Alexander Warrack (ed.), *Chambers Scots Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1974).

⁵¹ MacDonald, *Jacobean Kirk*, 59-60; Bowes described the rapport between king and kirk in his letter to Burghley of 24 September 1594, noting James' comment 'that a Bothwell & a papist shall nowe be all one to him' (PRO SP 52/54, 58r, calendared in *CSP: Scotland*, xi, no. 373).

⁵² Roger Aston to Bowes, 31 October 1596, enclosed in Bowes to Burghley, 1 November 1596. PRO SP/52/59, 65v, calendared in *CSP: Scotland*, xii, no. 288.

comments against Elizabeth and the English church caused further questions to be asked at Whitehall over James' control, this time of the presbyterian kirk.

The six-book *Faerie Qveene* was entered into the Stationers' Register in January 1596, and Book VI is conventionally assumed to have been written in 1595, a period when all the news from Scotland was of how 'the ministers and the K. were never so great'.⁵³ Writing Book VI against the backdrop of James' presbyterian alliance, Spenser would have had good reason to fear that a Stuart succession in England would also unleash the beast of Scottish presbyterianism upon the English and Irish episcopal churches. What if Spenser had given form to these presbyterian fears in the figure of the blasphemous Blatant Beast and his sacrilegious actions? Such a reading must certainly have occurred to some of Spenser's readers in 1596, in light of 'bellowing' in the pulpits against James VI and Elizabeth I by Black and the other presbyterian ministers later on that year. Black's sermons excited great interest in England, the subject of two letters between Bowes and Burghley written on 1 and 12 November 1596. In the second letter, Black's name has been underlined and also appears written in the margins.⁵⁴

Both letters are better known to Spenserians for their comments concerning James' 'great offence' at Spenser's attack on his mother in *Faerie Qveene* V.ix, and the name 'Edward [*sic*] Spenser' also appears alongside Black's in the margins of the later letter.⁵⁵ But in a month when Bowes was reporting to Burghley on James' difficulties muzzling presbyterian preachers like Black, Spenser's barbed representation of James' mother may not have been the only passage from the 1596 *Faerie Queene* to cause 'great offence' to the King. The news that the kirk was full of beasts like Black was as alarming for Whitehall as it was embarrassing for James, who may have seen something of his own failure to muzzle Black in Spenser's characterisation of Sir Calidore's failure to muzzle the Blatant Beast at the end of Book VI.

That Spenser mistrusted presbyterians in the mid-1590s is clear from an Irish context in *A View*. Here, Spenser's speaker, Irenius, calls on Ireland's governors to 'builde up and repaire all the ruined churches' in Ireland:

⁵³ Aston to Bowes, 18 January 1595 [i.e. 1596]. PRO SP 52/58, 10v, calendared in *CSP: Scotland*, xii, no. 110). For the dating of *Faerie Queene* VI, see Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford, 2012), 326-33.

⁵⁴ Bowes to Burghley, 12 November 1596. PRO SP 52/59, 67v, calendared in *CSP: Scotland*, xii, no. 291.

⁵⁵ Bowes to Burghley, 12 November 1596, 67v.

for the outward shew (assure your selfe) doth greatly drawe the rude people to the reverencing and frequenting thereof. What ever some of our late too nice fooles say, there is nothing in the seemely forme, and comely order of the Church.⁵⁶

Irenius' attitude towards Ireland's churches is rooted in his attitude towards the growing recusancy crisis in Munster in the mid-1590s. Munster's New English community were divided on how best to increase church attendance among Irish and Old English Catholics. In *Croftus* (1591), Sir William Herbert sides with the former lord deputy, Sir James Croft's, policies of religious moderation.⁵⁷ Not so Herbert's neighbour in county Kerry, Sir Edward Denny, who like Spenser's employer, Sir John Norris, president of Munster from 1584-97, advocated coercive means of forcing recusants to church.⁵⁸ All the evidence in *A View* suggests Spenser sided with Herbert over Denny and Norris in advocating persuasion through preaching, not coercion through law. Irenius recommends that protestantism be planted 'with mildnesse and gentlenesse', through the 'meeke perswasions and instructions' of an Irish-born ministry.⁵⁹ Irenius also involves the 'outward shew' of churches in this policy of 'meeke perswasion', arguing that some are 'so unhandsomely patched, and thatched, that men doe even shunne the places for the uncomelinesse thereof'.⁶⁰

But Irenius' attack on 'too nice fooles' looks beyond the recusancy debate in Munster to target those, like Henry Barrow, who attacked precisely the 'forme' and 'order' of the Elizabethan church—its buildings and prayer book—that Spenser's speaker here defends. Barrow was already dead when Spenser wrote *A View* in 1596, but other separatists had 'of late' crossed to Ireland to escape London's purge of radical puritans, foremost among whom was Walter Travers, author of the 1587 *Book of Discipline*, a set of rules for an alternative, presbyterian church. In 1594, Travers had crossed to Ireland to become provost of Trinity College Dublin, and he there surrounded himself with presbyterian ministers, electing at least

⁵⁶ *View*, 155.

⁵⁷ Sir William Herbert, *Croftus, sive de Hibernia Liber*, ed. Arthur Keaveney and John A. Madden (Dublin, 1992); Steven G. Ellis, 'Croft, Sir James (c.1518-1590)', *ODNB*, XIV, 243-46.

⁵⁸ Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590-1641* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1985), chapter 3; Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford, 2001), 157-8.

⁵⁹ *View*, 153.

⁶⁰ *View*, 155.

two Scottish ministers—James Fullerton and James Hamilton—as college fellows.⁶¹ In *A View* Irenius commends ‘the grave fathers which are in high place about the state, and some few others which are lately planted in their new Colledge’, but his term ‘lately’ logically refers to those fellows ‘planted’ at Trinity College at its foundation in 1593, not to those presbyterians whom Travers had since promoted.⁶² From the evidence of Irenius’ attack on those who would destroy the ‘forme’ and ‘order’ of the Irish church, Spenser was more closely aligned with the views of Trinity College’s first provost, Adam Loftus, who preached before Travers in June 1594 that ‘both papists and schismatics are (tho’ in different degrees of enmity) equally our implacable enemies’.⁶³

Conclusion

Spenser is increasingly regarded as a religious conservative, and this chapter’s aim has been to take a broader British-Irish approach to Spenser’s religious conservatism, arguing that the Blatant Beast embodies Spenser’s fears over the threat of Scottish presbyterianism in *Faerie Qveene* VI. Spenser’s anxieties over Scottish presbyterianism may also have been influenced by his awareness, in *A View*, of ‘too nice fooles’ among Ireland’s New English. It was not, after all, only Irish catholics who had links with Scotland. Extant correspondence between Walter Travers and Andrew Melville points to close relations between presbyterian ministers in Scotland and those English presbyterians who had fled to Ireland in 1594, as does evidence that the Scottish ministers Fullerton and Hamilton took up fellowships under Travers at Trinity College.⁶⁴ *Faerie Qveene* VI reflects a period when presbyterians were in the ascendant, in Ireland as well as Scotland. Responding to this, Spenser’s later writings do more than merely remember the ruins of monasteries suppressed under Henry VIII. For Spenser, as for other English writers at the turn of the seventeenth century, the dissolution of the monasteries was less an event in England’s reformation past as an originary moment in a cycle of religious violence that continued to rampage unabated through the ecclesiastical landscapes of Britain and Ireland, now ruining the ‘sacred church’ as it had once ruined

⁶¹ R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College, Dublin, 1592-1952: An Academic History* (London, 1982); J.V. Luce, *Trinity College Dublin: The First 400 Years* (Dublin, 1992). I am grateful to Jamie Reid-Baxter (University of Glasgow) for this information on Fullerton and Hamilton.

⁶² *View*, 88.

⁶³ London, British Library, Lansdowne 846, 205r-7r; cited in Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, ‘Loftus, Adam (1533/4-1605)’, *ODNB*, XXXIV, 300-4 (303).

⁶⁴ ‘Andrew Melville and others to Thomas Cartwright and Walter Travers’ (1579), in Thomas Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, 3 vols (London, 1837), III, 126-7.

monasteries, and threatening to upend bishops, as the Blatant Beast upends altars, desks, and images in Book VI. No wonder that Book VI ends in despair, with Spenser's vision of the Blatant Beast 'growen ... so great and strong of late, | Barking and biting all that him doe bate'.⁶⁵

Spenser's message, then, is that the stones of monasteries could speak for a bygone English reformation at the same time as they speak out against the rise of presbyterianism across the British-Irish archipelago at the end of the sixteenth century. This is a message with broader applicability beyond Spenser, a message echoed in other English protestant responses to ruins in Spenser's day: in Joseph Hall's anxious reflection on monastic ruins as monitory tales, for example – 'It is not for us to be high-minded but to feare', Hall writes – or in the connections that the vicar of Wickersley (near Rotherham), Michael Sherbrook, makes between the dissolution of the monasteries and the potential destruction of the Elizabethan church at puritan hands. As God has punished the papists with the protestants, Sherbrook writes in 'The Falle of Religious Howses' (completed c.1591), so 'hath the Puritans risen from among the Protestants to their Overthrow'.⁶⁶ It is a message, too, that speaks beyond Spenser's generation to reformation historians today, reminding us of something that Spenser's contemporaries knew only too well, but which scholarship emphasising the role of ruins in the rise of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century antiquarianism has tended to overlook – that the ruins represented in early modern writing served not only, nor even primarily, to remember the English reformation. Writers like Spenser were less interested in ruins as windows on the past than in ruins as mirrors reflecting the prospect of further, puritan reformation to come.

⁶⁵ *Faerie Queene*, VI.xii.40.4-5

⁶⁶ Michael Sherbrook, 'The Fall of Religious Howses', in A. G. Dickens (ed.), *Tudor Treatises*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 125 (Leeds, 1959), 89-142 (136).

