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Frances Quarles' Early Poetry and the Discourses of Jacobean Spenserianism

Adrian Streete

I

[1] Early in 1621, King James was obliged to recall parliament for the first time in seven years. He took this action in response to the outbreak of war in Bohemia the year previously, a crisis that had already spread to neighbouring states in central Europe.[1] These events had been precipitated by the less than politic actions of James' son in law, Frederick, Elector Palatine. In 1619, and against his father in law's advice, he acquiesced in the deposition of the Catholic ruler of Bohemia, Ferdinand. Frederick assumed the crown and restored Protestant rule to Bohemia. These actions had a number of consequences. First, Frederick antagonised the dual forces of the Holy Roman Empire and Spain, whose response was swift and decisive. Frederick's army was ignominiously defeated outside Prague in 1620, a number of his commanders were sentenced to death in Prague Castle, and those who managed to escape joined the erstwhile Elector and his wife Elizabeth in exile in Holland. Second, and more pressingly, the crisis threatened to undermine the negotiations taking place for a marriage between James' son, Charles, and the Spanish Infanta. The fact that James's foreign policy was recognised across Europe as being assiduously and consistently based on the guiding principle of political pacifism made Frederick's actions all the more provocative.

[2] In England, the issue of how best to respond to the crisis divided opinion. On the one hand, there was considerable political and religious support for British military intervention in order to restore Frederick. Many of the more militantly minded Protestants saw this as the ideal opportunity to take on the might of Spain and thus, *de facto*, the papacy. On the other hand, not all agreed with this strategy and there certainly was opposition to this militant ideology, although it was perhaps less directly stated and rather more nebulous in character. But in any case, comment on the crisis was quickly forthcoming and spanned a range of genres from tracts, sermons, newspapers and drama (cf. Cogswell 1989a and Bellany 1994). In respect of the stage, scholars such as Margot Heineman, Jerzy Limon, A.A. Bromham, Zara Bruzzi and myself have shown the degree to which dramatists such as Middleton, Dekker and Massinger explored the religio-political issues thrown up by these crisis years (cf. Heinemann 1982; Limon 1986; Bromham and Bruzzi, 1990; Streete 2008; and my forthcoming essay on Field and Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry*). Although there are interesting variations in approach between these dramatists, it is generally the case that they tended to be broadly pro the militant ideology expressed above and critical of the king's pacific policy. The ultimate manifestation of this view is, of course, Thomas Middleton's scandalous 1624 play *A Game at Chess*, although writers like Massinger did offer a rather more moderate response to the crisis.

[3] In the case of poetry, reaction to these crisis years was no less involved. One group whose work has come under particular scrutiny in this regard are the so-called Jacobean Spenserians. Since the publication in 1969 of Joan Grundy's *The Spenserian Poets*, much important research has been done on those early modern poets whose work self consciously imitates and reworks the formal and ideological aspects of Edmund Spenser's political vision especially as expressed in his great epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. In contrast to the conservative, 'pastoral' construction of Spenser and his heirs that has dominated so much nineteenth and twentieth century criticism, I want to focus here on the central recuperation of the radical Spenserian tradition by scholars such as David Norbrook and Michelle O'Callaghan. Broadly speaking, they have pointed out that Spenserian ideology does not

necessarily imply a right wing, conformist agenda but can instead be seen as congruent with the left wing of moderate and Puritan Protestantism. This outlook is characterised by its militantly apocalyptic conception of a nation state defined through its opposition to Rome and by its eagerness to intervene abroad on behalf of other Protestant powers against Catholic expansionism. Spenser's use of the pastoral form is central to his poetics and to those who seek to follow in his wake: but this key marker of Spenserian ideology does not have to imply a quiescent political agenda. More work is needed in order to understand the political valences operative within the genre of early modern pastoral. However, it is clear that Jacobean Spenserianism is more politically interesting than has commonly been thought.

[4] That said, there are some caveats needed here. In respect of monarchical power, the Spenserian critique of monarchical failures and in particular Jacobean pacifism is generally tempered by a contrary impulse that acknowledges the utility of monarchy as a political system. Indeed, this realisation is central to Richard Helgerson's reading of certain important ideological tensions at play within *The Faerie Queene*. He argues that while the poem is 'the product of a new monarchic centralism', it also 'resists that centripetal force': 'It represents an uneasy and unacknowledged compromise between a monarch who gives both the poem and the nation whatever unity and identity it has and the individual aristocratic knights whose adventures are the glory and the safety of the nation' (Helgerson 1992: 57-58). This reading is important because it demonstrates that Jacobean Spenserians such as George Wither, Phineas Fletcher, Michael Drayton, William Browne and George Wither did not simply inherit a static ideological blueprint from Spenser's writings that they could then co-opt for their own political ends. Rather, they were the inheritors of a contested set of ideological assumptions that required contemporary re-exploration, re-statement and re-fashioning. Part of this literary activity was, naturally enough, prompted by political events. As David Norbrook has shown, the failures of late Elizabethan policy in the 1590s invoked the twin spectres of apocalypticism and republicanism, ideologies that in very different ways bypass the claims of secular monarchy (136-139). And although the early part of James's reign held out great hope for the Spenserian poets, the king's relentlessly pacific foreign policy and increasingly cautious theological agenda meant that, by the time of the crisis years, the Jacobean Spenserians had much to comment upon. Whilst loyal to the notion of monarchy as an *ideal*, they were radically critical of the Jacobean practice of monarchy.

[5] In her book *The 'Shepherds Nation'*, Michelle O' Callaghan offers a broad assessment of the ideological values connecting the Jacobean Spenserians at the close of James' reign. She writes:

They can collectively be described as 'patriots': they are hispanophobes; they represent themselves as defenders of traditional liberties and oppose corruption at court; and they advocate an 'Elizabethan' revival which is equated with the reform of patronage systems, naval and colonial expansion, and a return to an aristocratic martialism. Religion tends to be viewed in political and geographic terms, rather than on a personalized basis (O' Callaghan 2000: 10).

Unsurprisingly, this ideological stance is virtually indistinguishable from those within the militant Protestant wing advocating a military response to the imminent European crisis. Poetry and politics thus coalesced in interesting ways during these years as the Spenserians sought, through networks of patronage and print, to intervene in and shape the nature of debate. But while these poets certainly formed what O'Callaghan has called a 'politicized community' (14), it is equally important to note that there were varieties of opinion and emphasis within this group. Precisely how the ideological agenda pursued by the Jacobean Spenserians manifests itself therefore needs to be explored not so much collectively, but rather on a poet-by-poet basis. While these poets do share many of the same

preoccupations, there are also significant differences and diversions of emphasis and opinion.

[6] This is particularly the case in relation to the poet Francis Quarles. Born in 1592, Quarles is undoubtedly best known for his extremely popular book of *Emblemes* first published in 1635. In terms of critical history, the only extended study of the writer is Karl Holtgen's German language critical biography of 1978. In the main, English language critics have tended to focus on the *Emblemes* as well as on the writings produced by Quarles during the English Civil war. For Christopher Hill, Quarles was 'always a staunch middle-of-the-road Calvinist Anglican, satisfied with the Jacobean church [...] wishing to see no change in the direction of popery (or Arminianism) or of sectarianism' (190-91). More recently, Robert Wilcher's work has revised this view. Much more sensitive to the vicissitudes of Quarles' political ideology, Wilcher finds that in his late poetry there exists 'the nucleus for a royalist party in the Commons and in the country' (71). Much of the material that Quarles produced during this period, including the verse romance *Argalus and Parthenia* and the pastoral Eclogues collected in *The Shepherds Oracles*, has led to him being called a 'Spenserian poet' by David Norbrook (222). This designation makes sense in relation to this Caroline work. The latter work mentioned, with its anti-Laudian satire, is well in keeping with a tradition of Spenserian anti-clericalism that was well defined by the 1630s and 1640s. It was, after all, parliament that arraigned Archbishop Laud: royalism, or more accurately 'moderate' Protestantism, was not incompatible with radical political action.

[7] However, the problem with this prevailing critical construction of Quarles is that while it quite properly draws attention to the fact that he was working within a defined poetic and ideological tradition, it is based on an artificially narrow reading of his poetic canon, one that focuses almost exclusively on his later Caroline works. Naturally, this reading is to the detriment of his Jacobean poetry. Certainly Quarles was a central and widely read voice during the first part of the Civil War, and to this end Hill's construction of him as a 'moderate' Protestant is correct. This designation accurately reflects a wide range of religio-political opinion in early modern England, one that is no less interesting for being less obviously radical than other more militant groupings at the time. But his characterisation of this strand of opinion as 'middle-of-the-road Calvinist Anglican' is both inaccurate and unhelpful. For one, it implies that Quarles' work is implicitly uncritical of prevailing religio-political orthodoxies. Just as this is incorrect in respect of his Caroline writings, so it is false in relation to the work he produced under James. Secondly, it implies a broad 'Anglican' consensus within the Jacobean church. But as we have seen, the crisis of the late Jacobean years brought to the fore faultlines that had always existed within the Church of England, faultlines that were thrown into sharp focus by the Arminian emergence that Quarles was to so sharply criticise later. If anything it was the Arminians who were the 'Anglicans' of the period, if the retrospective nature of this designation is to be maintained. Indeed, many of those who leaned towards Arminianism supported James' pacific policy while also favouring forms of worship that were often described as 'popish'. This is crucial. While Quarles is unambiguously Calvinist in his theological outlook and thus impeccably anti-Arminian, his Jacobean work does share with the Arminians a scepticism towards the bellicose rhetoric of the militants and an assertion of pacific values. It thus places his poetry at an important distance from the Jacobean Spenserians, as it does from his later Caroline royalism. Jacobean and Caroline Quarles need to be viewed through distinct lenses. This also problematizes any easy political distinctions between moderate and militant Protestantism: there was considerable slippage between the two positions.

[8] As this last point makes clear, the central problem with the dominant critical reading of Quarles is the use of the term 'Spenserian' to describe his ideological outlook. This designation relies too heavily upon the work he produced during the Caroline period. Certainly some of his later poetry utilises the pastoral mode and expresses criticisms of

church and court that many of the Spenserians would readily agree upon. But to only view his work in this light of his Caroline adoption of Spenserian tropes is inaccurate and it unhelpfully skews the import of his earlier work. The majority of Quarles' published writings, Jacobean *and* Caroline, are in fact religious in subject and didactic in tone. These may not be the most appealing generic modes to modern readers but they are a fairer reflection of the kind of writer that Quarles was. To dismiss his Jacobean works as inordinately long, diffuse and mere 'pious light reading' as Holtgen does, is to ignore the political aim of these works as well as the kinds of political interventions that 'moderate' Protestants were capable of making in the literary arena.

[9] So in what follows, I want to redress the critical balance by looking again at Quarles' Jacobean poetry. The Jacobean Spenserians undoubtedly had didactic aims and their works certainly dealt with religion, but they did this in noticeably different ways to Quarles during the crisis years of James' last years. The fact remains that Quarles' identifiably 'Spenserian' writings represent a minority of his output and they are confined to the Caroline part of his writing career. This is not to downplay their importance but rather to place them within a revised context. He is a Spenserian poet in some ways but he departs from Spenserian ideology in others. From the publication of his first poem *A Feast for Wormes* in 1620, a paraphrase on the book of Jonah, most of the poems he produced up to 1625 were biblical paraphrases. Indeed, he did not significantly depart from this biblically oriented, didactically minded aesthetic throughout his literary career. For this reason, Quarles' Jacobean poetry is, in fact, more accurately representative of his literary output and his religio-political views across his entire writing career than the Spenserian pastoral work of the Caroline period. *This* poetry helps us to revise and expand upon his retrospective designation as a Spenserian poet. His first poem appears at the height of the Jacobean crisis in 1620 and it is a direct response to and engagement with that crisis. His subsequent biblical verse paraphrases carry on in that vein. Despite their didactic tone, the poems include some noticeably sharp, indeed at times radical, political critique of the political institutions and discourses of the period. In fact, it is Quarles' poetry that might prove the most genuinely 'popular' literary manifestation of widely held, moderate Protestant opinion on the political situation at the end of James' reign.

II

[10] Quarles' *A Feast for Wormes* (Quarles 1971: II, 1) was entered in the Stationer's Register on 11th April 1620 (*Transcript* 1875-94: III, 313). This date is important since it situates the text within a period of extreme political volatility both in England and on the European continent. After Frederick's acceptance of the Bohemian crown in 1619, there were intense diplomatic efforts between the Protestant Union and the Catholic League to avoid war and find a peaceful settlement that would satisfy all sides (cf. Bromham and Bruzzi 1990: 58-59). It was unclear at this point whether these negotiations would work, although militant opinion in England was unsurprisingly sceptical. It is in this context that Quarles first enters the literary arena. And he does so with a number of statements of ideological intent. In the first place, the poem is dedicated to Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle. Not only was Lisle the brother of Sir Philip Sidney, he was heir to the Sidney brand of militant Protestantism and aligned with the anti-Spanish party that included the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot and William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. In his dedication, Quarles mentions that he accompanied Sidney 'in your passage thorow [sic] *Germany*' (Quarles 1971: II, 5). In fact, this refers to a delegation, of which Quarles was a part, sent by King James in 1613 to accompany the newly married Frederick and Elizabeth to Heidelberg. By invoking this triumphant event, Quarles invites his readers to read the poem in the context of Bohemian politics. Indeed, he ends the dedication to the reader with a tag in Spanish, 'He leuado le Golpe, Dios sea con ella.' This roughly translates as 'high him blow, God be with her'. There is no particular reason for this tag to be here. Might it be read

as an invocation, ironically in the tongue of the Hapsburg aggressor, to protect both Frederick and Elizabeth in their present dangers?

[11] Quarles continues to position himself in the prefatory material to the poem proper. In the 'Proposition of the whole Work' he writes:

Tis not the Record of Great HECTOR'S Glory
 Whose matchlesse Valour makes the World a Story;
 Nor yet the swelling of that Roman's Name,
 That only Came, and Look'd, and Ouercame;
 Nor One, nor All of those braue Worthies Nine,
 (Whose Might was Great, and Acts almost Diuine,
 That liu'd like Gods, but died like men, and gone)
 Shall giue my Pen a Taske to treat vpon: (*A Feast*, 'Proposition', 1)

We are offered an anti-heroic litany of what the poem will not be. The valour of Hector as reflected in Homer's *Iliad* is rejected, perhaps with a nod to that hero's ignominious death. The 'swelling' Roman, Julius Caesar, is disavowed, as are the nine worthies, also known for their military prowess. If this poem is to invoke military/militant ideals then it will be on different terms to these. This fact is invoked through a clever manipulation of metrics. The first couplet is written in iambic pentameter, the stock in trade of epic verse such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. But notice that Quarles constructs the lines in eleven syllables. He could provide a final twelfth syllable that would make the couplet an alexandrine, as for example Spenser does in the last book and canto of *The Faerie Queene* (cf. Spenser 2007: 711). By tacking on an extra unstressed syllable at the end of each line, the opening lines do not end in the affirmative stress offered by the masculine force of the heroic couplet but rather with that extra half stress provided by a feminine ending (trochaic words like glory/story are contrasted with masculine monosyllables or anapests such as name/overcame that end the following couplet). This is a falling off that can be read both formally and ideologically.

[12] The couplet is thus located in the space between the 'English' heroic couplet and the alexandrine measure associated with French epic romance, an avowedly anti-heroic move. Or rather, it is a move that opens the space for a different kind of heroic discourse. The 'Proposition' continues:

I sing the praises of the King of Kings,
 Out of whose mouth, a two edg'd Smiter springs;
 Whose Words are Mystery, whose Works are Wonder,
 Whose Eyes are Lightening, & whose Voice is Thunder;

[...]

'Tis He that turn'd the waters into Blood,
 And smote the Rocky stone, and caus'd a Flood: (*A Feast*, 9-18)

The poem's typological focus will be on Christ, but it is a Christ who is apocalyptically constructed from a variety of tropes drawn from the book of Revelation (1:12-18). The heroism of this poem, such as it is, distances itself from the secular discourses of epic in favour of the realm of biblically sanctioned eschatology where Christ is 'More bright then mid-day Phoebus' (*A Feast*, 'Proposition' 21).[2] Indeed, when the 'Introduction' reads Nineveh in relation to that archetypal city of apocalyptic destruction, 'great Babylon' (*A Feast*, 7), the exegetical priorities of the text become clear.[3]

[13] Like Quarles' other paraphrases of biblical texts, the poem is divided into sections, with an 'Argument' providing a poetic amplification of the biblical story and a 'Meditatio'

offering a moral/didactic reading of the story's implications. The story of Jonah is particularly apposite to the religio-political context within which the poem is written. Jonah is commanded by God to go to Nineveh to preach condemnation upon the city. He resists and flees to another land by sea. While on the boat a storm erupts and Jonah is cast over the side into the belly of a whale. God spares him and he resolves to go to Nineveh. But his preaching does not result in the destruction of the city and Jonah is left to wonder at the mysteries of God's providential power. On the one hand the story could be read as an exaltation to intervene in the internal politics of other nations. Jonah is initially sceptical but once he has suffered he is willing to go abroad to do God's work. But on the other hand, his preaching does not lead to the expected punishment of the Ninevites and their destruction. In the Bible, Jonah takes this fact with ill grace: the poem, however, prefers to reflect upon the risks of foreign intervention and offer various religious and political criticisms. In this way, the story could equally be read as a warning on the folly of interfering in the affairs of other countries. The poem makes much of this exegetical tension.

[14] The first point to note about the text is its avowedly Calvinistic assertions on God's grace and providence. In the first meditation, the speaker notes that God 'will send the brightness of his Grace to those / That grope in darkness, and his Grace oppose' (*A Feast*, 115). As Calvin frequently notes grace is an unmerited gift from God bestowed freely upon sinners: 'upon grace alone the heart of man can rest' (Calvin 1961: 550). The poem also stresses that God's apparent failure to punish Nineveh as Jonah wishes is an affirmation of his providential power. In answer to the question 'Is God like one of vs? Can hee / When he hath said it, alter his decree?', the speaker argues that 'In God, to change his Will, and will a Change, / Are divers things: When he repents from ill, / He wills a change; he changes not his Will' (*A Feast*, 1140). Certainly this argument could be dismissed as a torturously irrational defence of the indefensible. But it becomes rather more significant when we compare the picture given here of an immutable God who resists destroying Nineveh with the comments throughout the poem on the perils of interfering in the affairs of foreign nations. The omnipotent Calvinist God whose decrees are absolute and, in this case, pacific, could also be read as an affirmation of Jacobean monarchical absolutism with a pacific bent.

[15] Throughout, the poem actually seems to sympathise with Jonah in his initial refusal to go to Nineveh. Jonah says:

The City's great,
 And mighty Ashur stands with deadly threat;
 Their harts are hardened, that cannot heare:
 Will greene wood burne, when so vnapt's the seire?
 Strange is the charge: Shall I goe to a place
 Vnknowne, and forraine? (*A Feast*, 171)

In the context of early 1620 when the question of foreign intervention in the Palatinate was still being debated, these lines offer a warning to the militaristic aspirations of the militant Protestant wing. The reference to 'mighty Ashur' and his 'deadly threat' may connote the power of Spain and the Catholic League, whose 'harts are hardened' with impious religion. That such allegorical decoding was commonplace at the time is confirmed by Thomas Cogswell when he notes that James' failure to intervene militarily 'ensured, as some Englishmen bitterly remarked, that the Promised Land was the Palatinate, not Palestine' (1989b: 115). The fact that Nineveh is called the 'the World's Imperiall throne' (*A Feast*, 1123) is significant here: if Nineveh is to be read as the Palatinate, then as a realm now under the 'Imperial' control of Catholic might, the reader is left to question how this force might be successfully opposed. Indeed, it is the question 'Will greene wood burne, when so vnapt's the seire?' that is the most pressing in this context. In 1620, it was doubtful that Britain's naval force was adequately equipped for a sustained war on foreign soil. The

reference to the burning of 'greene wood' can be read as a comment on the likely fate of poorly constructed ships venturing abroad from England, a 'seire' that is 'vnapt' or ill-prepared for war.

[16] The poem also contains a number of critiques of improper courtly, political and religious conduct. In the case of the former two, bribes are condemned (*A Feast*, 65, 158) and the proper application of justice and fair trade are also revealed as concerns (*A Feast*, 151-162). While this undoubtedly has a didactic/moralising aim, it is significant that the opening sessions of the 1621 parliament were dedicated to addressing precisely such matters (cf. O' Callaghan 2000: 193-199). Nonetheless, it is the critique of religious policy that occupies the most space. For one, there are numerous allusions to the misuse of altars such as the line 'My Altars cease to smoake; their holy fires/ Are quencht, and where prayers should, there sinne aspires' (*A Feast*, 71). I would argue that these words allude to the controversies between the Calvinists and Arminians concerning the place and function of the altar in worship. For the Arminians, the Calvinist emphasis on the word preached from the pulpit by the minister was in danger of overshadowing the sacramental centrality of the mass and its rituals. Because of this, the Arminians tended to privilege the altar over the pulpit, often moving the altar to a position of greater prominence within the church. But the critique goes further than ceremonial disagreements. In meditation nine, the speaker condemns the actions of the Ninevites in covering themselves with sackcloth and ashes after Jonah's condemnation, calling them 'tricks to purchase heau'nly grace' (*A Feast*, 1228):

Such holy madness God reiects, and loathes,
That sinkes no deeper, than the skinne, or cloathes;
'Tis not thine eyes which (taught to weepe by art)
Looke red with teares, (not guilty of thy hart)
'Tis not the holding of thy hands so hye,
Nor yet the purer squinting of thine eyes,
'Tis not your Mimmick mouthes, your Antick faces,
Your Scripture phrases, or affected Graces,
Nor prodigall vp-banding of thine eyes,
Whose gashfull balls doe seeme to pelt the skyes;

[...]

Such Puppit-playes, to heauen are strange, and quaint. (*A Feast*, 1237-1255)

The false repentance of the Ninevites is figured in terms that would have resonated directly for a Protestant readership in 1620: each of the criticisms levelled at the Ninevites is a common contemporary accusation made by Calvinists, moderate and militant alike, against false outward Arminian worship. The fact that Arminianism was often characterised as crypto-Papist by its opponents gives this attack a double edge. It can be read as casting doubt upon the commitment of Ninevah/the Palatinate to the Protestant cause while also assailing those who veer from 'true' Protestantism back home. This section neatly demonstrates the way in which both national and international politics were interwoven in literary commentary of this period.

[17] The attack also has a clearly defined political aim. This can be seen in the following passage that follows a section exploring Jonah's fate in being cast off the boat by the sailors, and that then turns to a more general lamentation:

O righteous Isr'el, where, O, where art thou?
Where is thy Lampe? Thy zealous Shepheard now?
Alas! the rau'nous Wolues will worr' thy Sheepe;
Thy Shepheard's carelesse, and is fall'n asleepe;
Thy wandring flocks are frighted from their fold,

Their Shepheard's gone, and Foxes are too bold:
 They, they whose smooth-fac'd words became the Altar,
 Their works discent, and first begin to falter;
 And they, that should be Watch-lights in the Temple,
 Are snuffes, and want the oyle of good example; (A *Feast*, 409-418)

There is no direct biblical source in Jonah for these words, and so the reader is invited to read them in a broader contemporary context. Rather than simply lamenting Nineveh, the speaker turns his gaze more generally onto Israel. These lines are also double edged: when the speaker laments for the 'zealous Shepheard' who has 'fall'n asleep' and allowed his sheep to be attacked by the 'rau'nous Wolues', the tropes, though biblically sourced, are conventional mainstays of early modern anti-Catholic rhetoric. Read in this light, the 'Sheapheard' is Frederick and the 'Wolues' are his Catholic opponents. However, the language used here is also central to the discourse of pastoral, which in the Spenserian tradition was often appropriated for anti-Catholic ends. Read in this light, Israel could stand as a synonym for Britain, constructing the careless 'Sheapheard' as James who has allowed the Arminian 'Foxes', to many Calvinists no better than Catholics, to abuse the 'Altar' and the 'Temple' and to sow 'discent'. This reading makes sense when we consider Quarles' scepticism regarding the more extreme militaristic ideology propagated by the militant wing of Protestant opinion during this period. As David Norbrook explains, 'the Arminians tended to favour peace with Spain and disliked Calvinist predestinarianism' (155).[4] This explains why Quarles goes after the Arminians so vociferously: while he is a Calvinist predestinarian, he is also, like the Arminians, sceptical of the bellicose martial ideology of the militant Protestants. So in order to protect himself from charges of Arminian/crypto-Papist sympathies at home or abroad, the stridently Calvinistic tone and polemical critique of the Arminians that we find throughout *A Feast for Wormes* is necessary. This demonstrates that Quarles is a poet who is not afraid to depart from prevailing orthodoxies. He is a pro-Calvinist but is also pro the king's pacific policy; he is anti-Catholic and anti-Arminian, but he is sharply critical of where he thinks the established Church has gone wrong.

[18] Quarles' next poem, *Hadassa* (Quarles 1971: II, 37-66), a paraphrase on the book of Esther, was entered in the Stationer's Register on 10th January 1621 (*Transcript* 1875-94: IV, 9). As was well known by this date, James intended to recall Parliament for the first time since 1614 and he did so on 30th January 1621. The King was aiming to win parliament round to his policy of pacific negotiation with other European powers, to gain important cash subsidies and to do something to alleviate the dire state of the economy. Parliament, dominated as it was by militant Calvinists, had other ideas. Although the initial sessions dealt relatively successfully with various political abuses (including the impeachment of Francis Bacon) and granted the King some of the money he asked for, it was not long before James and parliament clashed. A.A. Bromham and Zara Bruzzi have argued that the central issue that caused the King to dismiss parliament at the end of the year was 'freedom of speech' (86). However, an examination of parliament's petition to the king reveals that the argument for free speech was in fact a pretext for insisting upon a precisely defined set of religio-political views, many of which impinged directly upon the royal prerogative.

[19] The petition opens by arguing that the 'subversion of religion' by 'princes of different religion' was in danger of stirring up 'ill-affected subjects at home, the popish recusants' and re-establishing the 'ambition of the Pope of Rome and his dearest son' ('Petition' 1944: 307). The parliamentarians urged James to 'take your sword into your own hand' and to 'avow the aiding of those of our religion in foreign parts; which doubtless would reunite the princes and states of the union, by these disasters disheartened and disbanded.' For the petitioners, national and international security were intimately connected and depended not just upon defending Protestantism at home and abroad but on actively proselytising on its behalf. This is why the document suggests that James 'should not 'rest upon a war in these parts

only [i.e. the Palatinate]', a dangerous excursion into matters reserved for the royal prerogative (309). The King duly rejected the petition for presuming to 'meddle' with 'deep matters of state' but it is clear that the militant line expressed by parliament could not be squared with King's avowed pacific polity and that divisions were becoming increasingly entrenched (310).

[20] Therefore, Quarles' poem was written and published at another crossroads in late Jacobean religious and political discourse. As with *A Feast for Wormes*, the prefatory material offers a number of clues as to the poem's ideological positioning. It is dedicated to James and the title page carries the motto 'By peace plenty: by wisdome peace', a rather unsubtle invocation of James' pacific and Solomonic pretensions. More interestingly, the title page contains a quotation from Horace's sixth Ode: 'Conamur tenues, grandia; nec pudor, / Imbellique Lyrae Musa potens vetat' (Horace 1973: 29).[5] In order to unpick the significance of this quotation, it is necessary to return it to its proper context. This particular ode begins by invoking 'That eagle of Homeric wing' and the 'courage and conquests' of various battles. But this militaristic orientation is soon undercut:

But I'm not strong enough to try
Such epic flights. For themes as high
As iron Achilles in his savage pique,
Crafty Ulysses homing
After long ocean roaming,
Or Pelops house of blood, my wings feel weak; (7-12)

And after this anti-heroic disavowal come the lines that Quarles quotes:

And both my modesty and my Muse,
Who tunes her lyre to peace, refuse (13-14)

And then follow the lines that any educated reader would have known came next:

To let me tarnish in the laureate's part
Our glorious Augustus'
Or your own battle-lustres
With my imperfect and unpolished art. (15-18)

Just as James liked to compare himself to Augustus who, according to one reading of Roman history, initiated a time of universal peace and prosperity, so by invoking this particular Horatian Ode, Quarles is quite clearly setting himself up as the poet of peace who will not indulge in the 'epic flights' associated with the Spenserian tradition. The fact that Horace was known in early modern England as a poet who supported Augustus and who was sceptical of republicanism sets Quarles at a further ideological remove from the Jacobean Spenserians, many of whom were interested in precisely that dangerous republican territory (cf. Norbrook 2002: 200-201). Indeed, it is interesting to note that a translation of Horace's *Odes* was entered in the Stationer's Register just a couple of months after Quarles' poem in 1621: he was clearly not the only contemporary writer who felt the need for the particular political resonances associated with the Roman poet.

[21] But Quarles' support for the policy of monarchical pacifism does not preclude the strain of apocalypticism that we observed in his first poem. The apocalyptic language of the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah and Daniel are invoked in the 'Introduction', and the fall of Babylon is conjured:

Woe, woe, and heauy woes ten thousand more
Betide great Babylon, that painted whore;

Thy buildings, and thy fensive Towers shall
 Flame on a sudden, and to cinders fall. (Hadassa, 'Introduction', 13)

The inference is clear: Catholic political and militaristic might will fall, but this will be down to the intervention of God, not man. Quarles goes on to list a series of biblical and ancient Kings including Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus and Cambyses, all of whose reigns ended in failure. This sets the scene for the poem proper when the reign of the biblical King Assuerus is described as a time when the people 'softly began to grumble, sore to vex' (Hadassa, I. 9). As this detail is extra-biblical, it seems that Quarles is using poetic license to draw contemporary parallels between his biblical text and contemporary politics.

[22] But if these parallels are left to the reader to make, the 'Meditation' on section four is rather more directive. Ostensibly, this 'Meditation' should offer a comment on Esther being chosen by King Assuerus as his consort. Yet there can be no mistaking the very contemporary resonance of the verse:

The strongest Arcteries that knit and tye
 The members of a mixed Monarchy,
 Are learned Councils, timely Consultations,
 Rip'ned Aduice, and sage Deliberations;
 And if those Kingdomes be but ill-be-blest,
 Whose Rule's committed to a young man's brest;
 Whose choicest Councillors but Children are:
 How many Kingdomes blest with high renowne,
 (In all things happy else) haue plac'd their Crowne
 Vpon the temples of a childish head,
 Vntill with ruine, King, or State be sped!
 What Massacres (begun by factious iarres,
 And ended by the spoile of ciuill warres)
 Haue made braue Monarchyes vnfortunate,
 And raz'd the glory of many a mighty State?
 How many hopefull Princes (ill-aduis'd
 By young, and smooth-fac'd Councill) haue despis'd
 The sacred Oracles of riper yeeres,
 Till deare Repentance washt the Land with teares! (Hadassa, IV. 1)

The praise of 'sage' counsel and the stinging critique of 'young' men whose 'childish head' the state has unwisely crowned is surely a criticism of the King's controversial favourite George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. In 1621, Buckingham was firmly in favour of a Spanish match and anti-war, placing him in opposition to the 'sacred Oracles of riper yeeres' of militants such as Pembroke and Abbot. Given Buckingham's closeness to Prince Charles as well, the line about 'hopefull Princes (ill-aduis'd / By young, and smooth-fac'd Councill)' is more than a conventional expression of the *speculum* tradition that presumed to advise princes. This is, in fact, direct and radical political critique from the self-styled 'vngarnisht Quill'. When he says in section 16 that 'Fragile is the trust repos'd on Troopes of Horse' (Hadassa, XVI. 37), the poet is not just warning against intervention abroad: it is also a less than subtle dig at Buckingham who was, amongst other things, Master of the King's Horse.

[23] In case the point is missed, Quarles invokes Rehoboam, the 'lucklesse, and succeeding Son / Of (wisdom's Fauourite) great Solomon' (Hadassa, IV. 21), a clear reference to James as Solomon and his son Charles, whose predilection for 'rash, and beardlesse Councill' (Hadassa, IV. 23) threatens the political security of the state. He also recalls the 'second Richard' (Hadassa, IV. 27), a monarch whose reign and deposition resonated throughout early modern political and literary discourse with alacrity. Quarles covers his back (and

abandons any attempt at coding his message) by praising 'glorious Brittain', the 'sacred Sou'raigne' and the 'wise Assembl' of Priuy Councels' (*Hadassa*, IV. 33, 43, 44), but the criticism remains. This is a demonstration of how far moderate Jacobean Protestantism is prepared to go in criticising those in power. In this at least, Quarles and the Spenserians share a common agenda.

[24] The next poem, *Job Militant* (Quarles 1971: II. 67-98), emerged a few years later in 1624. Its entry for 13th October of that year in the Stationer's Register comes just six days after another text by the poet John Taylor entitled *Brittaines Joy, for the happy Arriuall of Prince CHARLES* and on the same day as an anonymous text called *The Joyfull returne of Prince CHARLES* (*Transcript* 1875-94: IV, 67-68: cf. Cogswell 1989a). As the title of these texts makes clear, much had happened politically in the intervening years. In 1623, Prince Charles and Buckingham had gone to Spain in order to persuade the Infanta and her Father into a marriage settlement. But the mission ended in failure and both men returned to Britain to the acclaim evoked in the titles above. The majority of the population were deeply relieved that there would be no Spanish match, a fact that reveals how deeply entrenched anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiment was in late Jacobean England, especially since the King had suspended the Catholic Penal Laws in 1622/23 (cf. Robinson 2006: 223). More startlingly, Charles and Buckingham reversed their previous policy and now argued for war with Spain and intervention on behalf of beleaguered Protestants on the European continent. As W.B. Patterson puts it, 'James had not lost control of foreign and domestic policy, but he faced an extremely serious challenge' (335). The King was faced by a newly united front arguing for war. He summoned parliament in February 1624 and in March argued for funds to pursue a war against England's enemies. Quarles' poem is dedicated to Prince Charles, and although the familiar tropes are in place in the prefatory material—the invocation of peace, the quotation from Horace's Odes, the defence of divine poetry, the disavowal of imperial Roman history as a paradigm, and the not so coded references to Britain as 'the afflicted nation' (*Job Militant*, 'Proposition', 5)—the tone of this poem is much more urgent. The story of Job and his suffering affords the poet the ideal space to discourse on a variety of contemporary issues and concerns and to offer a moderate response to the political situation.

[25] With his undoubtedly sincere commitment to pacifism, in 1624 Quarles found himself in the odd position of being a moderate Protestant whose adherence to his monarch's political principles placed him in a distinct minority. His dedication to Charles, speculative as it probably was, is also an attempt to wrest the previously pacific Prince back round to the religio-political views held by his father. *Job Militant* (the title is deliberately ironic) has no doubts as to who is responsible for the crisis. Section two has a Machiavellian speech by Satan who claims:

I haue been practising mine old profession,
 And come from compassing my large Possession,
 Tempting thy sonnes, and (like a roaring Lion)
 Seeking my prey, disturbe the peace of Sion;
 I come from sowing Tares, among thy Wheate;
 To him, that shall dissemble Peter's Seate,
 I haue been plotting, how to prompt the death
 Of Christian Princes; (*Job Militant*, II. 15)

Although this passage does draw upon chapter 2 of the book of Job, the references to civil discord and to the Pope are obviously not biblically sanctioned, and they offer a clear account of who is to blame for the present crisis. Like England, Job finds himself variously afflicted by foreign powers such as 'A rout of rude Sabaeans' (*Job Militant*, III. 18) and 'fierce Caldaeans' (III. 34). More directly, the poem speaks about 'mans righteous Pallate' (V. 28) and asks a little later, 'Can Pallates find a relish in distast?' (VIII. 11). While the word

ostensibly refers to Job's taste, it is surely no coincidence that the word is a homonym of the common early modern term for the Palatinate.

[26] The apocalypticism of the previous poems is maintained:

The secret disposition
Of sacred Prouidence is lockt, and seal'd
From man's Conceit, and not to be reueal'd,
Vntill that Lambe breake ope the Seale, and come
With Life and Death, to giue the World her Doome.' (IX. 28)

And when war is invoked as a positive virtue, it is in terms of the Erasmian trope of the *militis Christiani*: 'Thy life's a Warfare, Thou a Souldier art, / Satan's thy Foe-man, and a faithfull Heart, / Thy two-edg'd weapon' (VIII. 31). But despite these perhaps by now predictable moves, Quarles shows an important development in his thinking on the relative value of peace and how it is achieved:

The Ground-worke of our Faith, must not relie
On bare Euent: Peace and Prosperitie
Are goodly Fauours, but no proper Marke,
Wherewith God brands his Sheepe: No outward barke
Secures the body, to be sound within.
The Rich man liu'd in Scarlet, dyed in Sinne. (IX. 33)

These lines argue that just as faith cannot be contingent upon worldly events, so peace cannot be valorised as an absolute good in this world since it is ultimately dependent upon God. Relying too much on 'bare Euent' to underwrite peace is, ultimately, a form of idolatry and this realisation underpins the social critique that follows.

[27] The last years of James' reign were beset by economic problems and food shortages. This is addressed directly in the following lines:

Some mooue their Land-markes, rob their neighbour flocks;
Others, in gage, receiue the Widowe's Oxe;
Some grind the Poore, whilst others seeke the Prey;
They reape their Haruest, beare their Graine away;
Men presse their Oyle, and they distraine their Store,
And rend the Gleanings, from the hungry poore.
The Citie roares, the Blood, which they haue spent,
Cryes (vnreueng'd) for equall punishment (XIII. 99)

However, social criticism of selfish landowners and food producers is not simply the result of class antagonism. The broader social good that should unite men is, according to Quarles, perverted at all levels of society. The good is not to be found 'sainted in the Shrine of wealth' (XIII. 31), and because 'Honours are bought and sold, she rests not there [i.e. at court]' (XIII. 26). Throughout society, the fetishisation of material idols is the central problem. As 'Felicity' comments at the end of this section: 'My heart being virtuous, let my face be wan, / I am to God, I onely seeme to man' (XIII. 47). The verse may see simple and direct political action subsumed by providential assertion, but as a moderate expression of Calvinist 'plainness' in the face of idolatry, it represents a sincere and probably widely held response to the social ills afflicting late Jacobean society.

[28] The poem contains a number of laments by Job, and it is hard not to see these as offering a comment upon the position that James found himself in after the return of Charles and Buckingham. For example, Job recalls when 'Offended Iustice sought my hands, for peace' and 'Princes kept silence (when I spake) to heare me' (XV. 6, 8). But now

Job finds himself politically and personally reduced: 'I'm turn'd a laughing stock' and 'I'm vex't abroad with flouts, at home with feares' (XV. 21, 32). The poem ends, as it must, with the affirmation that Job 'dyed in Peace, and full of Dayes' (XIX. 112) as well as a paean to that 'Great Salomon' (XIX. 33) who was blessed with 'long dayes of peace' (XIX. 36). But while we might remark upon Quarles' political consistency in this matter, the fact that this praise is couched in the past tense reflects the passing of a truly pacific Jacobean policy where the fact that the King is now a 'laughing stock' is a statement not so much of criticism but of political futility.

[29] Quarles' last Jacobean poem, *Sions Elegies* (Quarles 1971: I. 99-118), follows in the same vein as the others. Interestingly, it is dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke, the leader of the militant Protestant wing at court. As with his dedication to Charles though, this does not necessarily imply a shift in Quarles' religio-political outlook. Rather it is another attempt to persuade those on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Sion is figured as an 'Iland' surrounded by a 'troubled Ocean' that is caught 'Betwixt her home-bred, and her forrein foes' (I. 2). Arminian worship is attacked: 'Her Altars are defac'd' and 'Her Priests haue chang'd their Hymns to sighes and cries' (I. 4); militaristic opportunist such as Buckingham are criticised: 'Tyrant foemen doe aduance / Their craftie crests' (I. 5); and idolatry is identified as an ongoing problem, with the 'wasted Temple' now 'a Groue, for base Idolatrie' (I. 10). Indeed, Quarles' critique throughout is strikingly similar to Fulke Greville's poem at the end of *Caelica*: 'Sion lies waste, and thy Jerusalem, / O Lord, is fall'n to utter desolation' (CIX. 1-2). Indeed, this poem may have been written not long after and with these events in mind (Norbrook 2002: 222-223). For moderate and high Calvinists alike, Sion/Jerusalem provided a paradigm for lamenting the political state of late Jacobean England. However, the concept of peace has shifted since *A Feast for Wormes*, from being an absolute ethical good, to being a state dependent upon God, to a concept that no longer seems attainable: 'Where, where art thou, o sacred Lambe of peace' (I. 21).

[30] That said, in keeping with the dual focus of Quarles' poetic critique that we have seen elsewhere, Sion/Jersusalem can also stand throughout the text for the Palatinate. For example, the conclusion to a sonnet in section four that states 'Abroad, the Sword; Famin, at home destroyes thee' (IV. 4) could, in 1624, equally apply to Britain as to the Palatinate. In other places, the allusions are clearly to the situation in the Palatinate. For example, when we are told in a sonnet in the second section that in Sion 'out-law'd Princes lieu constrain'd, / Howrely to heare the name of Heauen profan'd and that 'Manner and Lawes, the life of gouernment, / Are sent into eternall banishment' (II. 9), this can only be a reference to the court of Frederick, in exile and awaiting intervention from overseas. The prophetic tone adopted throughout *Sions Elegies* allows Quarles to comment on the folly of military intervention while also offering a moderate Calvinistic answer to the question of how best to respond to the crisis:

Rent, and desposed from Imperiall state,
 By heauen's high Hand, on heauen we must awaite;
 To him that struck, our sorrowes must appeale;
 Where Heauen hath smit, no hand of man can heale;
 In vaine, our wounds expected man's reliefe,
 For disappointed Hopes renew a Griefe;
Aegypt opprest vs in our fathers' loynes,
 What hope's in *Aegypt*? Nay, if *Aegypt* ioynes
 Her force with Iudah, our vnited powers,
 Could ne're preuaile 'gainst such a Foe, as our's;
Aegypt, that once did feel heauen's scourge, for grieuing
 His Flock, would now refined it, for relieuing. (IV. 17)

Quarles follows conventional Calvinist providential logic in suggesting that if God is responsible for the current state of Sion/the Palatinate, then it is only correct to wait for God to intervene and put things right. Yet what is significant about this elegy is that providentialism informs a political reading, or rather warning, against intervening and provoking the might of the Catholic League. In early modern discourse, 'Egypt' is a commonly deployed anti-Catholic synonym for Rome and the power of the Catholic Church. Quarles' point implicates both the Palatinate and Britain. If 'Aegypt' (Rome) joined forces with 'Iudah' (Spain), the 'vnited powers' of international Protestantism 'Could ne're preuaile 'gainst such a Foe'. Although this message is focused through a particular religio-political lens, it seems a much more measured and politically realistic assessment of the situation facing Britain in 1624. It may also be read as a subtle criticism of the prevailing political orthodoxy of the militant Protestants, including, perhaps, the man to whom *Sions Elegies* is dedicated.

III

[31] In its own particular way, Quarles' 'moderate' Protestant stance reveals a rather more complex and nuanced literary view of the religio-political picture in late Jacobean England than we might otherwise assume. While he shares many of the concerns and aims of the Jacobean Spenserians, his work departs from theirs at a number of crucial junctures. More than this, a reading of Quarles' Jacobean poetry forces us to reassess the kinds of political interventions that poets were capable of making. By reorienting the Caroline reading of Quarles that has so dominated criticism of him, the fascinating early part of his literary career is revealed in all its political complexity. His Jacobean poetry demonstrates that moderate Protestant opinion was often no less vociferous in its criticisms of policy and social ills than other more obviously 'radical' writers. Quarles' work may not have the theological complexity and formal elegance of George Herbert or the intellectual sophistication and dazzle of Andrew Marvell, but it is a body of writing that deserves to be more widely explored and studied than at present. His 'vngarnisht Quill' still has much to reveal about the religious politics of early modern England.

Queen's University Belfast

NOTES

[1] For more on this context, see Cogswell 1989a and Patterson 1997. [[back to text](#)]

[2] There is a similar metrical effect to the one noted in the opening couplet in the lines 'Whose Words are Mystery, whose Works are Wonder, / Whose Eyes are Lightning, & whose Voice is Thunder.' The caesura in each line combined with the anapaestic 'mystery' and 'lightening', and the trochaic 'wonder' and 'thunder' combine to render the couplet a feminine ended iambic tetrameter, despite its syllabic count. [[back to text](#)]

[3] Quarles locates 'high Armoenia' in Babylon (A Feast, 'Introduction', 9), which may be a dig at the 'high church' ecclesiology of the Arminian faction. [[back to text](#)]

[4] From line 953, Quarles does seem to offer the outline of what might constitute a *casus belli*, a just war, albeit with a number of caveats. [[back to text](#)]

[5] The tag is in fact incorrectly transcribed and should read: 'conamur, tenues grandia, dum pudor/ imbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat'. This probably reflects Quarles' working from memory and misremembering the quotation. [[back to text](#)]

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