

*Spenser and Milton on Ireland:  
Civility, Exclusion,  
and the Politics of Wisdom*

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ONE OF THE THEMES with which Edward Said begins *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is the inability of most “professional humanists . . . to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other” (xiii-xiv). As an example he adduces the case of Spenser in Ireland: “it is generally true that literary historians who study the great sixteenth-century poet Edmund Spenser . . . do not connect his bloodthirsty plans for Ireland, when he imagined a British army [*sic*] virtually exterminating the native inhabitants, with his poetic achievement or the history of British rule over Ireland, which continues today” (7). *Culture and Imperialism* is a rich and suggestive book, but on this point it is hard not to feel that Said has been overtaken by his own success and is preaching to many of those he himself has converted. The truth is that few contemporary Spenser scholars are unfamiliar with the poet’s career as a colonist and even fewer literary critics of the generation that came to maturity in the eighties and nineties have any difficulty seeing the relationship between culture as aesthetic achievement and culture as social formation with all its often dire political consequences.<sup>1</sup> What is at issue, then, is not the existence of the relationship, but its evolving nature, how variable it is, and in the case of Spenser and his early modern contemporaries how distinctive it is.

To explain that distinctiveness perhaps I can begin with my own experience in what the Englishman W. H. Auden calls “mad Ireland.” Between 1974 and 1975 I served as an infantry officer

in Ulster.<sup>2</sup> I say “served” in Ulster, but since I was a volunteer and not a conscript, it seems logical to ask whom or what exactly I thought I was serving. In retrospect it all seems surprisingly like Marlow’s explanation of the colonial mentality in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. “What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency” (10). What preoccupied us was professionalism—getting the job done, no matter what it was, as efficiently as possible.<sup>3</sup> Beyond our immediate obsession with being professional there was not a great deal of thought, but there was something that approximates to Marlow’s notion of the colonialist’s redeeming “idea”—“something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . .” (10). Twenty years on it seems clear that the idol I and many of my fellow officers were serving was the redeeming idea of civility. For me it took the form of a fantasy in which I and my comrades appeared like the Prince’s men in *Romeo and Juliet* holding two feuding houses apart, determined to maintain “the quiet of our streets.” At no point did I ever doubt the justice of this disinterested perspective, for to be a British Army officer meant to embody *sprezzatura*, urbanity, reason and moderation. I was enabled by an image of myself as a representative of civility and of the Irish, whether Catholic or Protestant, working-class or middle-class, as painfully immediate examples of a people irredeemably wedded to the past. “Let the dead bury their dead,” might have been our watchword.<sup>4</sup> My first point is that I would have known myself better had I better known the past, especially the degree to which my own self-representation and understanding, often even the very words I spoke, had been scripted by the past it then seemed so important to ignore.

By knowing the past, even the most cautiously textualist reconstruction of the past, the first thing I might have learnt is that at the heart of the rhetoric of colonialism is the argument of civility. On this, the two great Renaissance poets I wish to consider are at one. But what I want to argue is that an analysis of Spenser and Milton on the rhetoric of colonialism reveals something much more, something finally quite distinct from the contemporary colonial rhetoric of the British Army and civil administration in Ulster—though not, it needs to be emphasized, from that

of many Protestant unionists.<sup>5</sup> To be specific, it reveals some of the complex ways in which the secular discourse of civility was inflected, underwritten and insured by the colonial imperatives embedded in Scripture, especially as those imperatives were rediscovered and given new relevance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Every one of the Bible's great revelatory phases, whether it is the expansionism of Genesis or the paradoxicality of the Gospel, has its colonial uses, and taken together they constitute an inventory of early modern colonial tropes. What I want to focus on in this paper is just one such trope; I want to suggest the crucial importance of the Bible's Wisdom literature in defining Spenser's understanding of his colonial role, and in distinguishing his colonial rhetoric from the equally biblically inflected colonial rhetoric of Milton.

### I. The Argument of Civility

The political force of the argument of civility is succinctly exemplified by Milton. One of the great ironies of the Renaissance is that as civility and the humanism it served became consciously-held principles, so educated men and women increasingly came to see themselves as other than the uneducated, as being almost a different kind of human being from the poor, the superstitious, the rude, the mad, the savage—all routinely characterized as unclean.<sup>6</sup> At the same time that national and religious boundaries were becoming more clearly defined, the principle of civility increased the ability of the educated to cross those boundaries. In April 1647, for instance, Milton wrote to his Catholic friend, Carlo Dati, in Italy to apologize for saying some rather "harsh things against the Pope of Rome." But at the same time that he appeals to Dati's *humanitas*, to his singular politeness, begging his indulgence for "speaking of your religion in [what is] our peculiar way" (Columbia 12:51),<sup>7</sup> the writer who in this context sounds like a perfectly civil relativist loses all patience with the Catholic Irish.

Thomas Corns has recently drawn attention to Milton's "pre-emptive justification" (123) of Cromwell's reconquest and recolonization of Ireland. In *Observations upon the Articles of Peace*, published in May 1649, a few months before Cromwell set out for

Ireland, when Milton considers the reinstatement of what is for him the mad Irish custom of ploughing by attaching the plough to the horse's tail, he finds himself in the position of those who much later would oppose the East Indian custom of widow-burning<sup>8</sup> or who now oppose the African custom of female circumcision. But for Milton there is no dilemma, no relativism, no pressure to respect the integrity of alien cultures, only evidence in the Irish of a "disposition not only sottish but indocible and averse from all Civility and amendment," evidence of the little hope they give for the future, these people who are so wedded to the past, who

rejecting the ingenuity of all other Nations to improve and waxe more civill by a more civilizing Conquest, though all these many yeares better shown and taught, preferre their own absurd and savage Customes before the most convincing evidence of reason and demonstration. (3:303-4)

The difference between English and Irish is the difference between reason and unreason. What they are, implies Milton, we were, and the "true Barbarisme and obdurate wilfulnesse" (3:304) of the Irish suggests that only by subjection will they be freed, only by a conquest even more rigorous will they be civilized. Paradoxically, the argument of civility legitimizes violence. At this point Milton's voice seems indistinguishable from that of Irenius, one of the two speakers in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, and Milton's Yale editor, Merrit Hughes, wonders if the poet has been reading Spenser's tract (3:303).

It is the preponderance of evidence such as this that led historians like Nicholas Canny to conclude that the ideology of English colonization was essentially secular.<sup>9</sup> Fredric Jameson's notion that in the early modern period, "religion is the cultural dominant . . . the master code in which issues are conceived and debated" (37) is quietly reversed. Religious arguments when they do appear are only felt to function as an extension of the civility argument. Canny quotes Spenser to illustrate the common English perception that the problem with the Irish was not their Catholicism but that their Catholicism was so rudimentary: "They are all Papists by their profession [wrote Spenser] but in the same so blindly and brutishly informed for the most part that

you would rather think them atheists or infidels" (qtd. in "Ideology" 585). Canny's antagonist, Ciaran Brady, in his powerful essay on the *View*, somewhat ironically agrees with him.<sup>10</sup> While conceding that *The Faerie Queene* is remarkable for its "fusion of Renaissance and Reformation" (44), Brady insists that "Spenser's religious commitments provide little guidance on his perception of Ireland" (21). What Brady and Canny disagree over is not the secularity of the *View*, but its individuality. For Canny, it is a blueprint, wholly representative of the opinions of "a select group of second-rank English officials who wished to make their careers in Ireland [and who] had set their minds on a radical course of action" ("Debate" 209). For Brady, however, it is a curiosity, an idiosyncratic missive straight from the heart of darkness which reveals Spenser as a Kurtz-like figure at the end of his tether, desperately trying to conceal the mass-extirpation, the horror, the "holocaust" (32), the "blood-bath" (36), he contemplates. Both these accounts can be reconciled with that of Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, whose references to "the burning of mean hovels" and "forced relocation of peoples" (186) makes the *View* appear as evidence that the civilizing mission of England in Ireland was a lot like that of the United States in Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> What all these accounts consistently underestimate, however, is the degree to which the early modern argument of civility is complicated by certain *revitalized* patterns of biblical thinking.

## II. The Biblical Rhetoric of Exclusion

The same learning and mechanical reproduction of learning, the print technology, that accelerated the Renaissance idealization of civility also allowed men and women an unprecedented familiarity with the text of Scripture. One of the effects of that familiarity, especially in Protestant countries, was, of course, the emergence of what Simon Schama calls a "godly nationalism" (104). There were moments when the English, like the Dutch, came to see themselves as an elect nation for whom so many of the Bible's political imperatives, long since allegorized by generations of exegesis, suddenly became immediately, politically relevant again. And none more so than those that encouraged and

justified colonization. “[H]arken unto Caleb and Iosua,” urges Ralphe Hamor to the potential colonizers of Virginia, “Let vs goe vp at once and possesse it [Canaan], for vndoubtedly we shall ouercome it [Num. 13:30]” (50). Ireland will be “as fruitful as the land of Canaan,” claims Sir John Davies, “the description whereof in the 8[th] Deuteronomy doth in every part agree with Ireland” (179). “[H]ow godly a dede it is to ouerthrowe so wicked a race the world may judge,” confides Edward Barkley as he contemplated the destruction of the Ulster Irish, “for my own part I thinke there cannot be a greater sacryfice to God” (qtd. Canny, “Ideology” 581). This last example is especially important because it is not, as Canny dismisses it, some kind of aberration, merely a “smug observation” (581); it is an indication of the degree to which the secular discourse of civility is already interpenetrated by a biblical rhetoric of exclusion.

The full significance of Barkley’s reflection is best seen by comparing it with a similar reflection by William Bradford of the Plymouth colony in New England. Bradford a learned and humane man, is perfectly capable of not demonizing the Indians, but when under stress, when he feels his community threatened, the Indians like Barkley’s Irish become a wicked race, accursed like the alien nations of the Hebrew Bible. The burning of a Pequot village and the immolation of its inhabitants, despite the “stink and scent thereof,” Bradford perceives as a “sweet sacrifice” with which the English gave thanks to God “who had wrought so wonderfully for them, thus to enclose their enemies in their hands and give them so speedy a victory over so insulting an enemy” (296). The phrase “sweet sacrifice” is an allusion to the “sweet savour” of sacrifice in Leviticus 1:9,<sup>12</sup> and thus with both these middle-class gentlemen, with both Barkley and Bradford, the biblical rhetoric of exclusion allows them to transform the destruction of the natives into a sin offering, a sacrifice of atonement, a mark of their own holiness. What this paradox suggests is that often when early modern colonizers commit atrocities, imbrue their hands in blood, they don’t necessarily conceive of themselves as having abandoned civility, or of becoming the horror they have striven to resist; they don’t conceive of themselves as having gone native so much as having become

biblical. "Did not all *Israel* doe as much against the *Benjamits* . . . ?" (3:482) argues Milton in defense of the ruthless English response to the Irish uprising of 1641.

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> the biblical rhetoric of exclusion appears at its most categorical in books like Leviticus with its emphasis on holiness as separation, sexual purity and genealogical integrity. What I want to suggest here is that while even at its most extreme this rhetoric of exclusion thrives in colonies that pride themselves on their Christian inclusiveness and English civility, such rhetoric cannot be exercised without its having a radical impact on the discourse of civility. While, on the one hand, it enables colonists to finesse the paradox of civility legitimizing violence, on the other, it tends to transform the provisional kind of othering created and encouraged by civility into one that is irreducible and, despite the argument of grace, frequently felt to be irredeemable. This is why John Rolfe's letter explaining his marriage to Pocahontas is so interesting. In considering the obstacles to a marriage that, not surprisingly, turned out to be unique in the history of the Virginia colony, Rolfe finds himself caught between the relative prohibitions of civility—that Pocahontas's "education hath bin rude" and "her manners barbarous"—and the absolute prohibitions of Leviticus—that she belongs to a wicked race and "her generation is accursed" (64). Now, Spenser, it seems to me, is caught in a similar double-bind, but with this difference—that the biblical rhetoric that both underwrites and undermines his civility is not so much one of immediate exclusion as one of absolute subjection, that is, not so much the rhetoric of Leviticus as that of the Wisdom literature.

### III. Spenser's Civility and the Politics of Wisdom

Spenser's most famous piece of writing on Ireland, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), is full of the kind foreboding about a native uprising that becomes the staple of countless nineteenth-century popular novels. The signs of unrest are everywhere: "all have their ears upright," says Irenius, "waiting when the watchword shall come that they should all rise generally into rebellion and cast away the English subjection" (94). The watchword came about two years after this was written. After the Earl of

Tyrone's great victory at the Yellow Ford in August 1598, rebellion spread south like wildfire eventually engulfing the English settlements in Munster. While Spenser's flight from Kilcolman, the firing of the castle, and the mysterious burning of a child in the flames is a familiar story,<sup>14</sup> Spenser's response to the disaster is not known for sure. It is not clear whether or not he is the author of all or any of the three documents ascribed to him that detail the events in Munster and are known collectively as *A Briefe Note of Ireland*.<sup>15</sup> There are, however, enough similarities between the *Briefe Note*, the *View*, and Book V of *The Faerie Queene* to suggest what his response is likely to have been.

All three texts reveal the particular conception of justice Joel Altman calls "imperial" (415). Imperial justice is not felt to originate, as many thought common law did, in immemorial custom; it is not independent or self-authenticating; it does not rest on abstract principle but on the sovereign will of the monarch. It is a power, as the proem to Book V explains, that devolves directly from God: most "Resembling God in his imperiall might," it is a power that he "doth to Princes lend,/ And makes them like himselfe in glorious sight,/ To sit in his owne seate" (V.Pr. 10).<sup>16</sup> Now the biblical model for justice so conceived is the Wisdom literature. Texts like the Psalms, the Proverbs, the Book of Job are all dominated by what Northrop Frye calls "the anxiety of continuity" (121). The guarantee of that continuity is the wisdom of the elders, their knowledge of Yahweh's will. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words and hide my commandments with thee . . .," says Solomon, King of Israel, "Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom" (Prov. 2: 1-6). The Wisdom texts are thus intensely authoritarian.<sup>17</sup> They are not as immediately concerned as Leviticus to maintain the integrity of the community by defining its difference from others; they are much more concerned to maintain that integrity by insisting on the wisdom of the community's sources of authority. And justice is not so much an autonomous principle as a function of that authority. All are subject to it and those who challenge it are to be cut off, to be condemned as fools, faithless, mad, "double-minded men" (Ps. 119:113, RSV)—people who are, if they persist in their madness,



no better than the unclean as defined by Leviticus. During Tyrone's rebellion, with the failure of civility, then, with the failure of what Irenius calls learning's "wonderful power" to "soften and temper [even] the most stern and savage nature" of the Irish (159), the rhetoric of Wisdom is always available, having interpellated the minds of so many colonists, to sustain and harden Spenser's heart against this "stiff necked people" (96).

Consider, for instance, the second part of the *Briefe Note*, the appeal to the Queen. It opens in the style of Psalm 130, the *De Profundis*:

*Out of the ashes of disolacon and wastnes of this your wretched Realme of Ireland. vouchsafe moste mightie Empresse our Dred soveraigne to receive the voices of a fewe moste vnhappy Ghostes.* (10:236)<sup>18</sup>

The author of the appeal and his fellow colonists approach the Queen as the psalmist approaches Yahweh. The justice they call for is not a right, but the Queen's gift—it is a matter of her prerogative, her grace, her mercy. They are perfectly capable of not demonizing Tyrone, of understanding his motives, but now that their community is threatened with extinction, Wisdom is uppermost in their minds and what they most fear is that the Queen will not behave like Yahweh and extend upon the Irish "the terror of your wrath" (10:241): "our feare is lest your Maiestes wonted mercifull minde should againe be wrought to your wonted milde courses" (10:242). The colonists are sustained by the continuity of authority imagined in the Wisdom literature: it is some "comforte to vs in all these our miseries," they say, as surely Spenser would have said, "that God hath put this madding minde so generallie into all this rebellious nacion rather to stirre vpp your Maiestie nowe to take vengeance of all their longe and lewde and wicked vsage" (10:241).

In other words, the colonists want the Queen to behave as Artegall does when he confronts the rebel Giant in Canto II of Book V, for there, as Yahweh's power has been delegated by the Faery Queen to her knight of justice, so Artegall rehearses Yahweh's argument against the upstart Job.<sup>19</sup> When Job asserts his righteousness, he appeals to justice as a self-authenticating principle: "Let me be weighed in an even balance that God may know mine integrity" (Job 31:6). Yahweh's response is that Job is in no

position to refer him to anything: "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct *him?*" (40:2). "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding" (38:2-4). This is precisely Artegall's response to the empirical arguments of the egalitarian Giant. In Artegall's redaction Yahweh's impassioned interrogation becomes a simple affirmation of authority: "In vaine therefore doest thou now take in hand, / To call to count, or weigh his workes anew, / Whose counsels depth thou canst not vnderstand" (5.2.42). The Giant is shouldered from the cliff on which he stands by the executive agent of justice, Talus, because, unlike Job, the Giant mad-deningly persists in questioning the wisdom of received authority. Similarly, the Italian and Spanish papal troops at Smerwick in November 1580 are put to the sword by Lord Deputy Grey, the real Artegall, not because Grey has become Kurtz, but because the papal troops are upstarts, double-minded men. The fact that they are commanded by the Pope of Rome, who is for the godly Grey merely a "detestable shaveling," a tonsured priest, means that their incursion amounts to an implicit challenge to all legally constituted, that is, received authority. As Grey explains in his dispatch to the Queen, what both astonished and enraged him was that these people had allowed themselves to be led "by one that neither from God nor man could claim any princely power or empire" (*Calendar* lxii).<sup>20</sup> This is what "the right Antichrist" means for Grey—almost exactly the reverse of what it will mean for godly revolutionaries like Milton.

The point I want to emphasize is that Yahweh's absolute authority as it is articulated in the Wisdom literature is gradually arrogated not only by Lord Deputies like Grey, but even by relatively minor English colonists like Spenser. It permeates their rhetoric and while what we might call Wisdom-thinking prevents the kind of despair Brady attributes to Spenser, it clearly undermines the claims the colonists make for civility, in particular, the transformative power of education. Wisdom-thinking legitimizes the priority of violent subjection and eventually exclusion over transformation. At one telling moment in the *View*, Irenius, in the very act of defending his civility, starts speaking Yahweh's

lines, or at least the lines Abraham attributes to Yahweh. Having asserted that the only way to reform Ireland is by the sword, Irenius immediately qualifies his assertion: "I do not mean the cutting off of all that nation with the sword which *far be it from me* that ever I should think so desperately or wish so uncharitably" (95; emphasis added). Irenius's phrase "far be it from me" alludes to Abraham's expression of faith in Yahweh as the source of justice just as Yahweh seems set on the indiscriminate destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? . . . That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked . . . that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all earth do right" (Gen. 18:22-25). The allusion is grimly ironic, for in the event Yahweh will discriminate, but since he finds no righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, all that nation is cut off. Similarly for the Yahweh-like Irenius as he broods over his map of Ireland,<sup>21</sup> the righteous keep disappearing. Educable natives become harder and harder to imagine, and even after the proposed subjugation by famine, Irenius, as Brady points out, remains preoccupied with rebels and upstarts, those who will finally have to taste the full bitterness of martial law (159-60).

Significantly, Irenius returns to the priority of subjection, surveillance, and coercion just as Eudoxius, his interlocutor in the dialogue, urges him to continue his plan for civilizing the subjugated Irish with his ideas on the reformation of religion—"which is first to be respected according to the saying of Christ, 'First seek the Kingdom of Heaven and the righteousness thereof [Matt. 6:33].'" Irenius's response is to insist testily on first things first: "let me, I pray you, first finish what I had in hand" (159). What he has in hand is the plan for a force of Talus-like provost marshals—lest anyone should challenge authority, "swerve . . . straggle up and down the country or miche in corners amongst their friends, idly as carrows and bards, jesters and such like" (159). Just as the poet imagines the reformation of Irena's "ragged common-weale" in terms of "that same yron man which could reueale / All hidden crimes" sent through all the realm to search out the wicked and "inflict most grieuous punishment" (5.12.26), so Irenius proposes "a provost marshal [be] appoin-

ted in every shire which should continually walk through the country with half dozen or half a score horsemen to take up such loose persons, whom he should punish by his own authority" (159-60). Now if these persons should persist in their ways or should others relapse into rebellion, then, says Irenius, remembering the cup of wrath Yahweh will put "into the hand of them that afflict thee" (Isa.51:23), "let them taste the same cup in God's name" (160). After wondering why a sheriff couldn't do the job as well as a marshal, Eudoxius concedes the wisdom of Irenius's plan: "I do now perceive your reason well" (161).

#### IV. Conclusion

Let me conclude by rehearsing the distinctions at the center of my argument. What determined our behaviour as army officers in Northern Ireland in the seventies was an ideology of civility. I say ideology because the complex set of socially constructed and historically received beliefs and practices that gave us our identity was so deeply held that it felt natural, self-evident, not open to question. Our very identity as representatives of civility inhibited our understanding of the political situation in which we found ourselves. Only very painfully did one become aware that by even-handedly keeping the peace we were, to some extent at least, maintaining Protestant power over the Catholic community and our own power over both. The discourse of civility that moved us is genealogically linked to that of Milton and Spenser, but it is not the same, because, as I have tried to suggest, the civility that determined their identities is inextricably bound up with certain re-politicized patterns of biblical thinking—patterns that are strangely preserved in the rhetoric of Protestant unionists like Ian Paisley.<sup>22</sup> Not, it needs to be emphasized, that Milton and Spenser are exactly the same.

When the argument of civility fails and Milton's colonial rhetoric becomes biblical, it is much more immediately Levitical than Spenser's. In tracts like *The Reason of Church-Government, Eikonoklastes*, or the first *Defence*, whenever Milton is discussing the Irish uprising of 1641, the Irish are routinely represented as an alien or unclean nation, "an accursed race" (4:323), as "the enemies of God and mankind," as "the cursed off-spring" of the Sodomiti-

cal Bishops (1:798), as the Canaanitish other by which republican England can define itself as revolutionary Israel.<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, his colonial rhetoric is remarkably free of the Wisdom literature.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, when Milton does use Abraham's phrase "That be far from thee" in the context of an argument about justice, it is in *Paradise Lost*, Book III, when the Son challenges God the Father's first formulation of justice sufficient without mercy:

For should Man finally be lost . . .  
 . . . that be from thee farr,  
 That farr be from thee, Father, who art Judg  
 Of all things made, and judgest onely right. (3.150, 153-55)

The Son differs from both Abraham and Irenius in quite *explicitly* maintaining justice as an abstract principle and holding the Father accountable to it:

For should Man finally be lost . . .  
 So should thy goodness and thy greatness both  
 Be questiond and blasphem'd without defence.  
 (3.150, 165-66)<sup>25</sup>

Spenser, on the other hand, was no revolutionary; unlike Milton, he spent most of his adult life in a volatile colonial situation and when under stress, his deepest political faith is articulated in terms of Yahweh's willingness to discipline his "stiff necked people." The irony is that in Spenser's colonial rhetoric it is the Irish who so often become Israel, albeit Israel in rebellion.

Both Milton and Spenser supported and encouraged harsh colonial regimes in Ireland. My purpose is not to demonize them, to deny the greatness of their poetry, or even to suggest that they were merely men of their age; it is to point to the enormous *political* power of Scripture—the Bible may be the great code of art, but it also the master code of emergent Western colonialism.<sup>26</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nor does this political awareness seem confined to academics. In movies as popular as *Schindler's List*, for instance, as German troops go about the brutal business of liquidating the Cracow ghetto, an SS officer pauses to play the piano while his comrades debate whether he is playing Bach or Mozart. Blake's claim that empire follows art is now not so much a visionary insight as—it might be argued—a cultural commonplace.

- 2 I served in Belfast as a lieutenant in the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Wales (24th/41st Foot) from December 1974 to May 1975.
- 3 On the cult of professionalism in the British Army in Northern Ireland, see Urban.
- 4 See Huxley 9.
- 5 For the biblical quality of the colonial rhetoric of Ulster unionists like Ian Paisley, see Stevens, "Leviticus Thinking" 441-42.
- 6 On the "withdrawal" of the upper classes, see Davis, esp. 227-67, Burke, esp. 270-81, and Helgerson, esp. 10-11. On the association of the "low" with uncleanness, see Greenblatt, "Filthy Rites," and Stallybrass and White, esp. 1-26, both of which are indebted to Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*.
- 7 Unless otherwise indicated (as here), Milton's prose is quoted from the Yale edition and his poetry from the Columbia edition.
- 8 Nineteenth-century British polemic against *sati* is usually characterized by concern that legislation should not antagonize Hindu religious sensitivities. Writing in 1818, J. H. Harington, for instance, feels that the suppression of *sati* is only possible if it is perceived "as obviously and exclusively originating in motives of equity and humanity, unconnected with any degree of religious intolerance" (qtd. in Peggs 17). Obviously, there were situations in which the appeal to religious tolerance was every bit as politically interested as it was altruistic, but my point is that religious tolerance was an argument that had to be taken into account in colonial India in a way that it did not in early modern Ireland, and as such it indicates a degree of cultural relativism not available to people like Spenser and Milton.
- 9 In his article "The Ideology of English Colonization," Canny argues "that those sixteenth-century Englishmen who pondered the Irish problem did so in secular terms" (576). The argument is expanded in his book, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*.
- 10 For Canny's response and Brady's reply to that response, see "Debate."
- 11 Greenblatt's conclusion that the "colonial violence inflicted upon the Irish is at the same time the force that fashions the identity of the English" (189) is indebted to Canny's conclusion: "the events in Ireland from 1565 to 1576 . . . sharpened the English concept of civility with the result that the English thereafter looked differently at others and at themselves" (*Conquest* 163). This observation has now achieved the status of an axiom, as witness Michael Neill's recent pronouncement: "since nationality can only be imagined as a dimension of difference . . . it goes without saying that Ireland played an equally crucial part in the determination of English identity, functioning as the indispensable anvil upon which the notion of Englishness was violently hammered out" (3). Neill's otherwise fine essay is typical in its almost complete indifference to the religious dimension of early modern colonial rhetoric and so furthers the "presentism" that is a principal target of my essay.
- 12 Unless otherwise indicated the Bible is quoted from the Authorized Version.
- 13 See Stevens, "Leviticus Thinking."
- 14 See Judson 196-201.
- 15 See Brady, *A Briefe Note of Ireland*.
- 16 Spenser's poetry is quoted from the Variorum edition.
- 17 As, for example, Reventlow 139 makes clear, the Book of Proverbs is routinely used to justify the divine right of kings during the reign of James I.

- <sup>18</sup> The *Briefe Note* is quoted from Variorum edition.
- <sup>19</sup> See Dunseath esp. 104-05.
- <sup>20</sup> Spenser's account of Grey's motivation in the *View* differs from Grey's own only in as much as he assumes the troops had no commission from the Pope. Grey's rage against the Pope is edited out, but the threat to constituted authority remains at the center of Spenser's apologia: because the troops came "with no licence nor commission from their own King," Spenser's Grey felt it would "be dishonourable for him in the name of his Queen to condition or make any terms with such rascals" (108). For a more sentimental view of Grey at Smerwick, see Camden 105.
- <sup>21</sup> On the map as an instrument of domination, see Avery.
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, Paisley, "A Prime Text for the Prime Minister" (15 December 1985), qtd. in Bruce 269-70.
- <sup>23</sup> For more on this, see Stevens, "'Leviticus Thinking'" 455-58.
- <sup>24</sup> As David Gay makes clear, Wisdom-thinking is apparent, however, when Milton finds the authority of the republic challenged by counter-revolution as in *The Readie and Easie Way*: "Shall we never grow old enough to be wise to make seasonable use of gravest authorities, experiences, examples?" (7:448).
- <sup>25</sup> For a more detailed account of the function of the biblical allusions in this speech, see Stevens, *Imagination* 155-59.
- <sup>26</sup> This paper was first delivered as the keynote address to the Spenser Society of America at the MLA Annual Convention in Toronto, December 1993.

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