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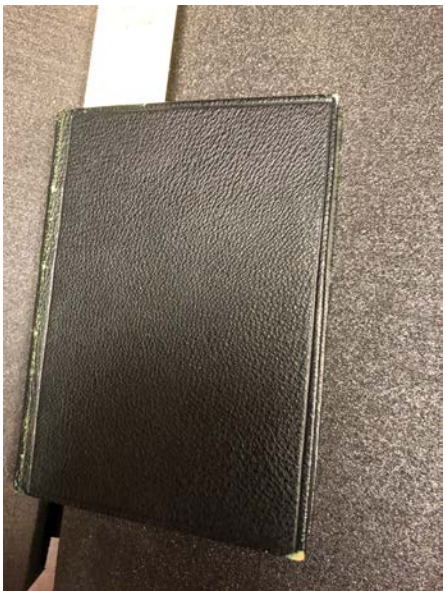
Early Modern Bibliophilia: A Celebration of the Chrzanowski Collection
November 15, 2019

The Scourge of Villainie: Three Bookes of Satyres. **London: Printed by J[ames]. R[oberts]. And are to be sold by John Buzbie, In Paules Church-Yard, at the Signe of the Crane, 1598.**

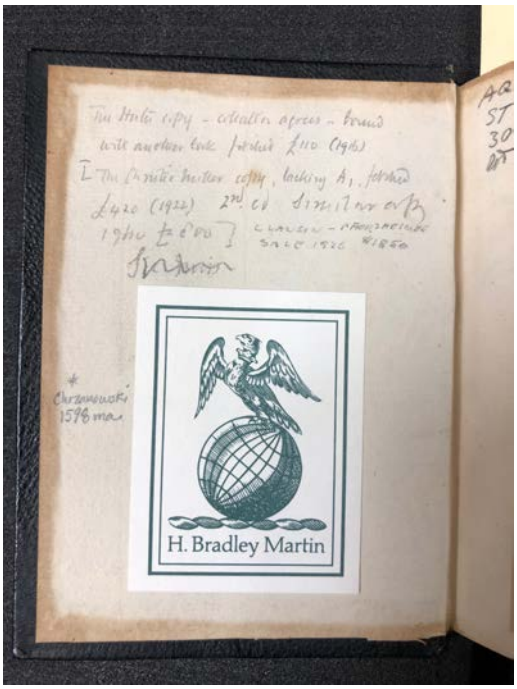
"In serious iest, and iesting seriousness
I striue to scourge poluting beastliness."

When I first began working at the Clark in 2018, my favorite aisle in which to shelve books was the one that holds our spectacular Chrzanowski Collection. I'm not embarrassed to admit that I took great pleasure in the pure eye candy represented in the stacks: From incunables to drama, the Chrzanowski tomes feature some of the most beautiful bindings, illuminations, illustrations, and papers held in the entire library. Even the earliest book in the collection, Caxton's 1479 *Cordyal of the four last and final thinges*, is, of course, "an extraordinarily tall and beautiful copy!" The books in the collection are not only crucial to the development of the English language and literature, but are themselves pinnacles of aesthetic achievement in early modern bookbinding. Each one practically begs you to judge it by its cover.

The book I'm speaking about today, however, is absolutely *not* one of those books.



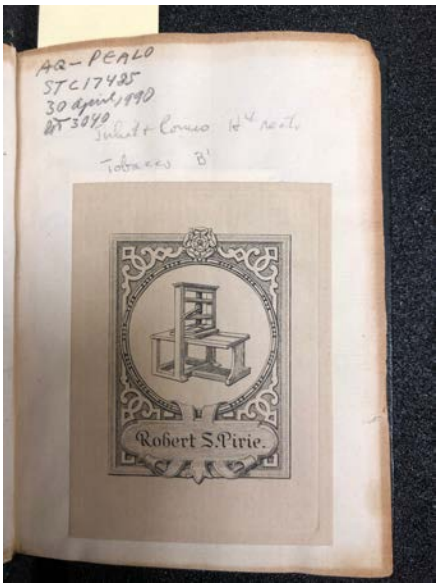
When it comes to appearances, this first edition of John Marston's *The Scourge of Villainie* (1598) stands out amongst the crowd by virtue of being so darn boring. Peeping out between folio versions of Shakespeare's plays is this little octavo, bound in nondescript modern 20thc black morocco with some daringly-trimmed fore-edges (blech!) and a few ornamental borders shaved off by well-meaning previous owners (cut to generations of future rare book librarians wringing their hands, aghast). However, the mundanity of the binding conceals not only salacious, genre-defining poetry by one of England's most energetic Jacobean playwrights, John Marston, but a fascinatingly rich provenance history documented via bookplates, stamps, and inscriptions.



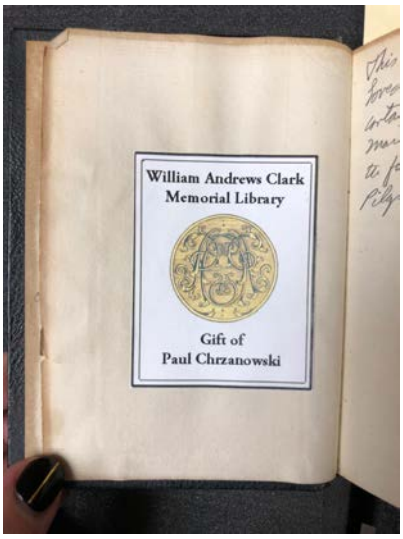
Provenance

Before delving into the content of Marston's gleefully "snarling satire" bursting from the pages of *The Scourge of Villainie,* I want to move into the book from the exterior materiality inwards. First, the bookplates and pencil notations on the pastedowns and front free endpaper reveal that this particular edition, before being generously given to the Clark for safe-keeping, traveled through the hands of some of America's leading book collectors, denoting it as not only an artifact of its era but one which holds a historic place in 20th-century book collecting history.

The earliest (and least firm) ownership notation is that of S.C. Jarvis (?), written in a 20th-century hand on the front pastedown with an illegible signature. From there, the copy made its way into the collection of "one of the greatest collectors of the century," H. Bradley Martin, whose bookplate remains on the front pastedown. Martin took impeccable care of this copy, as he did all the 10,000+ volumes in his $30 million-dollar collection, all of which were considered "museum-quality" and housed in his climate-controlled library in Virginia.



Upon Martin's passing, the book was auctioned off by Sotheby's New York on May 1st, 1990, which is when it passed into the care and keeping of Robert S. Pirie, a seminal figure in early modern book collecting. Upon his passing, *Fine Books & Collections Magazine* deemed Pirie "one of the world's leading book collectors: Over 60 years, Mr. Pirie built the finest collection of 16th and 17th-century English literature in private hands...[his] library is made all the more extraordinary by the particular emphasis he placed on the hardest-to-find works with a distinguished provenance." Pirie's legacy remains permanent via his bookplate and is still present on the front free endpaper. When Pirie's collection, too, was auctioned by Sotheby's in December 2015 after Pirie's death, the book was purchased by Paul Chrzanowski and then presented as a gift to the William Andrews Clark Library, thus completing the final stage in the trajectory, which is still represented by the Clark/Chrzanowski bookplate on the verso of the front free endpaper.



In short, this copy has been recognized by some of the finest book collectors in the world as an immensely desirable historical artifact. And for good reason: All three editions of this poem remain scarce, a result of the public-book burning conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury in June 1599 at Stationer's Hall, of which this book was likely included. This scarcity made Mr. Chrzanowski's gift of this specific copy even more historically valuable: According to the English Short Title Catalogue, only six copies of this particular edition exist in the world (see image for holding institutions). The Pirie copy was, according to Sotheby's, the only one still held in private collections. As such, what Mr. Chrzanowski has done is ensure that the copy not only made its way to an institution, but to a *public* institution, where it may be viewed and read by scholars and by the general public. *The ESTC, as you might see from the image, has not updated their listings since the sale, as there are no longer any copies in private hands and all are accessible by various degrees at institutions in America and England.

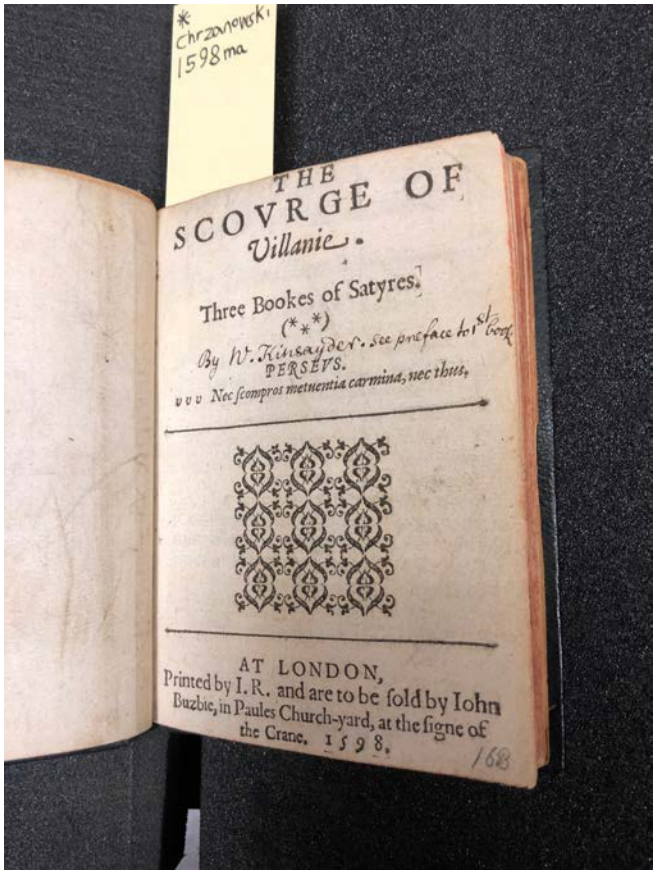
What I find so beautiful about this little book's journey, and the star-studded provenance history of our *Scourge of Villainie*, is that if William Andrews Clark Jr. were alive today, one imagines that he could hardly fail to be delighted by a donor so committed to making rare archival works publically accessible. When Clark donated his library to UCLA (or as it was called then, the Southern Branch of the University of California), he made history by giving UCLA's first major bequest, and still one of the most generous one's in the university's history. He did so, rather than gifting the collection to the University of Southern California, because he wanted his collection not to live within private walls guarded by gatekeepers, but to be available for not just UCLA students, **but for any member of the public who wanted to see them**. He was a pioneer in access to rare books, and the Pirie copy of *Scourge of Villainie* carries on the tradition of allowing materials privately kept on bookshelves by a sole collector to be utilized, enjoyed, and experienced by any and all publics. The provenance story is, in essence, what I find so special about the Clark's mission to not just protect rare books, but to engage in meaningful outreach with them.

Copies - Brit.Isles	British Library
	Oxford University, Bodleian Library
Copies - N.America	Folger Shakespeare
	Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery
	Private Collections
	University of California, Los Angeles, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library
	University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center

Scourge and Shakespeare

The material history of this copy is undoubtedly fascinating, but it's worth noting that the book is so scarce precisely *because* of the striking contents within, plain as they may first appear. First, let's talk nuts and bolts: This poem is a key specimen of **some of the earliest verse satire ever printed in the English language.** John Marston was one of the Jacobean era's most energetic and biting satirists who revived the style of a cutting Juvenalian satire into verse for the first time in centuries. His satire is savage, misanthropic, rough, and vulgar, all qualities which earmarked it as a prime candidate for book-burning: Marston's satire emerged in history just as the verse

satire fad was to be checked by censors, and his *Scourge* was consequently banned and publicly burned alongside works by other satirists.



The poem itself ruthlessly tears apart the world of theatre performance, sartorial fashions, hypocrisy, and nearly every aspect of Elizabethan society available to be criticized. The vicious language is, in fact, where some scholars claim that Shakespeare sourced the vocabulary for some of his most evil villains. Readers of the *Scourge* will note that Marston certainly read himself, and was influenced by, Shakespeare. To name a few examples, *Romeo and Juliet* is referenced on H4r, and the beginning of Satire III directly parodies a line from *Richard III*: "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" is transformed into "A man, a man, my kingdome for a man," as the narrator facetiously bemoans the lack of a man who hasn't been corrupted by the beastliness of human nature and of society. Other passages directly denounce contemporary poets for attempting to steal Shakespeare's phraseology and pass it off as their own (a critique which rings ironic, as Marston seems to have no compunctions about citing and ripping off Shakespeare's vocabulary hundreds of times in his own works).

In terms of influencing Shakespeare, the *Scourge* might be best read as a dictionary of filth from which Shakespeare likely drew to create certain protagonists, including *King Lear*, but more explicitly, to fuel the rotten speech of villains such as Iago and Thersites. As David Pascoe recalls in "Marston's Childishness," Swinburne would later describe Marston's style as follows:

"No sooner has he said anything especially beautiful, pathetic, or sublime than the evil genius must needs take his turn...[and] deface the form or the flow of the verse with some preposterous crudity or flatulence of phrase" (p. 92).

The poem alternately satirizes and then defends its satire to an imaginary censor by explaining that it merely identifies scummy morality in order to critique it:

> "Think'st thou, that I in melting poesie
> Will pamper itching sensualitie?
> Hence thou misjudging Censor, know I wrot
> Those idle rimes to note the odious spot
> And blemish that deformes the lineaments
> Of moderne Poesies habiliments." –Satyre VI

As Marston compares various members of society to beasts and insects, he engages in lush, adjective-littered verse that feels as if it should indeed be read with a lip curled into a snarl:

> "Hence ye big-buzzing-little-bodied Gnats,
> Yee tatling Ecchoes, huge tongu'd pigmy brats,
> I meane to sleepe, wake not my slumbring braine
> VVith your malignant weake detracting vaine.
> What though the sacred issue of my soule
> I heare expose to Ideots controule?" –Satyre VI

By the end of the satire, the reader is left un-situated, grasping for a foothold in the slippery meaning of the poem, wondering if they are the "ideot" referenced. The sadistic indulgence in cruelty for cruelty's sake is often traced to the senselessness of Iago's own sadistic behavior, and even more so to the linguistic "satirical abuse" of Thersites, in *Troilus and Cressida*: "[Thersites contradicts the sickly sweet language of honey with the satirical bitterness of gall...his satiric bitterness comes to dominate the play," writes Eric Byville in "Aesthetic Common Sense: Early Modern Taste and the Satirical Sublime."

As a lexicon for cruel, nonsensical satire designed to both critique and repulse the world, the *Scourge of Villainie* may well have provided Shakespeare with a model for characters who delight in lingering amongst the scatological, biological, and grimy to accurately portray the world as they see it: A meaningless, hellish, teeming mass of vice.

As a prized holding in the Clark's collections, it makes so much sense to me that the *Scourge* would eventually find its home within a library focused on 17th and 18th-century collections: The verse satire, while it may have inspired Shakespeare, indeed paved the way for a revival of snarling Juvenalian satire which would be tamped out by censorship, but then returned in the 18th century under the auspices of another bitter poet seeking to weaponize satire as a means to identify social ills: One of the 18th-century's most noted satirists, Jonathan Swift, gloried in the same no-holds-barred mode of Juvenalian verse satire in his own poetry. When placed in the context of the Clark's collections, our copy of *Scourge* not only represents a laudable artifact in a beautifully complicated history of textual circulation, censorship, and private collecting, but

provides a missing piece of the puzzle in the literary history of the library's most famous 18th-century authors. From *Scourge* to Swift, the Clark is sure to remain a key destination for scholars searching for a complete narrative of the history of verse satire...or maybe, just for those readers looking to spice up their vocabulary with a few naughty words.