

SAA 2021, Seminar 32, “Satire/Satyre”

Abstracts

Seminar Leader: Kristen Abbott Bennett

Joseph Black

University of Massachusetts Amherst

‘This Booke is not to be’: Thomas Nashe and the Anti-Martinist Voice

The “literary” pamphlet campaign that sought to combat the anti-episcopal satires of Martin Marprelate in the public sphere by turning Martin’s biting voice against him is increasingly recognized as playing a formative role in the development of satirical voice, persona, and polemical strategy in prose of the 1590s. The two names most firmly associated with this campaign are John Lyly and Thomas Nashe. The forthcoming OUP Works of Nashe includes six of these pamphlets: Mar-Martine (1589), Martins Months Minde (1589), Almond for a Parrat (1590), and the three “Pasquill” tracts, Countercuffe (1589), Returne (1589), and First Parte of Pasquils Apologie (1590).

This paper begins by outlining the current case for Nashe’s involvement with the anti-Martinist campaign: in addition to the strong tradition of association, the pamphlets display strong stylistic, tonal, strategic, and referential affinities with Nashe’s acknowledged works. The paper then explores some implications of this formative engagement with print controversy for the ways we read Nashe and the tradition of satirical prose that follows in his wake. Pamphlet warfare as a genre would constitute a major component of Nashe’s writing: attacks on his role in anti-Martinist polemic spiraled into the Harvey-Nashe quarrel, a complex exchange that continued the debate generated by the Marprelate controversy concerning the social uses of print. More generally, for an emerging class of professional writers the anti-Martinist campaign popularized the very elements of Martinist style it had set out to condemn. Martin Marprelate had found a way to make himself heard over the many other voices competing in print: whatever they might think of Martinist content, writers like Nashe recognized and subsequently deployed Martin’s effective modes of writing and public address. Nashe’s performative manner, self-reflexive play with ironic personae, and extemporizing colloquialism all exemplify the influence of Martinist and anti-Martinist exchange. Finally, this paper raises some new questions by reading anti-Martinist polemic as offering arguments and not just stylistic performance. Might anti-Martinist attacks on puritan learning, economic aspiration, and social ambition e.g. inform Nashe’s engagement with these same issues throughout his writings?

Hannah Bredar

University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)

Distance, Detachment, and the Mechanisms of Satirical Wit

Early modern satire delights in the transgression of social norms. Whether the satirical target is an MP who [breaks wind](#) in the House of Commons, a city wife who elides the public and private (Knight of the Burning Pestle), or those “pretenders” who aspire to higher status than they possess (Epicoene, The Gull’s Hornbook, etc.), the flouting of social norms is a frequent source of humor and object of critique. But satire does more than mock impropriety; it insists that we view these behaviors as incompetence, as an essential lack of knowledge and ability that is located in the target’s gender, age, experience, or class. Wit is often presented as the counterpart of satirical incompetence -- the rhetorical acuity and inventiveness that form a satirical speaker’s ultimate currency and hold incompetence up for judgment.

My seminar paper will analyze the relationship between incompetence and wit as they are represented in two Shakespearean plays: the so-called “shrew” in *The Taming of the Shrew* and the wit in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Through comparative close-readings of the critiques that Beatrice and Kate make of their respective suitors, I will examine the ways in which their variously ironic, critical speech comes to be elevated as witty critique in one play and reduced to shrewish complaint in the other. This analysis aims to provide a fuller understanding of how satirical speakers create (or fail to create) the critical distance or detachment that is the distinctive feature of witty exchange and ironic critique.

Dr. William R. (Rusty) Jones

Murray State University

“Yet ‘stead of balm, he pours out blame thereon”: adjuvant vs. internecine satire

Inspired by the seminar’s interest in “hybrid forms” of satire, as well as by the question, “does satire ‘work’ as a mode of social reform, or not?”, my essay will explore an ideological gap in sixteenth and seventeenth-century conceptions of satire that still influences the practice of satire today, specifically, the nature of the schism between restorative and vituperative philosophies of satire.

A close reading of works by two less-traveled English exemplars of the restorative ideology of satire, namely, Thomas Drant’s 1566 definition of “Satyre” and John Weever’s 1601 deprecation of the vituperative style, will illustrate the ideological divergence between those who conceived satire as an adjuvant literary mode (i.e. a cultural product intended to supplement or complement other moral remedies) versus those who conceived satire as an internecine literary mode (i.e. a cultural product mutually destructive to good and bad alike). By extension, I hope to address the general question, does satire “work” best as a mode of social reform when framed as a curative “balm” or as a ‘blaming’ obloquy? At the heart of the choice between employing either the adjuvant or the internecine philosophy of satire, both then and now, is the satirist’s tacit judgement of mankind as either redeemable or irredeemable, reparable or irreparable, as often expressed in the satires of the time via medical metaphors. The former judgment encourages the conception

of satire as a sanguine prescription compatible with other socio-cultural forms of moral improvement (an ideology readily supported by the authorities), while the latter judgment impels the conception of satire as a pessimistic, fatalistic, even nihilistic purgative force antithetical to both the nationalistic narratives of exceptionalism and the more popular cultural products (i.e. dramas) that espouse the inevitable triumph of social order and personal virtue.

The essay will likely end with a few examples of Shakespeare's discomfort with the internecine philosophy of satire as dramatized through Jaques in *As You Like It* and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Ian Frederick Moulton

Arizona State University

Satire, Sexual Invective, and Thomas Nashe

Now, as in the early modern period, Thomas Nashe is famous as an author of sexually explicit verse, in particular the poem known as "Nashe's Dildo" or "Choice of Valentines." This paper examines the role of sexual invective in Nashe's prose works. Nashe modeled himself on Pietro Aretino, calling himself "the English Aretine." Aretino was notorious in early modern Europe both as the author of sexually explicit verse (the sonneti lussoriosi) and for vicious satirical attacks on contemporary corruption. While Nashe clearly admired Aretino, he never attempted to use sexually explicit text to attack abuses on the scale that Aretino did in his *Dialogues* (the *Ragionamenti*). In my paper I want to explore the ways in which Nashe drew on Aretino's mix of sexual explicitness and satirical venom, as well as the ways the cultural and social environment of early modern England limited Nashe's ambitions in this area.

Romola Nuttall

King's College London

Notes on a scandal: Oldcastle, Falstaff and Religious Satire

Shakespeare's Falstaff is widely regarded as a satirical portrait of Lollard leader Sir John Oldcastle, whose unflattering portrayal in *Henry IV Part 1* is thought to have been motivated by rivalry between Oldcastle's descendant, William Brooke, and George Carey, Shakespeare's patron and/or the Earl of Essex. It has been suggested that these high-ranking courtiers exerted an influence – directly or indirectly – on Shakespeare, to make the characterisation of Falstaff insulting to Brooke. This paper reconsiders Falstaff as a response to wider trends in Elizabethan satire, rather than as a product of a patron's personal agenda. Comparing Falstaff to religious figures represented in the anti-Puritan satire, most prominently, the Martin Marprelate affair, suggests that Shakespeare's Falstaff was not simply motivated by the desire to please individual patrons, but by the desire to please wider audiences, whose appetite for satirical representations of religious reformers was firmly established by the mid-1590s.

Curtis Perry

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

“Titus’s revenge and the energies of imperial Roman satire”

In the last two acts of *Titus Andronicus*, Titus seeks among other things to critique and dismantle the inherited literary decorums of Rome. This is one reason why he sends a snippet from Horace’s Ode 1.22 to Chiron, Demetrius and Aaron: not just to signal his awareness of their villainy via its reference to Moorish javelins (“*Mauris iaculis*”), but also to contrast that poem’s depiction of moral rectitude in a global empire with the corruption he has discovered to be characteristic of his own milieu. At least in the non-technical sense that this example suggests, Titus’s attitude towards the Rome might therefore be said to be satirical.

In this essay, I’ll propose an addition to the already-crowded profusion of metadramatic frameworks with which to read the play’s denouement by suggesting that Titus’s revenge is also plotted in a manner designed specifically to dismantle Horatian decorum. And that it can be productively read through the lens of Horace’s biting satiric successors, Persius and Juvenal. The former offers a vision of Roman imperial culture as cannibalistic and the latter (as I will suggest) is part of the allusive aura invoked by Titus reference to the exemplary story of rash Virginius. Reading Titus as adopting the stance of imperial Roman satire clarifies the nature and stakes of his final project and also casts an ironic light on the recuperative efforts of Lucius and Marcus at the very end of the play.

Jennifer C. Vaught

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Satirical Appropriations of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* by Nashe, Harvey, and Milton

Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, and John Milton appropriate the name and persona of Braggadocchio and gold hoarding Mammon in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* to satirize the lack of support for poets, censorship, and tyranny. Nashe and Harvey, both of whom express nostalgia for the crumbling institution of patronage for poets, allude to Braggadocchio for conservative ends. The social climber Braggadocchio resembles the “bragging brere” in the “*Februarie*” eclogue of Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* and the fox and the ape in *Mother Hubbard’s Tale*. In *Pierce Penilesse* (1594), Nashe appropriates Braggadocchio and Mammon to lambaste the theft of the printing press by base upstarts. The popularity of this bestselling pamphlet, which according to Nashe passed through at least “sixe Impressions” between 1592 and 1595, contributed to the wide circulation of the figures Braggadocchio and Mammon in works by numerous seventeenth-century writers. In *Areopagitica* (1644) anti-royalist Milton appropriates Guyon’s journey through the cave of Mammon, who is black as ink, when advocating for freedom of the press. A radical Republican, Milton borrows the comic windbag Braggadocchip in braggadocious company with the giant aristocrat Orgoglio in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*, and the populist Gian with the Scales in

Book V for satirizing tyranny and intemperate crowds in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Milton uses Spenser's Braggadocchio to satirize overblown aristocracy in *Samson Agonistes* (1671) in a radical way. Satirical appropriations of Braggadocchio and Mammon by Nashe, Harvey, and Milton illustrate that not only *Mother Hubberds Tale* but also the ideologically malleable *Faerie Queene* provided Spenser's early readers with fodder for satire aimed at curing social ills.

Eric D. Vivier

Mississippi State University

Edmund Spenser's Honest Satire

Although Edmund Spenser's most recent biographer, Andrew Hadfield, notes that Spenser was not only "often an acerbic writer" but was also "astonishingly rude to the good and the great throughout his life" (402), Spenser is not often included in the ranks of important early modern satirists. An important recent exception is Rachel Hile, who argues in *Spenserian Satire* that Spenser articulated his criticisms of the Elizabethan court "indirectly" out of his fears of government censorship. "Blame is . . . more blameless generall, / Then that which priuate errorrs doth pursew," as Colin Clout tells Hobbinol in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (749-50). Yet Spenser often invites personal application even where he denies it ("who knowes not Colin Clout?"), and in at least one instance—his blameworthy attack on Lord Burghley in *Mother Hubberds Tale*—his satire seems to have more in common with the direct attack of *Leicester's Commonwealth* than the nuanced indirection of *Thomas Middleton's Father Hubberd's Tale*.

My essay will explore the paradoxically direct and indirect, personal and impersonal nature of Spenser's satire in *Mother Hubberds Tale* by situating the poem in the context of a series of "evil counselor" treatises: John Leslie's *Treatise of Treasons* (1572), John Stubbs' *Gaping Gulf* (1579), *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584), and Richard Verstegan's *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles* (1592). These texts all concern the politics of Catholicism in general and the question of the succession in particular, and they point to a different kind of indirection at play in *Mother Hubberds Tale*. By directly attacking the queen's court and her most faithful counselor, Spenser indirectly attacks Queen Elizabeth herself.