

La muse satyrique (1600–1622). Guillaume Peureux.

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This is a rare modern study of a curious hybrid genre that flourished at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *recueil de poèmes satyriques*, usually anonymous collections of extremely vulgar and obscene poems in the vein of the lascivious satyrs, demigods who are half-men, half-goat from Greek mythology and were reputed for their outspokenness. The resulting “satyre” was habitually integrated into the wide and ill-defined realm of satirical writing throughout the early modern period. Its ill-reputed aesthetic qualities account for much of the critical disdain that this poetry has encountered throughout the centuries, and Guillaume Peureux sets out to deliver a long-overdue critical reassessment of the form in this brief study. The five chapters of the book touch on the major characteristics of satirical poetry, a phenomenon that was largely restricted to the two decades that open the seventeenth century in France (up to the famous process of Théophile de Viau) with at least fifty-three extant collections: first, the “satirical phenomenon,” focusing on the satirical muse; second, “satirical trouble,” touching on the form’s satirical qualities; third, “poets and readers of satyre,” interested in the authors’ lyrical persona and reception; fourth, “the double obscenity of satyre,” dealing with major objects of criticism (love poetry, the courtier); and fifth, “politics of the satirical event,” addressing questions such as pornography and masculinity. The author delivers numerous interesting close readings and identifies the major issues that inform this vast production, such as moral justifications usually confined to the paratext, the reflection of order and disorder, and questions of erotization; creation of desire; honesty, virtue, and hypocrisy; social life versus natural life; or conservatism and revolt.

The discussion of these issues forms the strong point of an informative study that would have benefited, however, from a more thorough engagement with the concept of early modern satire as well as a more detailed account of the literary traditions and historical circumstances that are reflected in this burst of satirical production. As for the first point, Peureux is not only adamant about repeatedly distinguishing very clearly between satire and satyre, a distinction that does not correspond to the literary realities of the time despite Isaac Casaubon’s famous 1605 rectification of the confusion surrounding these genres; the critic also limits his assessment of the genre to Roman verse satire, *saturna*, without taking into account the mixture of genres, styles, and registers that constitutes the single most distinctive trait of early modern satire (notably incorporating Menippean satire, late medieval popular theater, non sequitur and epigrammatic poetry, and even polemical writing). Second, the attempt to underscore the innovative nature of the satirical production in question leads precisely to a deplorable neglect of the influence that the satirical tradition exerted on the creation of these collections. Linguistic disorder, the instability of meaning, and the parody of Petrarquismo, as well as pastoral literature and Carnivalistic reversals of codified language, genres, or social norms all point to a long satirical tradition. Instead of constructing such phenomena as an invention of satirical

poetry, it would certainly have been more accurate and fruitful to show the ways in which these collections imitate and alter them to become a distinct part of the satirical register. This development is far from denying this production novelty, as the author claims, but shows precisely how it deals with the traditions to which it is undeniably indebted (e.g., the discussions of masculinity and courtly life seem major illustrations of what this poetry brings to the table; there also appears to be a movement toward more homogeneous forms of satire at this point in time that is insinuated in Peureux's discussion). *Imitatio* and *amplificatio* are at stake here, and there are clear echoes of Rabelais, Marot, Du Bellay, and the pamphlet literature of the Wars of Religion — to name but four striking examples that have developed the aforementioned topics, themes, and attitudes — that run throughout the study without being acknowledged. Despite such substantial shortcomings, this is still a valuable study of a neglected genre with many useful observations. It will open the discussion and serve as a precious starting point for further investigation of the genre.

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