

The Quest for Genre: Menippean Satire, Romance, and the Novel

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Distinguishing among or between genres is an undertaking now somewhat in disrepute in academe. No less a critical force than Frederic Jameson has pronounced genre criticism "thoroughly discredited by modern literary theory and practice" (105). To some extent generic studies are suspect because the novel's dominance in postmodern literature has established it as a kind of critical common denominator, yet no literary type has been as formless, as elastic as the novel. It defies classifications that would impose boundaries. After alluding to "Bakhtin's analysis of novelness that nothing must be, by definition or genre prescriptions, excluded," R. Rawdon Wilson notes "a conclusion of contemporary textualist theory that discourse cannot be rigorously divided and that the properties of one kind of discourse penetrate, bear upon, and may be included by, any other kind of discourse" (112). This is well put and undoubtedly true. Still, Wilson must revert to a phrase like "kind of discourse," implying types, even as he describes the dissolution of types. But if we can look through or beyond the synchronism the dominance of the novel in postmodern literary studies generates, into a past where the traditional genres evolved diachronically over the course of centuries, and where these genres were accepted by makers, scholars and audiences alike, we can continue to apply the concept of genre as a convenient historical and critical tool.

Surely, for example, the long held distinction between epic and romance is not only helpful but also necessary, both in literary and cultural areas of study. Granted as distinguished a classical scholar as Ben E. Perry, long before his thinking on the matter could possibly have been touched by the theorists, refused to commit himself explicitly to distinguishing between epic and romance: "Romance and epic are basically the same genre, as much so as ancient and modern drama" (45). However, here and there in his excellent study on the ancient romances, Perry does make implicit distinctions. On the same page he denies the difference Perry gives a rather useful definition of the romance, emphasizing its focus on the individual: The romance is "an extended narrative ... which relates ... the adventures or experiences of one or more individuals in their private capacities and from the viewpoint of their private interests and

emotions" (44-45). Critics after Perry would note the subjective tendencies in the romance, as distinct from the objectivity of the epic, long recognized by scholars.

Why this critical hedging? Perhaps because any inductive generalization must inevitably be an overextension and therefore an exposed position. But in seeking to strengthen one's critical position, one can compromise it. Apparently to place the epic in the same paradigm as the romance, Perry emphasizes the role of the individual (epic hero) in the epic at the total expense of the culture: "The Homeric hero ... overshadows the state (of which the poet is scarcely conscious) ... for the state, if the patriarchal community of which the epic hero is the head and leader can be so called, is only the hero's following and counts for little in the poet's imagination" (59). Here Perry seems entirely to preclude the epic as a cultural document, noting, for example, that "the catalogues of the *Iliad* (Bk. II) and the *Odyssey* (Bk. XI) ... are Hesiodic in character and relatively late" (53), thus dismissing a major cultural aspect of the epic. Yet reason tells us the epic is very much a cultural document, more so than a paean to an individual, more so than most novels. One of the central images in the epic is Agamemnon's staff of kingship, and the epic itself is about the wrath of Achilles precisely because it is that wrath which alienates him from his culture.

If, then, determining boundaries between epic and romance was too daunting a task for a notable classical scholar, what can be said about genre in general, and so slippery a type as Menippean satire in particular? Concerning the latter, the generic problem seems insoluble: one of the main structural thrusts of the writers of Menippean satire appears to have been the parodying or violating or, even, the utter disregarding of the paradigms of ancient literary types. Indeed, one scholar has labelled Menippean satire as "essentially an antigenre, a burlesque of literature at large" (Relihan 34). Furthermore, what is one to make of a category that can include Lucian's Menippean narratives and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 27; Relihan xi)? A good deal, apparently, as an examination of three recently published books might indicate. These three are a translation of Petronius' *Satyricon* by R. Bracht Branham and Daniel Kinney, Garry Sherbert's study of *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit: Ideologies of Self-Consciousness in Dunton, D'Urfey, and Sterne*, and Donald Beecher's edition of *The Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolphus*.

Branham and Kinney have produced an engaging, vigorously-paced English translation of Petronius' *Satyricon* — more on the title later — better written, all in all, than a good deal of contemporary prose fiction. In their brief but impressively comprehensive Introduction, Branham and Kinney address the problem of genre in an attempt to classify Petronius' prose narrative, "the earliest extant work of prose fiction in Latin" (xiv), "something without attested classical precedent" (xv). The important point in their discussion is, simply, that their (necessarily) diachronic viewpoint as classical scholars or, in the case of Kinney,

as a comparativist interested in classical studies, allows both for distinct genres, however shifting in their parameters these may be, and for a powerful interplay between culture and genre: "For while genres persist over very long periods of time, indeed for centuries, they are also subject to a continual process of change, as is the cultural context of their production and reception. Any given example of a genre is formally determined by a wide range of culturally specific engagements as well as by its ruling generic design" (xiv).

In seeking the generic forebears of the *Satyricon*, Branham and Kinney must come to grips with Menippean satire. Undaunted, they brilliantly suggest in the (symbiotic?) merging of what they consider a relatively conservative generic form, the Greek romance (xvii), with the allusive, elusive exuberance of Menippean satire the creation of a third form:

The sophisticated humor and ironic tone of Petronius' narrative have their origin in his novelistic fusion of two genres that differ radically in form, tone, style, characteristic effects and, perhaps, even in the audiences addressed. Out of this hybridization, crossbreeding, or fusion of genres emerged what can fairly be called the first novel. (xviii)

This thesis makes a good deal of sense in that it provides the structural paradigm Mikhail Bakhtin's emphasis on the Menippean heritage of the novel does not (*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 92-149). The only other structural system available would have been that of the quite unsuitable epic. Nor would emulating the episodic romance pattern necessarily preclude the mock-heroic or epic parody. Understandably enough, Branham and Kinney then appear, like Perry, to hedge a bit with some qualifying: "The traditions of Menippean satire and Greek romance should be conceived as important sub-texts, as two of shifting generic frames of reference, not as 'sources' for the *Satyricon*" (xix). Too, their decision to translate *Satyricon* rather than a *Satyricon* suggests some structural scattering, looseness, in Petronius' work(s?).

Nonetheless, their view of the roots of the *Satyricon* is incisive, however controversial, since it suggests how the early novel's tensions might have been generated: the tighter structural pattern of the romance was used to contain the Menippean exuberance. If so, it was a momentous merger. One paradigm brought a measure of discipline; the other, a force for freedom. Viewed diachronically, it is easy to perceive now that in the development of the novel the latter force would eventually triumph. But the basic romance pattern did not go easily or early — did not, in fact, go at all. I believe that Branham and Kinney are closer to the mark than Perry in their recognition of a distinct structural pattern for the romance. I see this archetypal pattern as essentially episodic, centered upon the concept of Fortuna. Numerous variations are of course possible, but basically each episode involves, for the protagonist(s), a half-turn of the Wheel of Fortune, usually down into trouble or danger, then up into triumph or, at the least, escape. After a few fortunate episodic closures, the audience comes to expect the same

in future episodes. I call this "setting up" of the audience a Rhythm of Reassurance.

In the hack romances, the episodes can be and indeed were strung together virtually interminably, but in the more sophisticated romances there is also provided a sense of closure, of a major goal or quest to be achieved which governs the overall narrative movement, a reunion of lovers, the slaying of the final dragon, the reclamation of a lost birthright. This larger overarch can also be an analogue of Providence, dominating the Fortune of the episodes. As Branham and Kinney note, "One of the important senses in which the romances are 'idealizing' narratives is that they consistently imagine the constancy of eros as the agent of happiness (and salvation) in a providentially ordered world" (xxiv n46). The dominant god of the *Satyricon*, however, appears to be Priapus, not Eros. And so, was there to have been a parodic providential closure featuring a restoration of Encolpius's potency? Even setting aside the storm at sea, there are other remnants of the romance besides the episodes and the possible overarch: allusions to Fortuna abound, and the separations and reunions look forward to the era of high romance, with its un- and inter-weavings, what C. S. Lewis called "interweaving ... in the medieval manner" (335).

Centuries later, Cervantes would predicate his novel's structure on an ironic treatment of the Rhythm of Reassurance, in that for the poor Don most episodes end disastrously, nor is there a final triumph in a better world, nor even some little joy in the embrace of Dulcinea. (The ties between Menippean satire and romance persisted. Kirk records that "some renaissance critics regarded *Don Quixote* as a Menippean satire, rather than as a parody of chivalric romances" [*Catalogue*, 132].) Did the novel become structurally freer through time because of the decline of the romance, not a little aided by the genius of Cervantes? (I refer to the late medieval romances, of course, since the major romance patterns flourish to this very postmodern day, notably in film.) Or were the radical departures of individual pioneers like Laurence Sterne, generic gamesters, more influential in the novel's development? For it is Sterne, it seems to me, who makes available or possible the "great juncture," as there is little enough of the romance in *Tristram Shandy*, beyond the protagonist's first name. Citing Northrop Frye ("Toward an Age" 131), Garry Sherbert indicates that "Sterne's Longinian [as distinct from a linear Aristotelian] aesthetic is evinced ... in the absence of a suspenseful plot which throws the reader's interest forward" (136). He then quotes Tristram's declaration (1.25.89), "if I thought you was able to form the least judgment or probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page — I would tear it out of my book" (136). Here are precluded both major structural patterns of the romance, the providential overarch and the episodic Rhythm of Reassurance.

And though he objects to "certain aspects of Bakhtin's approach to Menippean satire [which] confuse the genre with the novel" (7), Sherbert, it seems to me,

reinforces the concept that the spirit of Menippean satire and the structure of the romance vied for the soul of the novel, with the eventual triumph of Menippean satire: "Tristram Shandy ... shows the successful merging of the novel with Menippean satire. Sterne manages to subvert the eighteenth-century canon of novelistic probability" (7). For even though Sherbert suggests here, with the phrase "the eighteenth-century canon of novelistic probability," a solidly established mimetic genre, a tradition of linear narrative apparently free of the trammels of romance, as eminent and gifted a novelist as Henry Fielding in Sterne's century, and Charles Dickens and other picaros in the next would continue the familiar romance patterns in the novel. (I need not go into the Menippean aspects of Fielding's novelistic art.) Sterne, then, looked far ahead. But how did he manage to stand aside from romance to effect his "great juncture"? Garry Sherbert tells us he did so by letting slip a Menippean carnival of wit.

Confronting the awesome critical task of defining Menippean satire, which he attempts with a good deal of conviction and persuasiveness, Sherbert examines three early modern works which he suggests are Menippean, including of course Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), John Dunton's *A Voyage Round the World: Or, A Pocket-Library* (1691), and Thomas D'Urfey's *An Essay Toward the Theory of the Intelligible World* (1701).

Though he is well aware of the earliest traditions of Menippean satire, referring regularly to such writers on the type as Mikhail Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, and Eugene Kirk, Sherbert's method is best described in the passage by Branham and Kinney cited above, that "genres ... are ... subject to a continual process of change, as is the cultural context of their production and reception" (xiv). And so, in comparison to what we know of its classical roots, Sherbert gives us in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a leaner, but not meaner, Menippean satire, with much of the clutter recorded by J. Relihan and Kirk evolved out of the genre, yet with many of its original classical currents intact.

I should at this point insert a disclaimer: Sherbert's grasp of his topic is quite evident, but his challenging argument is packed into a very slender volume, less than 200 pages of text, and he is not always able to develop a position as fully as a reader not entirely familiar with the materials, or with a very sophisticated and arcane tradition, might wish. The Introduction, for example, is compacted with argument, and suffers somewhat for its density. Sherbert's reasoning, too, is at times almost baroque elaborate, rife with challenging insights, ranging widely through diverse and dense texts. On the whole, however, it holds together quite well, even when he applies analogies. For analogical comparisons, suspect in logic, are the very stuff of literary analysis and, certainly, generic studies, as Sherbert demonstrates in his able defense of Northrop Frye (10-12). They are especially inescapable, however, in dealing with Menippean satire, for as H. K. Rönönen indicates, "In Menippean discourse there is a logic of relativity and

analogy" (31). And Sherbert's analogies generally throw a new light on some complex literary relationships. Grappling with the complexities of Sterne's art in its integration of "visual with rhetorical wit," for example, Sherbert notes that "While critics have discussed the 'relations of complicity' that Sterne foists upon his reader, no-one has adequately connected this relationship to the witty emblems and other typographical oddities" (107). For Sherbert, Sterne's art is of a piece both visually and verbally.

To sum up very briefly: In his Preface, Sherbert comes up with a respectable defense of genre studies (xvi-xvii). And if Frederic Jameson is correct in asserting that "modern literary theory and practice" have "thoroughly discredited" genre criticism, Sherbert is indeed a maverick, for he is not averse to incorporating the major figure of modern theory, Jacques Derrida, in his discussion of Menippean satire as genre. He then proceeds in his Introduction to outline an expanded role for wit in Menippean satire, a wit which is not simply linguistic play, but rife with psychological and political implications (2-5). After moving through some traditional views of wit, Sherbert, basing his argument on the self-consciousness implicit in the concept and practice of wit, asserts his most provoking point, the alterity, even Narcissism, of wit (17-30). Four chapters follow his Introduction, one devoted to Dunton, one to D'Urfey, and two to Sterne. If his elaborate argument can be epitomized, it is simply that Menippean exuberance found a means of expression in the neoclassical concept of wit.

Addressing in his Preface the often debated status of generic criticism, Sherbert presents his book "as a genre study of the conventions of self-consciousness in Menippean satire" (xvi). More generally, for Sherbert, genre is "a series of linguistic events which display a historically specifiable regularity" (xvi). In reviewing Derrida's pronouncements on genre, Sherbert, in a clever turn of argument, suggests the deconstructionist's views in "Law of Genre" and *Limited, Inc.*, have been misconstrued, a not unlikely possibility:

Some have read Derrida's work on genre as a dismissal, just another illusion of logocentrism. His reflections on the "degenerescence" ... or self-destruction of genre, however, show that genre is not a moribund practice of ... classification. Degenerescence, paradoxically, keeps a genre alive by keeping it open to the context changing around it. For Derrida, the trait, within a text, which marks membership in a class of texts opens the individual text to the general, repeatable qualities that constitute that class.... The trait's ability to iterate itself, that is to repeat and alter itself in different contexts, represents the trait's genericity as well as its degeneracy.... (xvi-xvii)

After thus establishing for the purposes of his study the suitability of acknowledging genres, Sherbert turns to an examination of neoclassical wit in Menippean satire. For Sherbert, both early and late "Menippean satire attacks learned discourse more than any other target" (17). The butt of this attack is what Northrop Frye called the *philosophus gloriosus* (17), and the invariable weapon

is a self-conscious wit: "Wit ... serves as an important index of self-consciousness in Menippean satire and its central character the glorious philosopher. The kinds of self-conscious wit most commonly used in the genre are narrative digression and some form of wordplay (such as the pun), or paradoxical metaphor (such as the conceit)" (17). Menippean wit therefore operates on two levels, linguistic and narrative (20), and a self-conscious digression is possible at either level (21). So immersed can the self-conscious philosophical narrator become in his wandering wit, that he may be too absorbed in his witiness to achieve his goal of self-knowledge and thus suffer ironic deflation by the author.

Sherbert proceeds chronologically, beginning with Dunton's seventeenth-century *A Voyage Round the World*, and almost immediately indicates the need for a more diachronic point of view as he engages modern synchronic criticism which approaches Dunton's travel narrative as an "anti-novel," not as a Menippean satire: "J. Paul Hunter's recent identification of Dunton's *Voyage* with the novel tradition leads to hasty and dismissive value judgments.... The anti-novel concept offers an attractive solution to novel-critics who want to claim a work that they know (albeit unconsciously) does not fit their novel-centred view of prose fiction" (44). (On this privileging of the novel in current criticism, see also Milowicki and Wilson, 12-13 and n. 4 & 5.)

Sherbert, then, puts Dunton squarely in the tradition of Menippean satire, noting how Don John Kainophilus, the *philosophus gloriosus* of the *Voyage* who wanders both with pen and with pilgrim's staff, is well-read in Menippean satire, even launching "a defense of Lucian, the most influential classical progenitor of Menippean satirists" (47). Sherbert gives us some excellent examples of Dunton's witty word play and use of Menippean motifs, often scatological:

Dunton's parody of Kainophilus identifies the pen with the pilgrim's staff ... Dunton even parodies Kainophilus' name, meaning "staff-lover," by making it symbolize the pilgrim's faith and the phallus.... As a "staff-lover," his name suggests the conventional symbol of the wayfaring pilgrim's need for spiritual support and a spiritual home wherein to lay his staff. On the other hand, the word "Kain" recalls the biblical wanderer Cain, and makes our character a "lover of wandering." The fundamental duality in Kainophilus represents the reader's conflict between reading the story as a linear, providential plot, or a series of discrete episodes. Dunton plays with this opposition in the figure of Kainophilus by developing a phallic association with the character's name and his profession. The adventures of male heroes driven to wander by the wrath of Priapus recurs as a theme in Menippean satire, beginning with Petronius's *Satyricon*. (67-68)

In his incisive remark on the tension inherent in the narrative between "a linear, providential plot" and "a series of discrete episodes," Sherbert suggests Dunton's work has a significant place in the evolution of the novel out of the romance and Menippean satire. For Dunton has, according to Sherbert, long been seen as Sterne's inferior predecessor (43-45). There is another provocative point Sherbert

makes in discussing Dunton's deployment of wit through the figure of Kainophilus. Citing De Porte (115), Sherbert notes that "Uncontrolled, wit reduces a person to madness, which in extreme cases causes either a wandering intellect or, worse, an obsession ... Dunton's narrator, Don John Kainophilus, strangely mixes them together, for his obsession is 'rambling'" (45). Bakhtin suggested that one or another form of mental aberration recurs in Menippean satire (Relihan 7, Rönönen 25).

Sherbert turns next to Thomas D'Urfey's *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Intelligible World* (1707), itself a Menippean satire of another *philosophus gloriosus*, John Norris, and his "Platonic idealism" in *An Essay Toward the Theory of the Intelligible World* (1701-1704). The duplication of the title leaves no doubt concerning D'Urfey's intended target. As Sherbert puts it, "What makes Norris the 'ideal' *philosophus gloriosus* for D'Urfey's parody is the quixotic conviction with which he argues, against common sense, for the reality of the Intelligible World" (76). Throughout much of his analysis, Sherbert indicates the important role of Ovid's myth of Narcissus. Suggesting that the mind was a "mirror of nature," "Cartesian and Lockean models of self-consciousness encouraged idealist philosophers to pursue ... the Delphic oracle's call to self-knowledge" (76). Distrusting an inner quest which smacked of solipsism, "The satirists were quick to point to the myth of Narcissus to warn of the mirror's elusive images" (76). Sherbert contends that Narcissus "serves as an archetype for the *philosophus gloriosus* who, rather than discovering wisdom, finds self-love" (14). Ovid's tale, then, became for the Menippean satirist a parody of the Delphic quest for self-knowledge, appropriated perhaps most effectively by Sterne (166).

Sherbert closes his discussion of D'Urfey with an attack on "the false dichotomy of true and false wit" (114), for

the move to exclude the true from the false wit repeats the traditional distinction of the literal and the metaphorical. Both literal meaning and true wit traditionally represent things in a reasonable and accurate way. False wit [that of the Menippean satirists] obscures representation and defers the acquisition of a single, fixed meaning. (114)

Here we approach, rather nearly, postmodern deconstruction.

Not unexpectedly, Sherbert's discussion of *Tristram Shandy* is the most extensive and comprehensive of his three analyses, and in the final two chapters he pulls together some of his major points, notably the self-consciousness inherent in Menippean satire, and the role of wit in relation to that genre, and in the larger Neoclassical context.

For Sherbert,

The fundamental paradox of *Tristram Shandy* is that, despite his self-consciousness, Sterne's narrator Tristram cannot fulfill the Delphic command of self-knowledge. Even

with the aid of the 'sagacious Locke' (1.4.7), Tristram repeatedly loses himself in his writing. John Locke, the philosopher who defined the self as self-consciousness (and coined the phrase), is the principal *philosophus gloriosus* Sterne ridicules through Tristram.... (120)

Tristram is also victimized by a second philosophical system, the Earl of Shaftesbury's sentimentalism, for "As a *philosophus gloriosus* himself, Tristram, with his lack of self-knowledge, cannot avoid the moral dangers of self-deception which lie in the ethics of sentimentalism" (120). Sterne's exquisitely ironic deflation of Tristram's philosophical pretensions, as illustrated by Sherbert (for example, 128), recall how Dunton disassembled his *philosophus gloriosus*, Don John Kainophilus. This sort of multi-dimensional (con)textualizing requires an extremely perceptive reader, and establishes Menippean satire as something more than scatological horseplay, as a genuinely rigorous intellectual undertaking, with levels of irony worthy of Sophocles.

Sherbert also examines wit's aesthetic function in neoclassical writings, and reveals how wit must inevitably have had more than a touch of the subversive, even when not roaming the spacious halls of Menippean satire: "Judgment contains imitation within the bounds of probability and conventional decorum. Wit's exuberance goes beyond the mimetic form of judgment by introducing such things as stylistic excesses, surprising, concealed metaphors, or improbable events in a plot sequence" (134). Here we have again the two levels on which wit can operate, linguistic and narrative, while "improbable events in a plot sequence" recalls the stuff of romance.

Sherbert also moves into reader theory:

Wit's exorbitancy breaks down the integrity of a mimetic work's internal structures, involving a reader in the processes that a mimetic author generally tries to conceal. The strained sense of comparison of a concealed metaphor, for instance, draws attention to its verbal status, reminding the reader of a given word's "literal" context in a poem ... Having broken down the internal fiction, wit's exuberance carries the reader away, creating an effect similar to the Longinian technique of involving the reader in the artist's own ideas and creative processes. (134-35)

It is not difficult to see how and why the exuberant false wit — Sherbert attempts to reclaim it by pronouncing it "Mother Wit" (xv, 76, 115, 176) — condemned by so many neoclassical philosophers and critics should have sought shelter within the elastic boundaries of Menippean satire, nor is it surprising that each would act as a catalyst for the other. Sherbert's study of all this is invaluable.

Did this combination of exuberant excessiveness have no redeeming aesthetic, social or cultural value? Not necessarily so. For it seems to me that the challenging manipulation of self-conscious wit could only make possible more complex treatments of tone and point of view in the novel. Fielding appears to

be a case in point. On the other side, Sherbert poses that wit's exuberant freedom could be ethically beneficial, that Sterne saw this possibility, and deployed wit in a morally corrective role. For one, "Wit often discovers our self-interested motive because it escapes the moral censor of rational judgment" (160), and thus wit, rather than misleading judgment, often "functions as a form of judgment" (159). Further, when Hobbes and Locke gave to sensation "an unprecedented importance, overturning ... Right Reason's traditionally exclusive power to govern ... moral behavior," they opened the way for wit and imagination, "mediators between the rational understanding and the senses," to take a more important role as "powers of the mind" (161). Thus "In Sterne's poetics, the pleasures of wit penetrate the conscious mind's rationalizations and surprise judgment into moral honesty" (165). And thus, like most great satire down the centuries, even the unrestrained linguistic play of Menippean satire has a noble purpose, and the foundations of the novel are laid on a solid moral base — if you cannot know yourself, at the least deceive not yourself.

Donald Beecher has edited a text which may have some relationship to the Menippean tradition, a fifteenth-century English translation of a Latin jestbook, *The Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolphus*. As with Branham and Kinney, the nature of Donald Beecher's peculiar text brings him up against the problem of genre. Like the translators of the *Satyricon* and Sherbert too, Beecher's necessarily diachronic point of view as he traces the background of the *Dialogue* allows, I believe, for a more sympathetic view of genre than scholars such as Wilson and Jameson might allow.

Beecher begins by qualifying the title of his text, finding "problematic ... the designation 'dialogue,' for only in the first part ... are Solomon and Marcolphus engaged in a dialogic exchange in the form of a proverbs match, while the second and longer part features a series of miniature plots formed around the tricks that Marcolphus plays on the king" (13). Beecher tells us there is lacking "a familiar structural unity and thematic consistency" which he finds characteristic "of the medieval mind" (13), for even though his text was published in 1492 it comes out of a medieval tradition. Whether the fault of medieval forebears or not, we have a work of some structural and thematic looseness, according to Beecher, which may be a parody of a tradition of confrontation between Solomon and Marcolphus or a similar character, or which may be parodying "the tradition of scholastic debate" as found in "early school texts" (15), all put together "as a form of clerical play ... In an age of church schools that gave rise to lords of misrule, parodic liturgies, the feast of fools, and the boy bishops, this kind of recreation does not go beyond expectations" (16).

Six pages into the Introduction, then, we have structural and thematic looseness, a dialogue, game-playing, parody, and a suggestion of the carnivalesque, all common characteristics of Menippean satire. If we add such other major characteristics of Solomon and Marcolphus as "the grotesque and the

scatological" (26), we would appear to have a text very much in the tradition of Menippean satire, especially if we take Bakhtin's view of the carnivalesque as a major element in Menippean satire. Joel C. Relihan, however, insists that the type was radically attenuated in the Middle Ages: "Not only did they ... reduce the eight hundred-year tradition of Menippean satire to some fifty or sixty years, but the authors that they read were, to the exception of Martianus, Christian" (194). He can therefore speak of "the long dormancy of Menippean satire in the Middle Ages" (195; but see also Korkowski xvi).

In attempting to determine any influence from a Menippean tradition here, we may find Beecher's remarks on the subversive aspects of literature relevant. He begins by observing that, at bottom, not only satire but all literature is potentially subversive:

The question is vexed by recent critical inclinations ... to see negotiations between authority and powerlessness in the reversed roles that are expressed by literary play and irony. In this light, all literary forms are potentially subversive in their constant susceptibility to variation. Critical faith in the subversive quality of all forms is further shored up by the belief that the only reason to vary forms would be to undermine the authority invested in them because that authority is aligned with dominant political, social, or ecclesiastical institutions. By that reading, the spirit of literary play itself becomes a carnivalesque gesture which is anti-authoritarian. (32)

But Beecher finds that *Solomon and Marcolphus*, though so excellent a candidate, does not readily seem to fit the pattern of ideological subversion, "its authorial history and the structure and probable uses of the text serving to undermine its purpose as purely ideological" (32). Here Beecher's diachronic approach leads him to qualify any hasty interpretations of the text as essentially subversive. Nor is he altogether certain of the extent of the parodic elements in *Solomon and Marcolphus* (34). Furthermore, a clear determination of that extent would not solve the problem for Beecher, since "parody both destabilizes yet preserves and reifies the authority invested in the form it imitates" (35). Beecher then gives us a final caveat on subversive literature in general, and parody in particular: "The crux of the matter will always come back to the intention of licence and parody, whether they are meant to destabilize and alter the institutions they target, or to confirm them" (45).

Beecher's diachronic vision is most evident when he addresses Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, which views "the court fool as the epitome of the transgressive individual in medieval society whose conduct expresses a free spirited form of resistance to authority. According to this thesis, every such court parasite seeks to destroy the host upon whom he depends for subsistence" (46). Beecher, justifiably I believe, assumes Marcolphus would, for Foucault, belong in the tradition of the court fool. The diachronic and synchronic viewpoints collide again when Beecher acknowledges "the difficulties on

historical grounds of investing in this generic type an ideology of revolution of twentieth-century making" (47). Beecher, then, is skeptical: Marcolphus "simply beats the world's wisest man in a social context conditioned only by his wit" (47). Sherbert has shown us how wit can assume the central role in Menippean satire. Nonetheless, the question as to whether or not *Solomon and Marcolphus* is Menippean must remain unanswered, given Beecher's justified skepticism about determining precisely what the piece is about.

Beecher's hesitancy about reading into earlier texts later meanings seems to me an excellent example of restrained criticism. Even Bakhtin's critical exuberance does not escape his skepticism, as he pronounces on the Russian's view of the carnivalesque: "the expressions of [carnavalesque] individualism that are absorbed into official culture may reveal more about the survival strategies of that official culture than about the liberationist tactics of the folk" (47). So much hangs on one's point of view.

Can we talk of genres in general? Perhaps, but certainly not within the scope of this essay. Is there a type or genre which can be isolated, identified and classified as Menippean satire, allowing for, at least, a convenient category enabling dissection and discussion? Most certainly, Garry Sherbert's analyses of three neoclassical texts presents strong arguments for a recognizable type with recurring motifs. Among other things, Sherbert has illustrated conclusively that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a sophisticated current of self-consciousness tending to Narcissism informed the Menippean tradition. Indeed, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* deploys Narcissism within what I believe to be an essentially Menippean context. Branham and Kinney do not give Sherbert's resounding "yes" to the question of a Menippean type. Nonetheless, they indicate very clearly, it seems to me, that Petronius's masterpiece is better understood both in terms of structure and content if we accept it as the confluence of two types, romance and Menippean satire. And even though Beecher is highly skeptical about any categories for the anomalous *Solomon and Marcolphus*, not even recognizing Menippean satire as a possible forbear, it would appear that a Menippean ancestor for his text is not altogether unlikely.

Finally, I should note that Branham and Kinney have done Petronius noble service, not only in giving us his enduring satire in a vigorous modern idiom, but also in making the poetic fragments accessible and very much alive again. Garry Sherbert has also effected a kind of literary resurrection, defining and illuminating a powerful satiric current in neoclassicism which has its roots in ancient times, and which is yet with us, having subsided only relatively briefly, apparently, in the Middle Ages.

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