

‘A RIOTOUS SPRAY OF WORDS’: RETHINKING THE MEDIEVAL THEORY OF SATIRE

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The purpose of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it will offer a brief survey of existing scholarship on the theory of satire in the Middle Ages, reviewing the studies of medieval glosses and commentaries published over the last twenty years or so. On the other, it will also try to suggest some ways in which this analysis might be further developed or expanded. Although the recent achievements of critics in this field are highly laudable, their conclusions can at times prove a little narrow in their focus. In particular, current scholarship often presents an overly homogenous and uniform view of satire commentary, neglecting a series of more marginal, even eccentric responses, which seem to identify different processes at work in the genre. The article will consider these overlooked remarks as significant aspects of medieval satire-theory in their own right: it will examine the attitude towards satire they present, and lay bare the exact functions they attribute to the literature.

To begin, until comparatively recently, it was widely agreed that the Middle Ages had no knowledge of satire as a poetic form. Following John Peter’s work in the 1950s, it was routinely asserted that any notion of medieval satire was an unhelpful anachronism, since ‘it was not until the sixteenth century, and the conscious rediscovery of Latin Satire, that Satire reasserted itself’ (12). The position that the Middle Ages ‘lacked a practical, unified theory of satire’ (Fahey 2) or ‘kannte die Satire als Gattung nicht’ (‘did not know satire as a genre’) appeared in several studies (Schalk 245), ranging from those by Fritz Schalk and Thomas Bestul (86), to Kathleen Fahey and Gilbert Highet (44-6). Even studies directly addressing satire in the Middle Ages were reluctant to use the term itself. More general designations were preferred, such as Douglas Gray’s “‘the satiric’” (21), John Yunck’s ‘literature of protest’ (5), or James Sutherland’s ‘school of primitives’ (23). More importantly, blame for this lack of awareness was often laid at the door of medieval exegesis. For some critics, the fact that poets had no sure grasp of satire was directly attributable to the ignorance of scholiasts (Sullivan 219; Knight 281). For instance, John Norton-Smith asserted that the absence of a clear theory of satire in commentary was responsible for deficiencies elsewhere: ‘the medieval writer interested in composing satiric verse had none of the sixteenth and post-sixteenth century critical scholarship,

richness of commentary or imitations in the vernacular [...] the manuals of rhetoric do not help much' (47). In a similar fashion, Cornelis Geerars stated that medieval 'poetica-handboeken' put forward only an 'erbarmelijke' or 'paltry' theory of satire, which led to a 'total' decline of the form:

In die duistere slotfase van de klassieke tijd had men geen idee meer van de werkelijke satire, evenmin als men zich een juiste voorstelling kon maken van toneel of een toneelopvoering. De verwarring van de klassieke genres was volledig. (5)

At the dark closing stage of antiquity, one could have no more an idea of real satire than one could produce a stage play or a performance following classical principles. The degeneration of classical genres was total.

However, recent scholarship has done much to overturn this view. Reassessment of the medieval commentary tradition has revealed a much fuller engagement with satire than earlier critics seem to have appreciated. It has become clear, for instance, that the ancient satirists were widely studied in the grammar schools and universities of the Middle Ages, probably 'to assure the medieval reading community' of the 'moral standing' of pagan literature generally (Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, 11). Accordingly, Juvenal, Persius and Horace all have detailed entries in Conrad of Hirsau's *Dialogus Super Auctores* (c.1140), a series of twenty-one introductions to classical authors composed for use by grammar students (Whitbread; Curtius 49). The popularity of satire is further attested by the library of the almonry school at St Paul's, which from 1358 contained 'Juvenal (two copies), Persius (two copies)' and 'Horace (*Satires*)' (Rickert 257). As medieval students encountered classical texts while 'receiving an educational grounding in the liberal arts', they would almost certainly have found at least one example of satire among their 'set texts' (Minnis and Johnson 4). As Rita Copeland observes, 'in elementary Latin instruction [...] satire was a preferred genre for teaching Latin – and thus literacy – to young boys' (79).

Encountering satirists in the classroom not only familiarised medieval readers with the work of individual poets, it also led them to regard satire as a broader category. The terms *satiricus* and *satura* had wide currency in general discussions of poetry, such as the rehearsals of literary form found in Guido da Pisa's commentary on Dante (c.1387) and John Ridevall's commentary on Augustine (c.1333). Outside exegetic works, the related tradition of prescriptive poetics also displayed a keen awareness of satire. Handbooks on rhetoric such as Matthew of Vendome's *Ars*

Versificatoria (c.1175) and John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria* (c.1229) contain lengthy discussions of the genre. In fact, knowledge of satire proved sufficiently widespread to make its way into vernacular texts. In the fourteenth century John Trevisa gave a detailed account of the 'pre poetes specialliche i-cleped satirici' (Higden 4:179), while at the end of the fifteenth Henry Watson dubbed his work a 'boke satyryke', comparing it to 'the poesyys and fyccyons/ of the auntyent poetes' (Brant 8). It thus seems fair to discount the view that satire was unknown to the Middle Ages. On the contrary, it has become clear that satire was acknowledged as a key poetic genre, widely read, and carefully examined.

What is most significant about this engagement with satire is the cluster of recurring details it contains. As Paul Miller states, exegetes developed a clear 'vocabulary of censure' in their examinations of the form, as a series of terms reappear in a number of glosses, commentaries and rhetorical manuals ('John Gower', 81). Several critics, including Udo Kindermann, Vincent Gillespie and Suzanne Reynolds ('*Orazio satiro*', 'Dante and the Medieval Theory of Satire') have been able to derive a fully-fledged theory of satire from these remarks, assembling them into a definite conception of the genre. What is more, this conception has not only proven to be reflective, but productive as well. As well as responding to classical poetry, it also seems to have stimulated composition, as an entire 'medieval satirical tradition' appears to have arisen 'as a result of the study of Roman satire and medieval satirical theory in the schools' (Miller, 'Medieval Literary Theory', 240). This point is made clear by Giovanni Orlandi's essay on Latin elegaic verse, A.J. Minnis' study of the *Roman de la Rose* (*Magister Amoris*, 82-119), Miller's treatment of Gower and Chaucer, and Robert Hollander's work on Boccaccio (69-88): each of these studies has been able to identify firm traces of scholastic satire-theory in their particular texts. In place of the negative position of Peter, Hightet or Schalk, reconsidering medieval exegesis has brought criticism into contact with a relatively sophisticated and robust conception of satire.

However, this is not to say that problems do not still remain in the current understanding of medieval satire-theory. Although the results of this research are undeniably impressive, and its findings have produced a much fuller comprehension of satire in the Middle Ages than existed previously, some of its assessments present new difficulties. In piecing together the medieval theory of satire, most critics have tended to focus on the strands of commentary which treat satire primarily as a tool for

instruction. In Rita Copeland's phrase, medieval satire-theory has generally been considered as a series of 'readily accessible...moral lessons' (80). For example, Miller argues that satire was chiefly considered as a warning against immorality. His overview of the exegetic theory spells this out clearly: for Miller, scholiasts saw satire as a 'type of ethical verse, ranging in tone between bitter indignation, mocking irony, and witty humour, which in forthright, unadorned terms censures and corrects vices in society and advocates virtues' ('John Gower', 82). Kindermann shares this view, remarking that in its engagement with satire, 'Das moralische Gewissen des Mittelalters war vielleicht mehr geschärft als das künstlerische' ('the moral conscience of the Middle Ages was perhaps more acute than its artistic sense') (113). To reinforce this point, both Kindermann and Miller name Isidore of Seville as the ultimate source of medieval satire-theory. As Kindermann states, although Isidore's definitions were not derived inductively from the Roman satirists, they remained 'effective for centuries': 'die noch über Jahrhunderte hin wirksamen' (12). Isidore's understanding of satire is a highly moralised one. He discusses satire as a form that is centrally concerned with exhortation:

Satirici a quibus generaliter vitia carpuntur, ut Flaccus, Persius, Iuvenalis vel alii. Hi enim universorum delicta corripunt, nec vitabatur eis pessimum quemque describere, nec cuilibet peccata moresque reprehendere. Unde et nudi pinguntur, eo quod per eos vitia singula denudentur. (VIII.vii.7)

Satire generally gathers together vices, as in the work of Horace, Persius, Juvenal, or other similar authors. These on the whole snatch up sins, never shying away from describing even the worst, nor from reprimanding sinful habits. Each naked sin is pictured, its every part laid bare.

According to this interpretation, satire serves to 'snatch up sins' and 'lay bare every part of each naked sin' in order to discourage such wrongdoing in practice: its practitioners 'never shy away [...] from reprimanding sinful habits'. The only substantial addition to these ideas that Miller and Kindermann detect is their recasting in the terminology of exegesis. Later commentaries defined the portrayal of 'naked sin' as the *materia* of satire, the subject-matter most appropriate to its composition. Likewise the satirist's desire to 'correct those whom he censures' was formalised into his *intentio*, his purpose as an author (Miller, 'Medieval Literary Theory', 206), while the actual correction of sins became satire's *utilitas*, the practical usefulness of the

genre (Kindermann 37-9). Beyond this shift in vocabulary, Miller and Kindermann see little alteration of Isidore's fundamental ideas.

From these comments, it may be seen that the conception of satire derived from medieval exegesis is largely a dogmatic one. Satire is held to be an innately instructive form, which must always direct the reader towards some positive ideal. This interpretation of exegesis promotes a view of medieval satire as essentially didactic, tying the poetry to a reformatory intent: it is consistent with Laura Kendrick's view of medieval satire, also insisting that the form tries to 'convince the intended audience not to do something the satirist considers, for whatever reason, wrong' (Kendrick 341). Satire is at root a buttress for conventional standards. Everything it portrays is presented as a deviation from an ideal, which is treated as a sacrosanct criterion: its final aim, its *utilitas*, is to prevent such deviations from occurring in actuality. Satire not only honours accepted ideals, but actively serves to enshrine them still further.

There is little here that can be challenged outright. It is indisputable that moralistic definitions do pervade medieval readings of satire. Authors as diverse as William of Tyre, John Trevisa and Averroes of Cordova agree that satire represents 'monstrous vices' (William of Tyre 406) and 'wikked men and euel levyng' (Higden 4:407) in order to 'give rise to [...] indirection' (Averroes 363), to prevent the commission of sins in actuality. This reading is sufficiently widespread to develop into a defence of classical literature in general. The English Franciscan John Ridevall, for instance, confronts the claim that 'multi poete fecerunt multas poesies inducentes homines ad delectationes carnales' ('poets made poems that encourage men to delights of the flesh') by pointing out that 'alii...scilicet satirici, componebant sua carmina ad reprehendum talia vitia carnalia' ('others [...] namely the satirists, composed their songs to reprehend the same carnal sins') (Smalley 319). Similarly, on at least one occasion satire is directly compared to 'the preaching of bishops' (Minnis, Wallace and Scott 34). What is problematic, however, is the insistence that exegesis bound satire inflexibly to this end, and that other functions or possibilities were wholly excluded. A number of critics have explicitly argued this point, stating that no further aims or processes were detected by medieval commentaries. Joachim Suchomski, for instance, states that even when other meanings began to present themselves, scholiasts were able to subordinate them to an admonitory end. He writes: 'kann die Toleranzgrenze so weit gedehnt werden, daß nahezu jede komische

Dichtung ihre Rechtfertigung findet, ihre Funktion erfüllt und damit ihren Wert hat [...] Innerhalb der Betrachtungsweise, die den biblisch-christlichen Standpunkt überwindet' ('the limits of tolerance could be stretched so far that any material could be accommodated, given a justification, function and value...germane with Christian, biblical attitudes') (173). Along similar lines, Paul Miller warns against seeing a scurrilous or subversive element in the exegesis of satire, stating that 'no medieval writer' would have seen satire as a means of undermining accepted norms ('Medieval Literary Theory', 241). According to both of these critics, the Middle Ages placed satire firmly in the service of established value-systems. It saw satire as continually gesturing towards a positive standard, recognising no defamatory or playful tendencies in the genre. In its interpretation, satire remained at all times a deferential form, with no capacity for interrogating or attacking the ideals it drew on.

It is, however, difficult to agree with this unilateral position on medieval satire-theory. In light of the scholia themselves, it seems a little reductive to claim that ethical conceptions of satire entirely monopolised discussions of the form. Despite its unquestionable popularity, the Isidorean 'vocabulary of censure' is not in fact the only notion of satire available to the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note that moralised definitions of the form are not the only ideas to emerge in exegesis of classical texts. There are in fact several points at which the exegetes' reading of satire slips free of a purely ethical schema. In several commentaries this intent loosens its hold, and exegetes begin to record details that cannot be easily reconciled with a curative aim. The more detail that is given about satire by medieval scholiasts, the more there arises a sense that it cannot be solely corrective. Several commentaries hint that satire contains further, less constructive potentialities. Although these observations are by no means presented in a cohesive or systematic way, they are nonetheless sufficiently widespread to form an important part of satire commentary. Collectively, these often marginal and singular remarks suggest that medieval readers saw more in satire than the Isidorean conception permits.

One of the most striking examples of this tendency accompanies William of Conches' glosses on Juvenal, compiled in c.1130. In one of its two surviving manuscripts the *Glosae* is preceded by a short *accessus*, which provides a brief introduction to the *auctor* and his *opera* (Quain). According to its modern editor Bradford Wilson, the *accessus* is most likely the work of one of William's students: at least, its opening section refers to him as 'magister Wilelmus' (Guillaume de Conches

28-9). What makes the text particularly noteworthy is its attempt to pin down exactly 'what satire might be', 'quid sit satura'. During the course of this definition, the *accessus* follows a typical procedure of medieval criticism. It attempts to unearth the structure of satire by setting forth the word 'in its true original sense' (Brehaut 33). This leads to some extremely interesting remarks, which warrant close examination:

Potest et satira dici a satiris, id est ab agrestibus dicta est...agrestes cuiuscumque patrie conveniebant in honore Cereris et Bachi...Deinde sibi indulgendo, commendando, et bibendo magnam partem diei consumeabant. Ad ultimum, rustici unius ville contra rusticos alterius ville consurgebant et in vicem fundebant convicia non bene consona pro discretione rusticana. Et huius modi convicia predicta sunt satire, id est agrestes callidores autem in artem redigerunt et metricè ceperunt reprehendere. (Guillaume de Conches 91)

It is possible that 'satire' is derived from 'satiri', that is from 'peasants'...Peasants, when they assembled for the honour of Ceres and Bacchus...would give free reign to their appetites, celebrating and drinking, feasting for the greater part of the day. At the end of such occasions, the rustics of one village would stand against those of another settlement, and by turns they poured out abuse, chiming together in ungainly fashion, as harsh and rough as befits the peasantry. And these types of outbursts anticipated satire, because the craftiest farmers, those with most skill and artistry, later fashioned verse intended to reprehend.

The bulk of this material is most likely borrowed from Horace, whose *Epistula ad Augustum* describes a similar scene (47). Nevertheless Horace does not associate these verbal duels with literary satire, and does not use the key term *satiri*, instead describing the participants as *agricolae* or *rustici*. Furthermore, this derivation is not found in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, or among the four etymons of *satira* given in Diomedes' *Ars Grammatica* (c.400) (Diomedes 485-6). The connection between satire and 'disorderly rituals' is an innovation on the part of the *accessus*.

What makes this passage particular noteworthy is that it can be seen as an interpretation of satire in its own right. In a sense, the *satiri* etymology is a critical comment on satire. It is a means of recording an idea of the form, its behaviour and its purpose. Satire can only be linked with rustic 'outbursts' if some correspondence is perceived between the two forms of language. The conduct of satirists and the 'craftiest farmers' must be seen as similar in some way. If the two are not assumed to be analogous, then the derivation would make little sense. As a result, the writer's choice of etymon reveals the characteristics he has detected in the literary form of

satire. It lays bare the observations that have allowed him to link satire to this particular root. The etymology rests on an assessment of satire, and conveys a particular impression of its nature.

When examined in this way, the *satiri* figure reveals a view of satire which does not wholly conform to a straightforward ethical conception. The figure comes to impute certain characteristics to the genre which are not obviously corrective. Firstly, it seems to claim that satire does not have to restrict its ridicule to vice. The peasants' abuse does not appear to address those who are already established as immoral. There is no mention of their insults being focused only on deserving cases, as the farmers 'pour out abuse' on one another regardless of their actual actions. It seems that this prototype of satire may be turned against any target, regardless of its actual iniquity. It is unselective, rather than concentrating on 'naked sins' alone. For the *accessus*, satire does not appear to be bound to the *materia* usually ascribed to it.

Likewise, this model also breaks with the customary view of satire's *utilitas*. If satire is intended to 'reprimand sinful habits' or 'peccata moresque reprehendere', this would suppose that its main objective lies beyond its own language (Isidori Hispalensis VIII.Vii.7). The belief that satire recounts 'evils...with the hope of correcting them', in John of Garland's formulation, assumes that it is designed to have some material effect (*Parisiana Poetria*, 103). Yet the bouts of 'abuse' described by the *accessus* are not tied to this pattern. They more closely resemble a game. They occur in a celebratory context, while 'feasting...for the honour of Ceres and Bacchus', and conclude with the festivities: it is only 'ad ultimum' or 'at the end' of these occasions that insults are exchanged. They do not seem to have any particular outcome, but are more self-enclosed in character. In fact, the emphasis of this speech is less on its edifying effects than on the verbal flamboyance of its speakers, as their 'skill and artistry' determines the value of the words. It is therefore more appropriate to view the peasants' abuse as playful, with no intent beyond its own invention. This 'anticipation' of satire is produced as an end in itself. For the author of the *accessus*, the *utilitas* generally attributed to satire does not seem to represent the limit of its functions.

The lack of the conventional *utilitas* and *materia* in this model has a number of important implications. Most significantly, it implies that satire has the capacity to be purely derogatory. The churls' raillery is unrestricted: it is not compelled to produce a recognisable effect, and has no obligation to attack only the transgressors of

a stipulated ideal. Both of these points would suggest that it is not necessarily governed by a system of prescriptions. Since it can be applied to any target, it need not regard any qualities as sacrosanct or untouchable. Likewise, since it does not have to turn its language outwards to propagate a definite moral, it is not in the service of a predetermined set of values. The peasants' abuse does not have to be tied to any idea of inviolable goodness or truth, or founded on any central standard. This implies that satire might also be free of any positive norms, since it is supposedly derived from this abuse. The comparison takes from satire any compulsion to judge entities against an ideal. Like its prototype, it may exercise a purely negative form of mockery. Rather than respecting or publicising given standards, satire is free to be wholly disparaging for the *accessus*. The form gains the power to mock indiscriminately, without necessarily privileging a norm as it attacks. Drawing this parallel suggests that satire's invective can achieve a life of its own, not subordinate to any sanctified system of values.

These arguments do not represent the limit of the *accessus*' comments. The text goes even further in hinting at satire's irreverence. Its central metaphor grants satire the ability to undermine idealised concepts. A significant detail in this respect is the emphatically plural nature of the churls' games. The text points out that the peasants' outbursts are made up of numerous separate voices: they are not only spoken by the inhabitants of several villages, but are described as being 'non bene consona', or 'not well harmonised'. These games are emphatically heterogeneous and dissonant. There is no attempt to reconcile their participants into a single mass, or to suppress their difference, as they remain resolutely discordant. Moreover, these differing positions are allowed to contest one another. It is stipulated that the peasants abuse one another 'in vicem', 'by turns'. Their positions are not simply distinct, but are in direct competition with one another: each challenges the others' assertions, and produces statements that will be in themselves confronted. Even more interestingly, this contest appears to be an ongoing state, rather than a process with a definite conclusion. It does not seek to confirm a winner, or judge the best or most successful insult, but simply ends when the occasion for 'celebrating and drinking' is over. It does not work to establish a principal or pre-eminent voice, or even have any criterion by which such a thing could be decided. The *accessus* emphasises that these rituals highlight disparity and competition for their own sake.

All of this strongly implies that satire itself may be turned against standards and prescriptions. As far as the *accessus* is concerned, it does not seem to occupy a single unified position. Like this analogous practice, it too may play host to several competing voices, without accommodating them into a hierarchy or subordinating them to one ruling set of values. If this is the case, then satire becomes capable of undercutting the moral codes it cites. Rather than allowing one set of ideas or prescriptions to put itself forward without question, it may create a broad field in which every position is forced to reckon with other standpoints. Instead of allowing one voice to issue secure instructions and judgments, it may unsettle such a process. It may reduce every claim to simply one of several assertions, and even force it to be directly contested by its rivals. In short, the *accessus*' metaphor for satire hints at a clear deflationary power in the literature. Through this comparison, satire becomes a practice in which any position can be made to compete with others, and even be countered and resisted. Its playfulness gains a more militant edge.

From these details, it is fair to say that the *accessus* reveals an understanding of satire that does not entirely accord with an ethical definition. While it does not oppose the didactic model proposed by Isidore and discussed by Miller and Kindermann, it does expand on such a view. At the very least, its claim that satire resembles a riotous game suggests that it may be playful. Such an analogy places comedy within the scope of the form. But at the same time this comparison also assigns more querulous powers to satire. It argues that satire may exist without any system of values, like the ritual it is linked to, and may even have the power to undercut authoritative pronouncements. The form has the ability to be sportive rather than entirely reformatory, and denigratory rather than plainly constructive. In sum, the Juvenal *accessus* seems to realise that satire is not only a tool for moral commendation. Despite its assurance elsewhere that satire has the 'utilitate ut auditorum retrahat a viciis', or 'the benefit of making its hearers retreat from vice', once its author sets out to describe the form, he allows further possibilities to emerge (Guillaume de Conches 89). In its survey of satire, the *accessus* recognises some potential for disruption and belligerence.

Of course, a single work can only give a partial view of the medieval period's notion of satire. The Juvenal *accessus* is only one text in the extensive body of Latin commentary, and its views are by no means the only ones found in this literature. However, the text does serve to crystallise a series of reflections that recur throughout

exegesis. Although the *satiri* derivation does not occur elsewhere, other texts follow much the same course as the *accessus*, forming metaphors for satire which steer their remarks towards similar conclusions.

Shades of this trend can already be found in Isidore's work. One of the etymologies outlined here seems to identify a similar potential for unruliness in satire. Towards the end of his discussion, Isidore follows Evanthius in suggesting a link between satire and the satyrs of Greek mythology (Galbraith 8). Isidore suggests that 'saturici autem dicti, sive quod pleni sint omni facundia...a satyris nomen tractum' ('the word "satirical" is taken from "saturation", or that which is full of every kind of eloquence...or else it may be taken from the name of the satyrs') (VIII.vii.8). Given the nature of this mythic creature, it would be hard for Isidore to avoid implications of disorder here. Few classical texts fail to associate the satyr with licence and tumult.[1] Horace's *Ars Poetica*, for example, associates the satyrs with 'obscuras humili sermone tabernas' ('base speech in dingy taverns') (66), while the fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* places the creatures in the procession of Dionysus, marching to the 'noise of tambourines and clashing bronze' (75). The figure is emblematic of low humour and uproar, habitually defying codes rather than reinforcing them.

In the course of his discussion, Isidore not only emphasises these subversive aspects, but projects them directly into satire. He writes of the satyrs: 'qui inulta habent ea quae per vinolentiam dicuntur' ('because of their drunkenness, they were permitted to speak with impunity') (VIII.vii.8). The salient detail here is the satyrs' intoxication. For Isidore, this 'drunkenness' is the governing trait of the creature. Everything else is subordinate to this characteristic. Even their speech is motivated by alcohol, as inebriation allows them 'to speak' in their particular manner. This set of ideas colours Isidore's view of satire. The only parallel that he establishes between satyrs and satire is their production of language, the fact that both 'speak'. The two are associable because they give rise to similar forms of discourse. The implication is that the satyr's manner of speech is the earliest kind of satire, the form in its most primitive state. This imputes a degree of upheaval to satire, making it less exclusively corrective. His remark about the form's 'drunkenness' implies that it need not be governed by restraint, decency, or reason. In fact, as William Sharpe has documented, Isidore associates drunkenness with the dissolution of these same qualities: 'Isidore has a low opinion of alcoholism: he mentions that [...] overindulgence in drink produces disturbances of the intellect, disordered emotions, and burning lust [...] the

drunkard loses his intellect, may forget where he is or what evils he has committed' (33). For Isidore drunkenness represents the total suspension of proper checks on conduct, especially the intellect and memory. By claiming that inebriation also underlies satire, Isidore seems to acknowledge that it too has no innate conservatism. He connects it to the arrest of established standards, not their reinforcement. This means that ideals do not have to be integral to satire's performance. Satire does not need to be tied to behavioural models, and it has no inherent duty to support them. The literature may be purely derisive, and free of any positive ideals. Even in Isidore's definition, there are traces of a theory of satire that is broader than simple moral reproof.

Nonetheless, these are only the briefest of hints. The rest of Isidore's remarks do not present satire as anything but didactic. At one stage Isidore even offers an alternative etymon, one that is wholly prescriptive in character. He suggests that 'satire' may have legislative origins, proposing that it stems from the 'lex satura', which he defines as 'lex est quae de pluribus simul rebus eloquitur' ('a type of law that makes several provisions at once') (V.xvi.1). For the bulk of his remarks, Isidore thus treats satire as wholly imperative. The satyr is a passing anomaly in his engagement with satire, and not representative of his views as a whole. However, this is by no means the case for Isidore's followers. In late medieval discussions, the satyr comes to play a far more central role: the *lex satura*, on the other hand, is comparatively neglected. As is stressed by Gillespie (225) and Kindermann (26-30), later scholiasts pay considerable attention to this aspect of Isidore's discussion. In their hands, his rough sketch is expanded and embellished, until it becomes a cornerstone of satire theory. In fact it remains a crucial part of commentary on satire until the work of Casaubon in the seventeenth century (Zimbardo 63-7). Moreover, although the satyr is extended beyond Isidore's brief outline, it does not lose the connotations of disorder he attaches to it. Throughout the Middle Ages, the satyr remained a vehicle for non-ethical readings of satire.

A case in point is Guido da Pisa's gloss on Dante, dating from about 1387. Guido mentions the satyr in the prologue of this work, while reviewing the various forms of classical poetry. In the course of this discussion, two highly revealing comments are made. After stating that the conduct of satyrs is analogous to satire, Guido begins to spell out exactly how one resembles the other. Firstly, he calls attention to the grotesque bodies of the satyrs. He states: 'satyri enim sunt quedam

animalia ab umbilico supra formum hominis habentia, sed ab umbilico deorsum habent formum caprinam' ('satyrs are animals with the shape of man above the navel, and the shape of a goat beneath it') (Guido da Pisa 5). His next point concerns the behaviour of the creatures. He observes that the satyr is 'levis, quia cito saltat': it is 'nimble, swiftly skipping and dancing'. This activity is specifically said to mirror satire's own performance: 'Sic ista scientia poetarum est levis, quia cito saltat de vitio in virtutem et de virtute in vitium' ('the species of poetry in question is nimble, dancing rapidly from vice to virtue, and from virtue to vice') (Guido da Pisa 5).

In calling attention to these features, Guido's work follows a broad current in medieval exegesis. Other medieval commentators also cite these details in their work on satire. For instance, Conrad of Hirsau notes that satyrs resemble satire because both are 'viciosa' or 'ill-formed' (76), while John of Garland writes that 'lex satire, vitiis ridere, salire' ('the law of satire is to laugh at vice, and to dance about') (*Morale Scolarium*, 234). What is more, in emphasising these points, all three authors articulate much the same ideas found in the Juvenal *accessus*. When Guido and John claim that the literature and the mythical creature have a common monstrosity and a tendency to 'skip', they also imply that satire may be reckless and irreverent. The idea of dancing again introduces a ludic element into the form. The dancing of satyrs, like the cursing contests in the *accessus*, seems more conducive to play than instruction: it is an end in its own right, an act performed for its own sake, rather than a process leading towards a further goal. The notion of play is again brought to the fore. Rather than being linked with a functional activity, designed to have some effect outside itself, satire is again likened to a game. As a literary form, therefore, satire seems able to toy with language and its codes without necessarily enforcing them. This again suggests that satire may be deflationary: it may treat codes ironically, and even perhaps critically.

The emphasis on teratology, as satire originates from 'ill-formed' creatures, develops this idea even further. The work of David Williams raises some helpful points in this regard. Williams examines the role of the monster in medieval culture, and reaches some significant conclusions. He points out that the monstrous body in the Middle Ages is invariably a distorted version of the human frame. It represents the human figure enlarged, diminished or, as in the case of the satyr, bestialised. This in turn has important ramifications. Williams refers to the symbolic role of the human body in medieval thought, echoing Mary Douglas' claim that the body is a model for

‘any bounded system’ (113). He finds this idea particularly applicable to the Middle Ages, owing to the prevalence of such schemata as the Pauline ‘corpus Christi’ (1 Corinthians 12.12-30) and the Aristotelian ‘body politic’ (Chroust). Throughout the period, he argues, the human body was a key paradigm for symbolic order in general. The monster is thus more than a mutation of human anatomy: it may also be a deliberate subversion of accepted codes and hierarchies. Williams writes: ‘the human body is the primeval matrix of all the chief figures and analogies by which human language seeks to understand reality...the deforming of this form negates the equating of the real to the limits of discourse’ (Williams 176). By distorting the archetype of ordered thought, the monster may be used to disturb established systems and rules.

In light of Williams’ remarks, Guido’s emphasis on the monstrosity of satire becomes highly suggestive. Likening satire to a monstrous body ‘with hooked snout, horned forehead, and extremities like goats’ feet’ implies that the characteristics of the monster are also present in the poetic form (Jerome 301). The analogy places satire outside the bounds of ‘affirmative, logical discourses’ (Williams 103). Since the physiology of its etymon breaks with conventional strictures, satire is moved away from such orders. It is removed from any obligation to preserve existing norms, as it is more firmly linked with their absence than their reinforcement. Satire may thus gain the ability to operate without a set of positive standards to govern it. The way is open for the form to be wholly denigratory and subversive in its mockery. Much like Isidore’s reference to satiric ‘drunkenness’, Guido’s insistence on monstrosity associates satire with disorder.

From this, it can be seen that the satyr functions much like the *satiri*. It allows exegesis to coordinate a response to satire that departs from an ethical model. The identification of satire and satyrs discloses a belief that the form can be corrosive rather than purely constructive. The satyr allows satire to be portrayed as a game rather than a lesson, indicating that it may use language without any directive intent. Satyrs also place some part of satire outside established values, recognising that it does not have to attack in their name. As with the *satiri*, when exegetes attempt to rationalise the link between satire and satyrs, they describe the form as undermining systems, rather than reinforcing them. Overall, these derivations betray a sense that satire may not simply be a didactic tool. Exegesis invariably uses these metaphors to pick out and magnify the irreverence of the genre. In its etymologies, commentary veers towards the view of satire given in Fulgentius’ *Mitologiae* (c.500 CE), seeing it

as ‘lascivienti verborum rore percussit’, or ‘lashing out with a riotous spray of words’ (Fulgentius 9).[2]

It is also worth noting that medieval scholars developed no means of separating satire’s didactic and derisive possibilities, but were happy to accept their coexistence. In its exegesis of classical satire, the Middle Ages lacked any clear sense that the genre could be subdivided into different types or varieties. As is well known, from the sixteenth century onwards, there developed the idea that satire had two distinct forms, the Horatian and the Juvenalian, each named in honour of its earliest practitioner (Weber). By the end of the seventeenth century, this binarism was so well established that it provided the basis of Dryden’s ‘Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire’, with its careful comparison of the ‘perpetually Moral’ Horace to the ‘lashing’ Juvenal (*Selected Criticism* 255). As Frederic Bogel has recently commented, the division of satire into Juvenalian and Horatian tones or traditions often serves a clear function. In many cases it serves to contain the malevolence or impertinence of the genre. Bogel describes this ‘convention of satiric criticism’ as a ‘labor of containment’, stating that the ‘apparently neutral classificatory procedure generating “Juvenalian” and “Horatian” variants keeps the volatilities and mercurialities of satiric aggression from being identified with satire itself’ (30-1). Excessive aggression or ironic play may be safely isolated from satire as a whole, by attributing it to the type of satire which a particular writer had chosen not to employ.

However, medieval writers did not have this tactic available to them, or felt no need to employ it. It is clear from their comments that they did not share the later belief in distinct Horatian or Juvenalian styles. This is not to say that the two poets were treated with complete indifference in the period. Conrad of Hirsau, for instance, distinguishes between Juvenal and Horace on the basis of their difficulty, describing Horace as the more accessible of the two (Conradus Hirsaugiensis 110-20). Other commentators go further, suggesting that different hermeneutic procedures are required for either writer, as Horace’s irony and Juvenal’s forthrightness present their own interpretive problems (Gillespie 226). This same discrimination is often apparent among medieval poets. Some writers express an open preference for one writer or the other, in a manner which suggests that specific qualities were recognised in either poet. In the twelfth century Walter of Chatillon speaks of ‘stulti cum prudentibus currunt [...] Juvenalis autumnant sumere personam’ (‘fools and wise men rushing [...] to take on the character of Juvenal’), before claiming such a position for his own

compositions: ‘semper ego auditor tantum, nunquamne reponam?’ (‘must I always be a listener and never give answer?’) (64).[3] By identifying Juvenal with a unique *persona* or ‘temperament’, Walter implies that certain techniques, a certain style, even a specific outlook, are particular to the poet.

There is then an awareness that the two satirists are different in some respects. However, this is not coupled with the conviction that each poet represents a fully-fledged branch of satire, absolutely distinct from that of the other. This is made clear by the fact that medieval satirists felt no obligation to adhere to one model exclusively. Instead they moved freely between the archetypes. Despite Walter of Chatillon’s stated fondness for Juvenal, this clearly does not preclude imitation of the other poet. The *satira* which follows his seizure of the ‘Juvenalis personam’ quotes Horace twice, and even concludes with an open tribute to the ‘scientia Flaccus’ or ‘wisdom of Horace’ (Walter of Chatillon 70). The same lack of bias is apparent elsewhere. In discussing Chaucer’s debt to the ancient satirists, Rosemary Woolf notes that his stance drifts evenly between Juvenalian and Horatian precedent, with a freedom that implies no sense of formal distinction (82-3). Kirk Freudenberg raises a similar point: ‘Juvenal’s influence was acknowledged by Chaucer and Skelton, but neither thinks of himself as Juvenalian’ (22). Other medieval authors go further, and openly stress the basic unity of the two writers. A number of commentators urge studying both poets together, since the same material is locatable in both: ‘Juvenalis moralia dicta in archano pectoris reservet, et Flacium nature summopere vitare studeat’ (‘the moral sayings of Juvenal should be kept in the secret places of the heart, while Horace encourages one to avoid wrongdoing earnestly’) (Haskins 91). In short, the Middle Ages developed no process for dividing satire into two different types. Its scholars were therefore unable to instigate the process that Bogel describes: they could not ‘secure a more normative, less problematic’ form of satire, by isolating the form’s ‘harshness and violence’ from its ‘conventional pieties’ (30). They were, in short, forced to concede that these two potentialities were equally present in satire.

What is more, this view of satire as mischievous or ungoverned does not only appear as an undertone in exegesis. There are several points at which medieval writers voice these reactions quite openly. A more candid awareness of satiric derision appears in a number of texts. One such work is the *Sacerdos ad altare* (c.1190), an educational tract often attributed to Alexander of Neckam (Hunt 28-30). Here satire’s tendency towards disorder is not merely noted, but comes to dictate how satire should

be treated in the classroom. For Alexander satire is a form of literature that should only be read under close supervision. While he does recommend that the student reads the satirists in order to ‘*vicia [...] addiscat esse fugienda et nobilia gesta eorum desideret imitari*’ (‘learn how to flee vices and desire to imitate noble deeds’), he also sounds a firm note of caution. Along with the ‘love poems’ of Ovid, satire should be kept from immature readers:

Placuit tamen viris autenticis carmina amatoria cum satiris subducenda
esse a manibus adolescencium, ac si eis dicatur: Qui legitis flores et humi
nascencia fraga,/ Frigidus, o pueri, fuite hinc, latet anguis in herba.[4]
(Haskins 91)

However much the student is pleased by the poisons of the authors, love poems along with satires should be kept from the hands of the young; for it is said: ‘Those of you who gather flowers and fresh strawberries from the earth, run from here, O youngsters, for a cold snake lurks in the grass’.

In this passage, Alexander does not see satire as a simple buttress for accepted standards. Instead, he suggests that it may actively disrupt moral principles. His main contention is that satire corrupts ‘the young’. It is able to ‘poison’ the sensibilities of ‘youngsters’, presenting a danger to their moral development. He believes that some part of satire is able to corrode notions of correct conduct and directly overturn proper ideals. As a consequence, satiric poetry should be handled with utmost care. It is evident from this that Alexander does not regard satire as exclusively moral. He does not accept that the genre can be reduced to an ethically beneficial *utilitas*. Parts of it are firmly didactic, but it also has more troubling powers. It does not only contain moral fruit and ‘flowers’, but also something more vicious, ‘a cold snake in the grass’.

A comparable set of remarks are also found at the point at which commentary and composition intersect. Medieval writers produce several valuable reflections on satire when they attempt to compose examples of the genre: it either proves more expansive than the ethical conception allows, or else it has to be deliberately limited to fit this remit, its more scurrilous capacity purposefully disabled. One text in which these concerns are apparent is John of Garland’s *Morale Scolarium* (c.1241), a satire on the ‘morals of students’. John opens his work by outlining its overall purpose. He claims to be ‘writing a new style of satire, one which does not sow crazed anger’, before promising that, unlike other satires, ‘no specific person will be mangled here with a spiteful fang’: ‘*Scribo novam satiram, set sic ne seminet iram,/ Iram deliram*

[...] Nullus dente mali lacerabitur in speciali' (*Morale Sclarium*, 187). It seems that in these lines, John candidly sets out to make satire more constructive. His 'new style of satire' will not give way to scurrility or unbounded attack. The fact that John is required to make these disclaimers, and to refer to his work as 'a new style of satire', suggests that he shares Alexander's suspicions. If satire is already governed by morality, it would not be necessary for John to rein in its performance in this way. He would not need to ensure that his work 'does not sow anger' if this was already impossible. John seems to recognise that part of satire stands outside the ethical model. The form can only be purely ethical if he forces it to be so. To write wholly moral satire involves sealing it into a 'new' form, dispensing with some part of its structure. Much like Alexander before him, John realises that ludic energies are innate to the genre.

A comparable notion appears in the prologue of Nigel of Canterbury's widely-read beast-satire, the *Speculum Stultorum* (c.1180). Although Nigel does not specifically identify his work as satire, his comments do connect his text with the genre, and particularly with the definitions offered by exegesis. His use of the term 'reprehendere' in the phrase 'insimulatione reprehendere' ('to reprehend with direct allegation') makes this clear (Wireker 10). Even by the twelfth century this term was commonplace in discussions of satire: John of Garland goes so far as to treat 'satire' and 'reprehension' as interchangeable terms, at one stage referring to 'Reprehensio sive Satyra' (*Parisiana Poetria*, 102).[5] Nigel's use of this terminology to define his own work signals its affiliation to Roman satire, as understood by the exegesis of classical texts. Importantly, when outlining his comprehension of this genre, Nigel also seems to see a more playful strand in satire. In the concluding section of his prologue, Nigel states that his narrator 'de diversis ordinibus interserit nolens jocosa quaedam insimulatione reprehendere, quae noverat aspera increpatione nequaquam se posse extirpare': 'he strings together jokes about certain things in the various orders, refusing to reprehend with direct allegation, since he knows that sharp and bitter rebukes have no power to reform' (Wireker 10). From this remark, it is clear that satire contains two distinct possibilities for Nigel, either of which he is free to pursue: the 'bitter rebukes' and 'direct allegations' are accompanied by a more comedic tendency. Although he does claim that this second, ludic direction can have the same outcome as the first, even comparing it to a 'utilis unguetum' ('application of ointment') which soothes 'multa emin genera morborum [...] quam cauterium ad

medelam' ('more kinds of illness [...] than the branding iron'), it is interesting that he presents the two as alternatives to one another (Wireker 10). Following one course involves 'refusing' the other, as though the two are opposed in some key respect. Despite his belief in the value of satire's less 'direct' possibility, Nigel seems to be in agreement with John's basic point. He shares his belief that satire has capacities beyond 'direct allegation', and suggests that these are difficult to reconcile with such a function, even if they do not entirely contradict it. Once again, satire is more than simple 'rebuke'.

These convictions even make their way into English. In fact, as soon as English satirists begin to comment openly on their work, the same suspicions arise. Henry Watson's remarks on his 'boke satyryke' bear witness to this. At one stage, Watson warns that his work should be treated like an 'almonde', since its 'vertues' or 'kynnelles' cannot be reached 'withoute brekyng of the stones'. From this comment, it seems clear that his idea of 'satyre' also includes something that stands outside 'vertues/ scyence and doctryne'. Some part of Watson's 'booke' is of a different character to its 'moral sens', and must be pierced or 'broken' before that 'prouffyte' can be accessed. A further statement reveals the nature of this non-moral content. Watson writes: 'Lordes yf it please you for to rede it and yf it seme you yt it is mordaunt excuse me as the auncyentes are excused the whiche haue made dyuers fayre doctrynes mordauntes' (Brant 5). The term 'mordaunt' suggests that Watson is describing a sort of unrestrained attack, which has no regard for proper standards. The word is used in this sense by other medieval writers: Caxton, for instance, uses the term in this context, alluding to 'right mordent and bytyng detractours' (Jacobus de Cessolis 70). Like John of Garland, Watson acknowledges that a more slanderous line of attack exists within satire. In fact, Watson even seems assured that this corrosive material cannot be removed from the form. His appeal to the poetry of 'the auncyentes' indicates that even the earliest models of satire need to be 'excused' for their occasional savagery: he does not seem to consider repressing such content in his own work. This unruly potential becomes intrinsic to the literature, present from its origin onwards. For Watson some part of satire will inevitably be vicious and uncontained.

All three of these authors display the same understanding of satire that underlies the satyr and *satiri* etymologies, and which informs Neckam's warnings about the genre. Their responses also suggest that satire resists a fully ethical

definition. It has possibilities that are not in the service of exhortation, and forms that are not ruled by moral interests. While it may have some didactic usefulness, it is able to erode concepts as well as endorse them. In short, satire is not exclusively corrective.

Lastly, further testimony to the currency of these ideas is provided by the satirical literature of the Middle Ages itself. Several texts show that medieval satirists were willing to accept the uncontained, amoral and unreasonable aspects of the genre into their own writing. The work of Hugh Primas, a teacher of secular literature at Orleans in the mid twelfth century, is a case in point. Hugh's antifeminist pieces seem to relish the scandalous potential of satire, generating a string of dysphemisms which recall Juvenal and Apuleius at their most unrestrained: one such piece complains, 'you mount her and she cries over your thing's excessive size [...] contracts the space between her legs – which, if she spread it wide, could take at least a mule inside' (Adcock 17). Even when poets choose not to embrace this unruly aspect of satire, they maintain an awareness of its existence. Walter of Wimbourne, in the thirteenth-century satire *De Palpone (On the Sycophant)*, carefully pays tribute to this strand, situating his chosen genre between morality and madness. He notes at one stage: 'Qui vera loquitur est melancolicus,/ immo satiricus, immo fanaticus' ('whoever speaks the truth is branded melancholic, even satirical, or, more correctly, insane') (Rigg 43). Once again, the malevolent and ungoverned energies of satire are registered, as here the form is associated with a lack of reason or sense, even though this is itself identified with moral 'vera', 'truth'.

Beyond Latin, there are a number of vernacular texts which display a similar set of assumptions, both in their practices and in their explicit remarks. Two English poems which firmly accept a vicious, corrosive element in satire are the alliterative texts *Wynnere and Wastoure* (c.1352-70) and *Mum and the Sothsegger* (c.1420). Each of these pieces appears to be self-consciously composed as satire, either demonstrating a familiarity with medieval commentary, or an adherence to Roman models. In the case of *Mum*, Paul Miller notes its author's use of the word 'tente' when setting out his position: this is evidently an English equivalent of *intentio*, a common term for the objectives of satirists used throughout the Latin scholia ('Medieval Literary Theory' 207). Along similar lines, *Wynnere* seems to be partly based on Juvenal's fifth satire. Like the Latin text, it contains an extended sequence which details two banquets, one of 'venyson with the frumentee and festanttes full

riche', the other of 'þe roughe of þe rye' and 'þe grewell gray' (Treharne 543-4). Most importantly, in both of these cases, adherence to the medieval idea of satire clearly does not mean producing straightforwardly ethical verse. *Wynnere* in particular offers little in the way of firm moral appraisals (Harrington). Its central debate merely fizzles out without 'granting a decisive victory' to either speaker or the values he represents (Spearing 134), and throughout there is a clear 'uneasiness [...] as to how traditional moral schemes and homiletic exempla can apply' (Trigg 127). Likewise, during the course of *Mum* many of the attacks are more ironic and deflationary than corrective. Despite the poem's early assurance that 'is hit not my cunseil to clatre [...] in sclaudre' (Barr 140), the text stages numerous vitriolic attacks: for example, it contains a long and sarcastic digression on the friars, claiming that they 'with smale semyd sockes and of softe wolle,/ For the love of oure Lord harde life induren' (153). Yet these rebukes do not lead to any constructive moral: if anything the opposite is true. Towards the end of *Mum* the poet wishes that his targets were destroyed rather than reformed, hoping for a divine 'gardynere' to 'daisshe þaym to deeth' (Barr 172). The inclusion of these tactics again reinforces the variability of the medieval understanding of satire. Both poets recognise that vindictiveness, indeterminacy and playfulness are within the compass of their chosen genre. As the Victorian editor George Ellis noted, 'opprobrious expressions' are among the central devices of 'the early satirists' (Ellis 1:82). If Minnis, Miller and Reynolds are correct, then the poets were most likely led to these suppositions by the scholia and the comments on satire they generated.

However, beyond these points of contact, the findings of medieval commentary may have had an even broader impact on satirical texts. It is possible that these ideas may have exerted an indirect influence on medieval satire, by fostering connections between the literature and festive culture. It is frequently noted that medieval satire shared several links with popular ritual. As might be expected, this view dates back to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin in fact names medieval satire as an example of 'carnivalised literature', placing it among the 'parodic-travesty forms of the Middle Ages [...] modelled on folk and holiday merrymaking' (*Speech Genres* 79). This idea has found widespread support among later critics. In Latin, goliardic texts, and especially the satiric songs of the *Carmina Burana*, are routinely discussed in these terms, as the work of Charles Presberg, Rupert Glasgow, Robert Scribner and Natalie Davis can testify. In English, Jon Cook,

Carl Lindahl and John Ganim have connected the *Canterbury Tales* with aspects of popular celebration, while Deanna Evans, Diane Watt and John Kelly have commented on the ‘carnavalesque’ in Dunbar, Gower and Skelton. In French, Paul Binski and Derek Brewer have drawn similar conclusions about the *dans macabre* and satiric prose. It therefore seems that revelry was an important resource in the performance of medieval satire, as texts repeatedly turn to the ‘festive values of transgression’ when articulating their work (Herman 147).

Nevertheless, the evidence of commentary suggests that the relationship between festivity and medieval is more important than even these critics infer. Although scholarship has uncovered widespread borrowings from ‘holiday merrymaking’, such intersections are usually considered to be localised and cosmetic. They are not seen to be derived from any innate part of satire itself, or invited by the medieval conception of the form. In fact, Bakhtin explicitly rules out this possibility. While acknowledging the link between satire and carnival, he stresses that festive material was fundamentally inimical to satire’s own structure. At one stage he claims that when festive parodies ‘began to serve the purpose of satire’ they either underwent a ‘process of disintegration’ (*Rabelais* 61), or else came to ‘pursue their own logic, independently from the author’s intentions, and sometimes contrary to them’ (63). For Bakhtin, therefore, carnival was linked with satire only in a supplementary and incomplete manner: the borrowed material not only originated from outside the genre, but was never fully integrated into it. This view appears in the work of his followers. By discussing satire’s debt in terms of individual poets or individual works, rather than as a generic requirement, much the same stance is assumed. Such loans are presented as the choice of a specific author, not the result of any obligation imposed by satire itself.

However, a different conclusion is suggested by commentary. Among the commentators there is a clear tendency to treat satire and revelry as analogous. The exegetes often clarify their observations by referring to festive practices, and occasionally define satire as the ancient equivalent of medieval ritual. One of the clearest cases is the *accessus* of the *Glosae ad Iuvenalem*. The *accessus* draws a particularly strong link between satire and festivity. Its comparison of satire to swearing-matches is a case in point. In this passage, the *accessus* emphasises that the ‘outbursts of abuse’ which ‘anticipate’ satire take place among peasants, during their ‘celebrating and drinking, feasting for the greater part of the day’. The allusions to

festivity are unmistakable here. Satire is made comparable to an explicitly popular ritual, a seasonal game which ‘befits the peasantry’.[6] Yet the *accessus* is not alone in connecting satire with festivity. The satyr etymon also serves as a powerful conduit between satire and seasonal games. In fact, the satyr had powerful festive associations even before the scholiasts linked it with satire. In one of the exegetes’ favourite sources, the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, the ‘agrestis satyros’ (‘wild satyrs’) are specifically placed among ‘sacris et potus et exlex’, or ‘festivals, drunken and lawless’ (66). In a similar manner Aristotle links satyrs with Dionysian celebration and the singing of ‘phallic songs’ (19). Overtones of revelry are innate to the satyr figure. In their own work on satire, medieval commentators often draw out these connotations explicitly. For example, Isidore presents the creature as a licensed clown or buffoon. His satyrs are not only ‘vinolentiam’ or ‘drunken’, but are also ‘qui inulta habent ea quae...dicuntur’ (‘allowed to speak with impunity’), their riotous speech being ‘permitted’. Their mockery is defined as a release from normal obligations or conditions, of the kind that characterises festivity. The references to satyrs ‘saltat’ or ‘dancing’ in the works of Guido da Pisa and John of Garland show that festive links survive in later work. Dance was widely associated with disorderly celebration, a fact which is evident from John Mirk’s stark warning to parishioners, ‘hawkyng, huntynge, and dawnsynge,/ Thow moste forgo for any thyng’ (Myrc 2). A third etymon, that of the *lanx satura*, a ‘scutella magna que diversis plena frugibus vel aliis speciebus’ (‘large dish filled with fruit or other types of things’) further connects satire with feasting and festival occasions (Conradus Hirsaugiensis 71). As John Fyler comments, the scholiasts often seem to promote a ‘connection with Saturnalian license’ in their work on satire (4).

The presence of these ideas in medieval commentary is highly suggestive. It allows the link between misrule and satire to be brought into sharper focus. Taking these findings into consideration, it seems likely that satire used festive material in response to commentary. The poets who drew their understanding of satire from the scholia may well have been steered towards festivity by exegesis, and its conviction that the discourse is comparable to satire. The links that the Bakhtinian critics recognise might well be the responsibility of medieval theorists, who routinely attach satire to a celebratory context. As a consequence, rather than being a matter of isolated innovation on the part of individual satirists, these borrowings may have been reactions to medieval commentary, and to the parallels it suggests. Satire’s connection

to revelry, in short, may be inherent to the medieval comprehension of the mode, part of the framework developed by commentary.

This in turn raises a further, and even more interesting, possibility. When these borrowings do occur in satire, they are generally used for scurrilous or deflationary ends. Robert Mullini puts this particularly well, noting that medieval satirists used festive material ‘as a weapon to hit and run’, drawing primarily on ‘the dethroning power of carnival’ (39). This fact is in itself compelling. It implies that commentary’s references to festivity might have given medieval poets the means to realise the more boisterous aspects of satire. The allusions to festive practices may have suggested a way in which satiric ridicule and mockery could be enacted. As a result, this side of medieval satire-theory might be said to have a practical as well as a reflective dimension. Rather than simply hinting at the existence of a playful or vindictive tendency, exegesis may have provided a method of implementing this strand of satire, forging ties between satire and misrule which satirists could then pursue. In sum, commentary might not only have lent medieval satire a denigratory aspect, but directed its composers towards a collection of techniques for achieving this tendency, whether deliberately or not.

The main conclusion to be drawn from all this is that medieval conceptions of satire are more complex and contradictory than many modern summaries allow. It may be true that the exegetes try to pin satire to a reproachful function: in most of these works satire is confidently described as a form which supplies ‘moralia dicta in archano pectoris reservet’ (‘moral sayings to be learned by heart’) (Haskins 91). It is defined as instructive, giving sanction to idealised forms of behaviour by attacking deviations from them. Its ultimate aim is not ridicule, but the moral education of its reader: as Avicenna states, ‘he who states that iniquity is a vice and stops there would not leave the same effect on the soul as when he adds that probity is a sublime and irreproachable life’ (82). However, these technical classifications do not represent the full extent of the scholiasts’ reactions. Alongside these assured definitions, there is a suspicion that satire’s portrayal of ‘naked sin’ in order to ‘reprimand sinful habits’ may not be its only possible effect. As the commentators attempt to describe the form fully, other ideas of satire present themselves. In the discussions examined here, there is a point at which the definition of satire as *reprehensio* begins to lose the centre ground, and other potential functions intrude. Satire comes to absorb a string of associations which cannot comfortably be reconciled with a hortatory view. It

becomes subversive and feral: at the very least, it is compared to activities in which these properties are evident. Although such ideas are under-theorised, they still form an important part of the medieval response to satire. They betray a sense that satire is not inflexibly or automatically remedial. Its ability to make forceful moral pronouncements is undeniable; yet its power to enforce an order coordinated around a series of privileged ideas is accompanied by a marked potential for disruption. Ultimately, medieval readers of satire seem to have been aware that the genre contained various energies. What is more, shades of these energies are often present in the literature of the period, at times appearing directly, at times appearing as a general reliance on festive forms.

End Notes

[1] An exhaustive list of classical references to the satyr is given in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*. 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1960), I:281-3.

[2] On the circulation of Fulgentius in the Middle Ages, see Robert Edwards, 'The Heritage of Fulgentius', in *The Classics in the Middle Ages: papers of the twentieth annual conference of the Center For Medieval And Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo and Saul Levin (Binghamton: Center For Medieval And Early Renaissance Studies, 1990), 141-51.

[3] Walter is quoting Juvenal, *Satires* I.1.

[4] Alexander's end quotation is taken from Virgil, *Eclogues* III.92-3.

[5] For occurrences of this term in satire commentary, see Isidori Hispalensis VIII.viii.7, Guillaume de Conches 89, Conradus Hirsaugiensis 76, 119-20. See also Kindermann 69.

[6] It is possible that the *accessus* is hinting at the festive culture of the Middle Ages directly. The swearing-match resembles a number of documented medieval customs: see Lindahl 44-61; Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English festive culture in the medieval and Early Modern period* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001), 279; James R. Andreas, 'The Rhetoric of Chaucerian Comedy: the Aristotelian legacy'. *The Comparatist* 8 (1984), 56-66.