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Scholars' Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance. by W. Scott Blanchard

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telian *Problem* xxx.1, which ennobled melancholy.

With its copious bibliography, an index of names, and twenty-six illustrations, this study of the reception of an important and previously neglected text deserves its place on any book shelf next to *Saturn and Melancholy* by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl.

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W. Scott Blanchard. *Scholars' Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1995. 205 pp. \$35.00.

Since "Menippeanism" has resisted most attempts at definition, Blanchard devotes much of his study to rectifying this problem. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the origins of this amorphous minor literary form in antiquity (i.e., Varro and Lucian), its rediscovery by early humanists such as Valla, Poliziano, and Urceo, and its immense popularity in the Renaissance. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 continue to define and redefine Menippeanism in relation to its later practitioners: Rabelais, Nashe, and Burton. Throughout his book, Blanchard explains the congeniality of this "formless form" to Renaissance thought. A dominant idea in *Scholars' Bedlam* is that some humanists used Menippeanism as an acceptable literary form to deflate their own pretensions and to critique humanism itself. Blanchard argues that some "chameleonic parodies" of the Renaissance art particularly informed by classical aesthetics (26) reflect "disillusionment in the humanist enterprise" (77).

Blanchard's first chapter is his most useful precisely because it defines this opaque term clearly and delineates the aesthetics of the form's practitioners

without oversimplification. The Renaissance Menippean satirist was a "wise fool" (12) whose form was "immensely learned" and "paradoxically anti-intellectual" (14). He was, in the manner of Varro and Lucian, a "literary saboteur of philosophical pretense" (15). He was "brave enough to critique the humanist claim that ancient sources could be recovered in their pristine state as paradigms for an authoritative understanding of the world, but smart enough to hedge his more subversive remarks with self-reflexive irony" (12).

However, Blanchard does not shrink from the most identifiable tendencies of Menippeanism that make it "one of literature's most interesting deformities" (24): apparent formlessness, broad satire, the grotesque, the obsession with bodily functions and orifices, and what we have come to describe as the "Bakhtinian carnivalesque" (as one might expect, Bakhtin is a ghostly presence in *Scholars' Bedlam*). Poliziano, Rabelais, and Burton expressed "some of their most unclassical habits of mind; the form is a repository for the ugly, the tasteless and the grotesque, and it can often disregard narrative order and rhetorical organization to such an extent that it achieves encyclopedic plentitude" (24). Since the two most "distinct strains" of Menippeanism were the anatomy and the Lucianic dialogue (162), one might well conclude with Blanchard that "the humanist intelligentsia spent more time amusing itself in the sewers of European culture that we might have supposed" (150).

The reader may encounter some difficulties in negotiating *Scholars' Bedlam*. Although the philosophy and aesthetics of classical Menippeans are admirably summarized, there are no passages in Latin, Greek, or in English translation of their works in the body of the text to help the reader understand ex-

actly which *loci* the humanists found as sites for their imitation. Also, it is not always easy to discover connections between writers or between chapters; it is as if each author or group of authors is in a separate cell. Midway into chapter 3, it is posited that Cornelius Agrippa's *De vanitate* was immensely influential upon Rabelais (88), but virtually no mention is made of the Italian humanists discussed so admirably in chapter 2. One may wonder why there is no intervening chapter devoted to Agrippa or how the Rabelais section relates to its predecessor.

The reader will discover many felicities, however, such as Blanchard's introductory descriptions of the intellectual milieu in which each writer worked. Also, Blanchard's immense range of reference concerning Renaissance thought shines through. I was pleased to encounter a *dramatis personae* that includes (besides the major figures to which each chapter is devoted) Agrippa, Justus Lipsius, Gabriel Harvey, Erasmus, Pico della Mirandola, Diogenes, Swift, Doni, Caelio Calcagnini, and Petronius. Finally, the opening chapter's exercise in extended definition of Menippeanism is, to my knowledge, unique.

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Judith Haber. *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction: Theocritus to Marvell*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xiv + 218 pp. \$49.95.

Judith Haber's compact, stimulating *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-Contradiction* is a profoundly (and deliberately) unsatisfying but not unsatisfactory book. Initially attempting "to account for the persistence of the antipastoral in pastoral poetry," especially in Renaissance texts as exemplified in Marvell's

poetry, Haber, who studied under Paul Alpers at Berkeley, discovered that anti-pastoralism has been a feature of the pastoral since its Theocritean origins. Fundamentally ironic, the genome of the genre is self-contradiction: claiming to be non-heroic, it depends on the heroic in order to make its claim (Theocritus); resolutely questioning its status as art, pastoral evades its poetic limitations (Virgil). Haber, who has a Marvellian penchant for antithetical perspectives and epigrammatic phrasing, offers her exploration of an unstable genre in part as a skeptical response to New Historicist interest in pastoral as primarily a mask for power. Her well-managed (and well-mannered) criticism of the different positions taken by Louis Montrose and Annabel Patterson might be summed up in the following remark: "What is occurring here is a kind of aesthetic scapegoating: the creation of a stable category of pure, 'empty' idyllic formalism allows for the simultaneous creation of a category of pure, 'full' political meaning, of an unmediated real uncontaminated by 'the mirror of art'" (5).

So shrewd is this observation (of the profession as well) that one almost wishes for a different kind of book: one less habitually constrained by paradox and contradiction. But, as Haber no doubt would be quick to point out, it would also only reproduce the sharp division between aesthetics and politics that she sees pastoral as interrogating — at least the version of pastoral she chooses to examine. "A history of pastoral that concluded with Milton rather than Marvell would, undoubtedly, seem more expansive" (11). For one thing, it would have to be politically located. Her "history," however, is rather a series of interwoven essays on Theocritus and Virgil, sensitively attuned to literary allusion, tipped in the direction of