

Grotesque Anatomies

Grotesque Anatomies:
Menippean Satire since the Renaissance

By

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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5677-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5677-5

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PREFACE

Since Northrop Frye and, later, Mikhail Bakhtin brought the genre to the attention of the mainstream academic community in the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been a veritable explosion of critical interest in works that have been identified, rightly or wrongly, as belonging to the genre of Menippean satire—and in the genre itself. Through a combination of Frye’s famous identification of works belonging to the genre in his *Anatomy of Criticism*—works such as the *Alice* books, *The Water Babies* and the novels of Thomas Love Peacock, among others—and Bakhtin’s identification of Menippean satire as a literary manifestation of the phenomenon of carnival, the claims for the genre have been great, often exceeding those made for it by its two main proselytizers. In fact, Howard Weinbrot has described Menippean satire as “the genre that ate the world”¹. It is not uncommon for the term “Menippean” to be bandied about and applied almost willy-nilly to many works which are clearly not Menippean satires. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is confusion among scholars regarding the exact nature and extent of the genre.

This book is concerned with proposing that an enlarged understanding of the genre of Menippean satire enhances the understanding of those works which can be identified as Menippean. It is clear that the history of Menippean satire requires an approach that examines all works in English that have either been extremely influential, or are particularly pertinent to the illustration of salient Menippean themes. For example, the influence of Lucian on English literature is demonstrable in Jonson, Burton, Sterne and Shakespeare, to name but a few. Similarly, Menippean satires in other languages have often had a crucial influence in English. Rabelais, for example, has had an enormous influence, mostly effected through the translation of Sir Thomas Urquhart.

Despite the relative obscurity of the genre, works of Menippean satire are far too numerous to be comprehensively listed, let alone discussed, in this book. While Eugene Kirk’s *Bibliography* extends to 1660, the number of Menippean satires from then onwards is too great to be listed. Indeed, Kirk’s own list, which is incomplete, numbers over one thousand entries. Menippean satire is particularly prevalent in much of what is termed innovative or postmodern in modern fiction, examples being some of the works of Thomas Pynchon, Kathy Acker, David Foster Wallace, Angela Carter, Salman

Rushdie and John Barth, and also in much recent criticism and theory, such as the works of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

Though intended as a useful addition to and correction of current perceptions of Menippean satire, this book is confronted with the difficulty of attempting to comment upon (and to some extent to organize) a vast area of literature—an area of literature made more vast, as it were, by its own assumptions about what Menippean satire represents. To adequately account for the many well-known works which have been hitherto neglected as Menippean satires would be the work of several theses. It has seemed more profitable to attempt a general survey of some key works, considered in their historical context, in order to be able to illuminate aspects of Menippean satire that have not attracted the attention required for a fuller understanding of the genre. I do this through a re-reading of some definitive texts, both Menippean and non-Menippean, that have appeared in English since the mid-seventeenth century. While the historical scope of this book is broad, I have restricted its focus to a few central texts only in each chapter. Menippean satires from antiquity through to the renaissance have not been considered in depth for a number of reasons. Ancient Menippean satire has attracted that particular tradition of scholarship of its own to which I alluded earlier, a tradition of comprehensive and vigorous debate on the subject within the relatively narrow confines of classical studies, largely without reference to the issues concerning Menippean satire that are relevant to contemporary literary theory. Joel Relihan's *Ancient Menippean Satire* (1993) is a qualified exception to this. Even though the scope of his study, which extends from Menippus himself through to Boethius and beyond, makes his work the most authoritative on classical Menippean satire, it remains deficient, by his own admission, in its overall conception of the genre. Barbara Merry has noted that Relihan's "narrow, conservative definition of Menippean satire [is based] on a strictly limited corpus of texts."²—but such is the extent of ancient Menippean satire. Menippean satire in the Renaissance is a vast field on its own, and requires separate study. The Renaissance saw the last great flowering of Menippean satire as a genre that was cognisant of its heritage and traditions. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift,"³ belongs to this period and has been comprehensively treated by Holland. Menippean satire of the period in general, including Burton, has also received full and discerning attention in W. Scott Blanchard's *Scholars' Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance* (1995), although it may appear deficient that Blanchard makes no mention of Holland's thesis.

I am hopeful that I have offered a clear position on the evolution and legacy of Menippean satire: in the debate about the status of the genre, I am

like that dwarf perched on the gargantuan shoulders of his predecessors, and by virtue of that may be able to see just a little bit further. I think I have also made it clear what the defining characteristics of the form are in the modern period. Many previous definitions have failed in this respect because they have attempted to cover impossibly broad periods. As I discuss, the genre changes markedly over time. Ancient Menippean satire tended to be a satire of philosophers (*philosopus gloriosus*) which gradually became a satire of philosophy in the middle ages and, later, a satire of religion and other powerful ideologies. This is further complicated by the fact that Menippean satire had an early, bifurcated development, with one strand tending towards a shorter form (Seneca-Lucian-Julian) which attacked false learning and false belief, the other, longer form tending towards encyclopedism and concerned with the impossibility of a single world view being adequate to explain the world. Some features of some definitions suit one strand more than the other. In the period I am dealing with, the shorter, Seneca-Lucian-Julian form had largely fused with the larger, encyclopaedic form by the end of the Renaissance and some of its features, such as the attack on false orthodoxies, become more diffuse. Therefore, the definition I offer and the conclusions I draw from the texts studied really only apply to a specific phase in the development of the genre: it is likely, that further refinements in our understanding of the form in the 350 year period my study covers are possible. Howard Weinbrot's *Menippean Satire Reconsidered*, for example, offers a definition of the genre which is really only applicable to the eighteenth century (and a selective aspect of that period), but nonetheless enlarges some aspects of our understanding of the form in that period.⁴ There are two basic attitudes towards this question, however, which need some comment. On the one side are those who attempt to define the genre through inclusion. The two main proselytizers of the genre in the twentieth century, Frye and Bakhtin, fit into this category. It also includes many following in their wake who have attempted at one time or another to make a case for some works which, in my opinion are not Menippean satires, such as Byron's *Don Juan*, Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*⁵ or Pope's "Essay on Criticism."⁶ and some works which I think are Menippean satires, such as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* or the prose satires of Thomas Love Peacock.⁷ The inclusive camp performs a useful and necessary function of adding to our understanding of the form and, where an identification is correct, adding to our understanding of those works included in the genre. More often than not, though, shoddy application of one or another definition or loose application of a reasonable definition lets this camp down.

There is one fundamental question regarding Menippean satire which is notoriously difficult, namely: how does one strictly delimit a genre

characterised by a tendency to puncture generic boundaries and to fuse with other forms, such as the Renaissance anatomy, or the novel? Answering this cannot be straightforward, although I hope I have gone some way towards doing so throughout the course of this book.

On the other side are those who seek to define the genre through exclusion. It seems to me this is as useful and necessary a process as the inclusive one, although with some pitfalls. It is important to know, for example, that of all of Lucian's works, only two, *Icaromenippus* and *Nekyomantia*, are Menippean satires.⁸ The process can be taken too far, though, if one's yardstick for measuring 'Menippeanness' is flawed, as is the case with Weinbrot, who excludes *Tristram Shandy* largely on moral grounds.⁹ Whether one leans towards inclusion or exclusion is largely a matter of temperament and ideological leanings. In this book I have sought a balanced approach, offering a definition of Menippean satire grounded in a comprehensive survey of the critical literature concerning it and then applying those findings in a number of close readings of iconic texts from various key periods since the mid-seventeenth century. I have also sketched the development of the genre from antiquity through to the Renaissance and beyond. While this must necessarily remain incomplete, I think successful identification of a work as a Menippean satire often derives from arguments for its Menippean inheritances.

Above all, this book examines the Menippean genre in the context of the grotesque mode and as such it is an addition to theories of the grotesque in literature as well. Considering Menippean satire in the context of the grotesque mode is not intended to supplant more normative readings of the satirical function of the Menippean genre—rather, I have sought to enhance our reading of it through an examination of its more colourful, exuberant and, at times, indecorous aspects for a fuller, if at times rambunctious understanding of the genre.

Notes

¹ Howard D. Weinbrot. *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 1

² Merry, *Menippean Elements in Paul Scarron's 'Roman Comique'*, 24. Merry's remarks are difficult to understand in the light of the following definition of Menippean satire from Relihan:

Menippean satire is abnormal in all of its aspects. It is an anti-genre; insofar as it is a satire, it is ultimately a satire on literature itself and all its pretensions to meaning, though burlesque would remain a better term. All is parody in Menippean jeu d'esprit.

—Relihan, Joel C. *Ancient Menippean Satire*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 28

³ Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 311.

⁴ Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered*, 303: “the works here discussed are not the only Menippean satires in antiquity, the eighteenth century, or at any other time in any other country.”

⁵ The number of articles is astonishing: see F. Anne Payne. *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, for the discussion of *Portnoy’s Complaint*, and for the discussion of Don Juan, see Ferriss, Suzanne. “Romantic Carnavalesque: Byron’s *The Tale of Calil, Beppo* and *Don Juan*”. In Levine, Alice and Keane, Robert N. [eds]. *Rereading Byron*. New York: Garland, 1993, 133–149.

⁶ Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered*, 213–37.

⁷ see Kharpertian, Theodore D. *Hand to Turn the Time— Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*. Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990 and Butler, Marilyn. *Peacock Displayed*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979.

⁸ Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*. Baltimore, 103–18.

⁹ Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered*, 8–11. Weinbrot’s argument is that Menippean satire offers a dark, troubling and gloomy message. ‘Optimistic’ satires, such as *Tristram Shandy*, or the works of Rabelais and Peacock ought not be included. This interpretation, which is not in keeping with the genre’s intellectual exuberance, derives largely from a moral interpretation of the legacy of Menippus as a disreputable misanthrope and scoffer, rather than an understanding of the literary legacy of those Menippean satires, such as Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, from which Sterne and Peacock, for example, drew much inspiration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: MENIPPEAN SATIRE AND THE GROTESQUE

What is Menippean Satire?

Menippean satire is best understood as a radically heterogeneous form which has its origin in an ancient genre which has come to be called “Menippean” after the Cynic Menippus of Gadara, who lived some time in the third century B.C. That such a form exists seems by now beyond doubt: the discernible influence of Menippus and of writers of what we call Menippean satires can be traced to the present day. Nonetheless, there are considerable differences of opinion as to the persistence and extent of Menippean satire in the West. This largely centres on the thorny problem of defining the genre. There are several definitions available, the most influential of which are those of Northrop Frye and Mikhail Bakhtin, both of whom have been widely cited and, almost equally as widely castigated for looseness, imprecision, mis-identification and factual error. Sufficient scholarship since 1980, however, has allowed a certain uniformity of thought to emerge about the genre. In this book, I attempt to synthesise these various views of the genre into something approaching consistency, bearing in mind that a ‘cover all’ definition of a genre that extends over two thousand years is unlikely to prove entirely satisfactory. A genre is modified by each addition to it, and the process of generic development and change means that there are different definitions of Menippean satire applicable in certain periods and epochs. I will be offering a definition which covers the period under consideration, those centuries of the modern era after the Renaissance.

A Brief Genealogy of Menippean Satire

The history of Menippean satire is not an easy thing to summarise. For one thing, little is known of Menippus. For another, Bakhtin’s claims that Menippean satires were written by Aristotle’s contemporary Heraclides

Ponticus, Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates, and Bion Borysthene somewhat confuse the issue. As most of their works are lost, or are known only by reputation, it can only be surmised that their writings were influential in the founding of a genre which we know through Varro (whose work is also largely lost), Seneca, Petronius, Lucian and the emperor Julian. It is possible to become bogged down and distracted by detailed discussions on whether Bion or Heraclides Ponticus can have been said to have written Menippean satires, or whether he was at all influential in the genre's development, although it appears that Bakhtin's position is that a genre of sorts existed from multiple points of origin whose most influential avatar was Menippus.¹

Menippus' writings no longer survive, but some facts of his life are known, largely through the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius. Menippus was a slave who became a pupil of the Cynic Metrocles, purchased his freedom and settled in Thebes where he satirized all formal schools of philosophy and all philosophical elites. Legend has it that he hanged himself, through disappointment at financial ruin.² Not entirely inappropriately, then, 'Menippean satire' has the attraction of having its 'origin' as mythic—Donald Dudley has noted that Menippus, "like the Cheshire cat, has faded away to a grin"³—an apt condition for a form characterised by unparalleled freedom and invention. From what is known through fragments of, and references to Menippus, his satire was a *mélange* of prose and poetry.⁴ It was characterised by bombastic and often coarse attacks on the *philosophus gloriosus*, or learned crank. The early popularity of Menippean satire appears to have had as much to do with its versatility as its Cynic relentlessness.

If nothing else, 'Menippean satire' is an appropriate term to refer to the works of those authors who considered their works to be 'after Menippus', although as Eugene Kirk notes, there are authors of Menippean satires who had no idea they were being Menippean.⁵ It is clear that Varro wrote in the style of Menippus—his contemporaries gave him the nickname "Menippeus" and he himself referred to his works in that vein as his "*Saturae Menippeae*"—and it is certainly possible "to speak in general terms about the direct influence of Varro on the Roman Menippean satirists of the first century A.D."⁶, namely Seneca and Petronius.⁷

It would be wrong to think that there is one paradigmatic Menippean satire, the kind which make it clear what the genre is.⁸ Eugene Kirk has noted this particular difficulty:

There never was 'one kind' of Menippean satire, not even in the writings of Menippus himself—for Menippus parodied broadly the different ancient forms of learned discourse. Contaminations, fusions, and separations of

form attend most of the history of Menippean satire, as the age and its occasions might happen to require.⁹

No doubt this is due to the bifurcated nature of the form's development from antiquity: Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* is paradigmatic of the shorter Seneca-Lucian-Julian form; the larger, encyclopaedic form is too various to have a paradigm, although in terms of its historical development, it would make sense to agree with Relihan's desire to "place *Consolation* in the genre's vital centre,"¹⁰ as it was the main means by which Menippean satire was transmitted from antiquity into the middle ages.

Nonetheless, it is possible to sketch some broad trends in the development of the genre. There has been significant work done on the development of the genre up to 1660 in Eugene Kirk's annotated bibliography. Following him, Relihan's work on Menippean satire up until Boethius (524 A.D.) and Blanchard's work on Renaissance Menippean satire give a very clear idea of the development of the genre from the ancient era to Boethius and then from the early Renaissance up to the mid-seventeenth century. Ingrid de Smet's *Menippean Satire and the Republic of Letters, 1581-1655* offers a comprehensive analysis of Northern European examples of the genre in the later Renaissance.¹¹ Weinbrot's study of Menippean satire in the eighteenth century is limited and does not reflect on the genre as a whole, and reaches some bizarre conclusions. Hoelker offers a detailed study of Menippean satire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Greenspan examines the genre in its postmodern aspects.¹²

A brief development could be outlined thus. Beginning with Antisthenes (c. 455–360 B.C.), (his oration in praise of poverty was recorded in Xenophon's *Symposium*) who Bakhtin postulates as possibly the first representative of the genre, Menippean satire began as a form closely linked to the Socratic dialogue and other kindred genres, all within the orbit of Menippean satire, which include the diatribe, the *logistoricus* (a combination of the Socratic dialogue with fantastic histories), the soliloquy and aretological genres (narratives about the miraculous deed of gods or heroes), and the paradoxical encomium. Examples of other proto-Menippeans are Bion Borysthenes (c. 325–c.255 B.C.) and Heraclides Ponticus (C.4th B.C.). The examples from antiquity of 'pure' Menippean satires, if there is any such thing, are few: Varro's *Menippeans* (largely lost), Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, Petronius' *Satyricon*, the works of Lucian and Julian the Apostate.¹³ Bakhtin also makes a claim for Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* and the "Hippocratic Novel", and although Relihan has excluded the former as a Menippean satire his recent work indicates otherwise.¹⁴ Kirk also includes a number of paradoxical encomia from

antiquity, but makes the careful distinction that “the exact point in literary history at which the paradoxical encomium became either temporarily or permanently confused with Menippean satire is unclear” and therefore includes precursors of Menippus because of the importance of the paradoxical encomium for Menippean satire in later ages, particularly during the Renaissance.¹⁵ Examples of these include: Gorgias the Sicilian (C5th B.C.), *Encomium of Helen*; Isokrates (436–338 B.C.) *Encomium of Busiris*; Plutarch (c.A.D. 46–c.120), *Gryllus*; Dio Chrysostom (c.50–117 A.D.), *Praise of Hair*; Favorinus (early C 2nd A.D.), *A Praise of Thersites* and *A Praise of Quartan Fever*; Marcus Cornelius Fronto (c.100–166 A.D.), *The Praise of Negligence* and *The Praise of Smoke and Dust*.

Plato also has an important role in the development of Menippean satire. Joel Relihan notes that “Plato’s place in the history of Menippean satire is not just as the author whose dialogue form and whose *Symposium* are so frequently parodied within it, but as the theoretician who advances the value of falsehood as a heuristic device” and that “it is the example of Platonic mythologising that gives Menippean satire a first push.”¹⁶ In fact, the main trend of ancient Menippean satire is movement from a parody (or as Relihan more accurately puts it, burlesque) of philosophy and of literature itself; to a reinterpretation of the “original castigation of folly to mean criticism both of the goals of intellectual effort and the intellect itself.”¹⁷

The influence of the earliest practitioners on each other can be summarised as follows: Menippus directly influenced Varro, who in turn directly influenced Martianus Capella¹⁸, who directly influenced Boethius, who in turn influenced Fulgentius.¹⁹ The Emperor Julian, on the other hand, was directly influenced by Seneca and Lucian (who possibly also influenced Martianus), and also by Varro;²⁰ Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* “is effectively halfway between Menippus and Varro’s reinterpretation of him”²¹ and Menippus’ direct influence on Lucian is clear. It can be seen, therefore, that there were two strains of the genre reaching out from antiquity into the middle ages. The Seneca-Lucian-Julian strain did not persist during the middle ages in the West, but flourished in Byzantium, including: Libanius (314–393 A.D.), *The Praise of Thersites*, *Vituperations against Achilles*, *against Hector*, *against Philip* and other works; Synesius of Cyrene (360–415 A.D.), *The Praise of Baldness*; Michael Psellus (C.10th), *Encomia on the fly, gnat, mouse and bedbug*; Theodoros Prodromos (C.12th), *Stygian Laments*; Johannes Catrares (C.14th), *Dialogues of the Dead*. More important than the creation of these Menippean works during these thousand or so years was the fact that Lucian was widely known, taught and imitated. Several patriarchs praised

his works and two different emperors ordered that Lucian be imitated as a model of terse style. Consequently, it was largely via Byzantine works that Lucian was reintroduced to the West, beginning in the late fourteenth century when the Byzantine scholar of classical literature, Manuel Chrysoloras, accepted an invitation to lecture in Italy, continuing with the visit of the Italian Aurispa of Sicily in 1422–3 to Byzantium in search of ancient manuscripts for wealthy patrons (he took back over two hundred rolls) and, of course, culminating in the fall of Constantinople in 1453.²² These events spurred the production of several Menippean satires during the fifteenth century, particularly from humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus. His *Encomium Moriae*, (*Praise of Folly*), puns on the name of his friend, Sir Thomas More, whose *Utopia* evinces distinct Lucianic traits. In fact, Kirk notes that

the many Lucianic satires of the German Reformation, directed against scholasticism, monastics, and conservative university faculties who opposed anything smacking of Protestantism, bear testimony to Erasmus' influence. His lead was followed by many, including Thomas More, Philip Melancthon, John Reuchlin, Johann Jaeger, Ulrich von Hutten, Willibald Pirckheimer, Sir Thomas Elyot, Jacob Sobijs, Konrad Nesen, Robert Molsheym, many anonymous 'pasquinaders' and dialogue-writers, and ultimately by dozens of later Renaissance polemicists, including Bonaventure Des Périers, François Rabelais, Alfonso de Valdes, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Christopher Hegendorph, Caspar Heldelinus, and others²³

including the great French Menippean satire, *La Satyre Menippée*, and the Marprelate controversies which unfolded between 1588 and 1590.

The Varronian Menippean form, with its leaning towards erudition, fused with the didascallic, or educational Menippean satires. These included Athenaeus (early C. 3rd), *Deipnosophistae*; Macrobius (fl.399–422) *Saturnalia*;²⁴ Martianus Capella (early C. 5th), *De Nuptiis philologiae et Mercurii* (*The Wedding of Philology and Mercury*); Fulgentius (early C 6th), *The Three Books of Mythologies*; Boethius (480–524), *The Consolation of Philosophy*; Ferghil (Vergilius) (fl.760) *Cosmographia*; Sedulius Scottus (fl.c.848–c.874), *The Book Concerning Christian Leaders*; Luitprand of Cremona (c.922–c.972), *Antapodosis* or *The Book of Repayment*; history writers such as Dudo of St. Quentin (c.965–1043), *On the Deeds and Deaths of the Norman Leaders*; Conrad of Hirsau (fl.c.1140), *A Dialogue Upon the Ancient Writers*; Saxo Grammaticus (C 12th), *The Heroic Acts of the Danes*; and allegorists of the so-called School of Chartres, such as Bernardus Sylvestris of Tours (fl.c.1136), *The Cosmograph*, or *The Wholeness of the World*, or *The Megacosm and Microcosm*; Adelhard of Bath (fl. early C 12th), *De eodum et diverso*, or *On the Same*

and the Different; and Alanus of Insulis (or Alain de Lille), (c.1128–1202), *De planctu Naturae*, or *The Complaint of Nature*; Petrus of Compostella (fl.c.1140) *The Consolation of Reason*; Johannes Gerson (1363–1429), *On the Consolation of Theology*; Theodorich Vrie (fl.c.1300) *On the Consolation of the Church*; Alain de Chartier (c.1385–1433), *The Tract of Hope*. According to Kirk, none of these writers demonstrates familiarity with Varro. It is possible they knew Seneca or Petronius, through their preservation in a few enlightened monasteries, but there is no evidence of reference to such Menippean ancients in medieval satires from the mid-sixth century on, meaning that Martianus Capella and Boethius were the starting point for the genre for the medieval Menippeans.²⁵

It seems wrong to restrict the term ‘Menippean satire’ to a few classical texts and to the works of a relatively obscure dynasty of seriocomic illuminati who were self-consciously ‘after Menippus’. That John Dunton wrote of his “satiric pedigree” in his *Voyage Round the World*,²⁶ does not make his work any more or less ‘Menippean’ than that of (say) Thomas Pynchon, who makes no reference to Menippus or Menippean satire. Yet Pynchon’s familiarity with such Menippean avatars as Swift, Sterne, Rabelais, Voltaire, Peacock or Joyce²⁷ (to name but a few) is obvious enough to have prompted a full length study of his work as Menippean satire.²⁸ Of the Menippean satires that have been produced in modern (post-Renaissance) times, some have the kind of formal and/or generic self-consciousness evident in Burton or Swift or Peacock and some the literary ‘naivety’ of Lewis Carroll or Joseph Furphy.

Moreover, as the example of Pynchon suggests, Menippean satire is a genre which has yet to exhaust itself, having continued to be a conduit of innovative and experimental writing across a wide variety of themes and forms in the twentieth century. Its protean form and techniques make it perfectly adaptable, from period to period with their manifold ideological concerns, to assume a wide variety of literary roles, not all of them restricted to ideological attack or fiction.

Critical Commentary on ‘Menippean Satire’

Reading the scholarship on Menippean satire is a little bit like the joke about the blind men describing an elephant: each having felt a different part of the beast begins to describe a creature at odds with that described by his fellows. Without belittling the efforts of Menippean scholars, it is fair to say that some are concerned only with the ancient forms, some with only the renaissance, some with only the sixteenth, seventeenth or

eighteenth century, others with specific authors such as Flann O'Brien, Cabrera Infante, Chaucer, Pynchon or Peacock, others with similarly large categories such as post-modernism, or carnival and comic genres, and others still are preoccupied with the darker implications of the genre and the disturbing conclusions that may be drawn from it.

In spite of its rambunctiousness and comic excess, however, the critical fortunes of Menippean satire have been less than happy. In antiquity it was generally regarded as an oddity, with Cicero remarking of Varro's Menippeans:

You have brought much light to our poets and to Latin literature and language as well, and have yourself made a multiform and elegant poetic work in nearly every meter, and have in many places embarked upon philosophical topics, sufficient for inspiring your readers, but insufficient for their instruction.²⁹

It is probably safe to say that in antiquity it was recognised as distinct from other genres, but it may not have been recognised as a distinct genre in its own right. Quintilian speaks of "an even older type of satire [to that of Lucilius] which derives its variety not merely from verse, but from an admixture of prose as well. Such were the satires composed by Terentius Varro, the most learned of all Romans."³⁰ Menippean satires were produced throughout the middle ages, although it was Justus Lipsius' *Satyra Menippea, Somnium, lusus in nostri aevi criticos* (1581) that marked the first instance of the use of Menippean satire as a generic term.³¹ Our understanding of Menippean satire as a genre is therefore largely a construction of the modern era. It was later acknowledged by Renaissance scholars such as Isaac Casaubon and J.C. Scaliger³² and later John Dryden.³³ Dryden was the first to disseminate the term in England, although he did little original research and derived most of his work from Isaac Casaubon.³⁴

From the eighteenth century until relatively recently the literature concerning the genre has been scant, prompting some scholars to proclaim that it had died out in the sixteenth century.³⁵ Since the proselytizing work of both Northrop Frye and Mikhail Bakhtin in the second half of this century (Bakhtin's work only being freely available to the west since 1968), there has been a revival of interest in the genre, although the quality of work produced on the subject has varied widely. From 1980 to 2006 there have been at least eleven books and over thirty articles produced specifically on the subject, apart from the incidental references and passing mentions which are far too numerous to relate.

By far the largest volume of this criticism relates to classical literature, and literature up to the early renaissance that clearly has a direct relation to

classical literature. Much of this criticism deals with Menippean satire as a genre after Menippus. It is therefore unquestioningly concerned with ideas of literary influence, intention and “generic integrity.”³⁶ The discernible influence of Menippean satirists such as Lucian, Seneca, Petronius and Varro in antiquity as well as from the middle ages onwards means that it is possible to derive a paradigmatic definition of Menippean satire as a form of prose and verse medley. Indeed, if one were to agree with those classical scholars that Menippean satire ‘died out’, then works in the genre would be easily definable, either through their allusion to other Menippeans or in their obvious indebtedness to previous Menippeans. The difficulty with this is, again, a consideration of ‘genre’.

Extant ancient Menippean satires are few in number (fragments from Menippus and Varro, Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, Lucian’s *Nekyomantia* and *Icaromenippus*, Petronius’ fragmentary *Satyricon* and Julian’s *The Caesars* and, in the late Latin revival, Martianus Capella’s *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Fulgentius’ *Mythologies*, Ennodius’ *Paraenesis Didascalica* and Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*) and their similarities to each other in terms of influences have been discussed earlier. However, once the continuity of the genre has been established, firstly through Boethius into the middle ages and, secondly, through the Seneca-Lucian-Julian line in the Renaissance and its later fusion with and influence on the encyclopaedic form, it is clear that the narrow definition of the classical scholar is no longer adequate. The medley that characterises the form of Menippean satire need not be merely alternating sections of poetry and prose. Menippean satire can be characterised by the conflation of different styles (usually parodic, as in *Ulysses*), different languages or discourses (as in *The Waste Land*), or different typographic forms (such as the comic profusion of footnotes in *The Third Policeman*, or in Derrida’s *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*³⁷). Eugene Kirk’s admirable *Bibliography*, which terminates in 1660, does not pretend to deal with Menippean satire as a genre that continues to the present day. The tenor of his arguments for the form and against other critics is largely determined by the time-frame within which the *Bibliography* is compiled, with the majority of works cited Lucianic in tone or indebtedness. Most modern discussions of Menippean satire have used the classical scholar’s definitions and arguments as a starting point, and their conclusions are largely coloured by this.

One notable exception to this tendency is Northrop Frye. His championing of Menippean satire initially did more than any other critic in the West to draw attention to it, although he conflates Menippean satire with the anatomy. To a large extent, Frye is guilty of forcing a square peg

into a round hole: his theory of genres requires a neat, quadripartite arrangement that forces him to replace the “cumbersome and in modern times rather misleading ‘Menippean satire’” with the term ‘anatomy’.³⁸ His argument proceeds rather loosely from the observation that the main feature of Menippean satire is an intellectual exuberance which finds its expression in the encyclopaedic farrago.³⁹ This tendency, evident on a surface level in Menippean satire in the form of lists and catalogues, finds its apogee, for Frye, in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Therefore, dissection and analysis become the principal features of the renamed and refashioned Menippean satire. The result of this reorientation of emphasis is that the traditionally grotesque aspects of the Menippean satire, such as its coarseness, invective and flights of fancy, are subordinated to its intellectual concerns. The rambunctious energy that characterises many Menippean satires is transmuted by Frye into an intellectual vivacity.

Eugene Kirk has argued that Frye’s term ‘anatomy’ is, on the contrary, more misleading than ‘Menippean satire.’ In his essay “Genre and Satiric Strategy in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*”, Kirk rightly notes that, when used in the period 1575–1650 the term ‘anatomy’ was a “rubric for poems, treatises, Euphuistic novels, geographies, pamphlets, prose polemics, devotional works—in short, for such a variety of forms as to render hopeless any idea that ‘anatomy’ ever implied a specific genre.”⁴⁰ Kirk is not alone in expressing these sentiments. Among others, Barbara Merry has complained that Frye’s ‘anatomy’ is a “vague definition of the genre” which “resolve[s] little of the difficulty in specifying the essential nature of Menippean satire.”⁴¹ Kirk’s argument has its most telling thrust when he strives to emphasise that the *Anatomy of Melancholy* is really a satire on the *theologus gloriosus*, in this case, the Jesuits. It is evident that Kirk feels that the identification of a work as a Menippean satire depends upon the existence of an object of satire, conforming to the notion of the crazed academician, philosopher or theologian. The weakness with this paradigm, that Menippean satire must *satirise*, is evident if one examines closely the list of Menippean satires that Kirk includes in his *Bibliography*. Although the *Bibliography* only goes up to 1660, there are several notable omissions in a work which claims to be as complete as exhaustive searches and incomplete records allow.

Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1593) is a case in point. The form of this work is rather a medley, with some verse interludes and inserted genres which are of a satiric nature. The first person narration of Jack Wilton is typical of many Menippean satires: he is vain, ostentatious and, as his narrative shows, sexually humiliated, as well. These features are common to characters in Menippean satires as diverse as *Midnight’s*

Children, Tristram Shandy, Eccius Dedolatus, Ulysses, Nightmare Abbey, Satyricon, Myra Breckenridge and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The *philosophus gloriosus* is satirised in the character of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and the *theologus gloriosus* in the form of the Anabaptist uprising. The diction is unconventional to say the least, with phrases such as “finnigraphical cuffs” and “firking flantado amphibologies” appearing along with many other neologisms.⁴² There is much coarseness (with the theme of obscenity underlined by the appearance of Aretino as a character)⁴³ and much grotesque imagery. Unless an oversight, Kirk seems to have considered the work to be an Elizabethan novel, and hence not a ‘satire’, although it has been argued elsewhere that the “thematic and stylistic elements of the work are illuminated by Bakhtin’s ideas of carnivalesque patterns in Menippean satire.”⁴⁴

A similar case in point concerns the critical fortunes of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. Kirk lists critics, particularly those from the Renaissance, who regarded *Don Quixote* as a Menippean satire.⁴⁵ Whereas Kirk does not specifically list *Don Quixote* as a Menippean satire in his Bibliography, he notes elsewhere that

since we now consider *Don Quixote* a picaresque novel, we would do well to note that the important critic Rapin designated the book a Menippean satire a century before Sterne, and Rapin’s remark came already translated to Sterne in the preface to the second volume of Dunton’s *Voyage Round the World*; Dunton regarded *Don Quixote* as a generic relative of Quevedo’s Lucianic satires.⁴⁶

Another significant omission is Sir Thomas Urquhart’s *The Jewel* (1653). Urquhart’s work features a self-consciously puffed up first person narration (it is difficult to tell whether the narrative voice is mad, or merely prone to extreme exaggeration), consistent with Menippean personae such as Martinus Scriblerus and Ricardus Aristarchus of *The Dunciad* or the bizarre H. Hatterr of *All About H. Hatterr*.⁴⁷ Neologisms and macaronics abound to the extent that the text is unintelligible without extensive interpolation and footnotes. There are satiric targets (most notably the Presbyterian party of Civil War Scotland); there is carnival imagery in the story of the Admirable Crichtoun and there are flights of intellectual fancy only rivalled by Swift or Flann O’Brien. It must be noted that there is no consistent satiric focus, which seems to be the gauge by which Kirk measures the ‘Menippeanness’ of a work. In terms of the serio-comic tone, heterogeneous form, unusual diction and fantastic actions, these two works are so unmistakably works of Menippean satire that I would suggest they cannot adequately be understood without reference to this generic

context. But it is also clear that they do not fit the pattern of being clearly ‘satiric’ in a normative sense. In other words, the ‘satire’ of Menippean satire has more to do with form, as in the *satira* of classical literature, than in an understanding of satire as a normative ridiculing or lampooning of vice or folly. It is in the fractured form of Menippean satire that the impossibility of a single world view, or the impossibility of an explain-all dogma is realised. This is, of course, not to say that satiric attacks on the *philosophus gloriosus* or *theologus gloriosus* are not important features of Menippean satire. It is simply that there are a large number of works where it is difficult to locate such attacks and yet they are quite clearly, by a number of other criteria, Menippean satires. ‘Satirising’ does not exhaust the potential meaning of Menippean satire, but of course it is a notion that must be retained.

Perhaps the most influential theorist of Menippean satire to be considered, Mikhail Bakhtin, presents a more complex picture. Many of his assertions are in agreement with Frye, such that the extensive treatment which Bakhtin accords Menippean satire in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* seems uncannily like a dilation on Frye’s comments in his *Anatomy of Criticism*.⁴⁸ Where Bakhtin differs radically from other treatments of Menippean satire is in his idea of carnival. Both the Dostoevsky book and *Rabelais and His World* deal extensively with the notion of Menippean satire as a “carnivalised” form. That is, Menippean satire is “influenced—directly and without mediation, or indirectly, through a series of intermediate links—by one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore (ancient or medieval).”⁴⁹

This opens up vast possibilities for the consideration of, for example, the relationship between carnivalesque imagery and carnivalesque structure, as has been done by Ivanov.⁵⁰ Work on the notion of carnival has been extraordinarily popular, no doubt because of the elusive prospect of emancipation it offers. Many critics, such as Terry Eagleton, have tended to emphasise a Marxist dimension: hence books such as *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, which focuses upon the influence of carnival on literature as one of subversion and alterity. Continental thinkers have largely followed a semiotic line in considering carnival, such as Julia Kristeva, Umberto Eco and Tzvetan Todorov; or a formalist line, indicated by Ivan Ivanov.

Many thinkers characterise the carnivalesque as subversive, and assume that works which are carnivalesque, reflecting carnival in their imagery and structure, are also Menippean. An example of this is Suzanne Ferriss’ article “Romantic Carnavalesque: Byron’s *The Tale of Calil, Beppo*, and *Don Juan*,”⁵¹ which claims *Don Juan* as a Menippean satire

because of its “deliberate multifariousness” of tone, its “jolly relativity” and its lack of a “one-sided critique.” Her claim that “the plasticity of the Menippean mode allows Byron to mix an incredible variety of forms within the borders of his poem” does not wholly make sense when the virtuosity of Byron’s use of *ottava rima* is measured against the formal *pot pourri* of a work such as *The Waste Land* or the novels of Cabrera Infante.⁵² It is characteristic of many critics that ‘carnavalesque’ is synonymous with ‘Menippean’ without them realising that carnivalesque elements, such as the harlequin engineer of *Heart of Darkness* or the grotesquerie of *Brighton Rock*, do not necessarily indicate that the text in question is a Menippean satire.

Different interpretations of carnival proceed, of course, from particular ideological axe-grindings. In the case of the semioticians, the semiotic, inverted relation of carnival to the “every-day” world is stressed: as a result, carnival is seen in a subsidiary if not subservient role to power. Marxist interpretations tend to stress the subversive nature of carnival. Each particular interpretation of carnival in turn reflects the significance that is attached to Menippean satire. For example, Howard Weinbrot’s claim that “Bakhtin’s theory of carnival in antiquity and the Middle Ages has largely been discredited” is in agreement with his insistence on Menippean satire as a darkly themed genre which is not optimistic or delightful.⁵³ Similarly, Eco takes a dim view of Menippean satire, equating it with comedy. In turn, his attitude to comedy, as is discussed in the following chapter, withholds from it the possibility of structural transgression and, hence, liberation.

One problem with Bakhtin’s discussion of carnival is a tendency to see carnivalesque works as being more “carnivalised” the closer they are temporally to the hey-day of carnival, the middle ages to late Renaissance. Bakhtin has noted that since the enlightenment the great folk-carnivalistic trunk has split into many branches,⁵⁴ implying that those carnivalesque works which come after this ‘dissociation of risibility’ lack the potential to be ‘great.’ As a result, Rabelais is accorded the highest accolades. It is largely Rabelais’ placement in history, and his proximity to folk-carnivalistic traditions, which situates him at such an apogee of achievement in Bakhtin’s eyes.⁵⁵ Bakhtin is a nostalgic, yearning for a particular version of the middle ages in which “medieval laughter is not a subjective, individual and biological consciousness of the uninterrupted flow of time. It is the social consciousness of all the people.”⁵⁶ The identification of Rabelais with this high-water mark of carnival makes it difficult for carnival and carnivalization to be conceived in terms wholly distinct from the massive presence of Rabelais in the comic tradition. It is worthwhile to

keep in mind that the ‘carnival’ of Bakhtin may not be so grounded in a historical and empirically verifiable reality as it may be a personal or cultural attitude:

Carnival is beginning to be seen more as a personal attitude, an inner form of truth—and indeed, this is precisely how Bakhtin referred to carnival laughter in his book on Rabelais, a book which, Russian scholars have now determined, in its original version as a dissertation made no mention of the word ‘carnival’ at all.⁵⁷

The final major commentator on Menippean satire to be considered is Howard Weinbrot, whose *Menippean Satire Reconsidered* is a significant attempt to challenge the Frye-Bakhtin paradigm and to severely limit the range of works included in the genre by discrediting aspects of Frye’s and Bakhtin’s arguments and offering an original definition, which is then applied against a number of key texts. The general approach of Weinbrot is ‘New Historicist’, examining examples of the genre of Menippean satire strictly in their historical context, in terms of cultural attitudes, current reputations, expectations of readers and knowledge of authors. The thrust of Weinbrot’s argument against Frye and Bakhtin is that their definitions are too broad and therefore allow too many identifications to be made so that, in effect, Menippean satire becomes the “genre that ate the world.”⁵⁸ His intention is admirable. As I have indicated above, the explosion in literature concerning Menippean satire in the last few decades has inevitably led to false identifications, over-generalisation and, in some cases, blatant mistakes having been made. However, Weinbrot’s limitation of the genre itself creates additional problems. Discrediting Frye and Bakhtin begs the question as to whether the mis-identification of many works as Menippean may be due to subsequent critics’ flawed understanding or misreading of these two thinkers. Before I consider this in detail, I need first to address Weinbrot’s objections to Frye and Bakhtin.

Weinbrot’s objection to Frye’s use of the term ‘anatomy’, which I have outlined above, is mediated by his citation of Alastair Fowler, who in his *Kinds of Literature* observes that “so many forms are united in the ‘anatomy’ that it threatens to prove a baggier monster than the novel” and that it is “too lacking in unitary force to be of lasting value without qualification.” Fowler’s tentative suggestion is that the term ‘anatomy’, if it were to be used, “could only be as one of a somewhat larger number of categories.”⁵⁹ Fowler’s argument has much in common with the objections raised by Eugene Kirk and Barbara Merry, and it is worth observing that the latter two reject the term ‘anatomy’ in favour of retaining the term ‘Menippean satire’ in critical parlance. Weinbrot’s arguments against Frye

and Bakhtin have a tendency to ‘throw the baby out with the bath water.’ Certainly, the term ‘anatomy’ may be misleading, or could be better deployed, but this does not necessarily invalidate the many genre identifications of Menippean satire made by Frye.

However, Weinbrot’s objections to Frye are quickly passed over in favour of a more probing attack on Bakhtin and, more importantly, the relatively recent Bakhtinian legacy in the west. The attack works on a number of fronts, but is principally concerned with the fact that “Bakhtin’s synchronic rather than historical method forces him into generalizations that are impossible to verify.”⁶⁰ Indeed, Weinbrot concludes his remarks on Bakhtin by expressing the hope that he has “shown that much of Bakhtin’s theory of the Menippea is alien to actual events in literary history so far as we can reclaim them.”⁶¹ His arguments focus primarily on Bakhtin’s reading of the fragment of Varro’s Menippean satire *Bimarcus* and also attempt to demonstrate how a direct transmission of the genre (the “unity and uninterrupted continuity” of the genre which Bakhtin asserts⁶²) from Bion, through Menippus then Varro to the present day could not have occurred. Unfortunately, Weinbrot has a tendency to quote selectively and therefore inaccurately. The “*unity and uninterrupted continuity*” which Weinbrot claims Bakhtin asserts for the genre of Menippean satire, which Weinbrot proceeds to question and, as a consequence, discredits Bakhtin’s position, is actually part of a larger statement by Bakhtin on genre:

A genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. Precisely for this reason genre is capable of guaranteeing the *unity and uninterrupted continuity* of this development.⁶³

Weinbrot seeks to demonstrate the falsity of Bakhtin’s claim by showing how it is unlikely that there was ever a transmission of Menippean satire in an uninterrupted fashion from author to author over some 2,000 years. Perhaps he is correct, and there have been various discontinuities, dead-ends and false starts; but in making this point he seems to be missing the main thrust of Bakhtin’s argument, which is that “genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development.” The manifestation of a genre and its development over time are representative of a deeper process—genres are evidence of “ways of understanding the world”⁶⁴ which “persist over centuries and across cultures, constituting a kind of transcultural memory.”⁶⁵ While Weinbrot’s analysis of the literary history of Menippean satire questions the uninterrupted dissemination of that genre over time, he does not take into consideration

that Bakhtin's claims are for the uninterrupted continuity of the way of understanding the world which constitutes that genre.

A further weakness in Weinbrot's argument is that he restricts his definition of Menippean satire to a single theme and by so doing ignores those Menippean satires which do not easily sit within that paradigm. For Weinbrot, Menippean satire "confronts a world of diverse dangers that threaten to engulf the humans involved."⁶⁶ As such, it is often darkly satiric and cynical; the more festive and gentler satires, such as the *Alice* books and *Tristram Shandy* are excluded because they do not evince the asperities of *The Dunciad* or *A Tale of a Tub*. Weinbrot is correct to dwell on the threat of a false orthodoxy as a defining trait of Menippean satire. However, the examples he analyses, such as *The Dunciad*, *A Tale of a Tub*, and *The Battle of the Books* satirise false orthodoxies in an explicit and ostensible fashion; those Menippeans he would exclude, such as Rabelais or Sterne, do so implicitly by virtue of the radical heterogeneity displayed in their works' forms. Weinbrot's version of Menippean satire encompasses those works which are ostensibly satirical and darker in tone. Adding to these those works which are more humorous and amiable, but nonetheless retain a radical heterogeneity, would probably obtain a more complete picture of the genre.

'Menippean Satire' as a Genre

From this or any survey of the critical literature on 'Menippean satire', the two questions most frequently and persistently invoked are, firstly, on what basis can an identification of the Menippean be made and, secondly, once the identification has been made, how can one speak of 'Menippean satire' as a genre? How can one make generic links between works which are similar only in their dissimilarity? The particular combination of the sentimental, the digressive and the fancifully comic in *Tristram Shandy* does not readily admit of a contiguous relationship with *The Waste Land* or *The Dunciad*. Instead, we tend to think of works such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Infinite Jest* as unique: if we are pressed, then a genealogy including Swift, Voltaire, Rabelais and perhaps Burton can be cited. The perceived uniqueness of particular Menippean satires has until now prevented widespread study of the genre and of various Menippean satires in the context of their genre.

If there is one Menippean satire which can be said to be analogous in form to another, then such an analogy cannot be carried beyond the confines of a fortuitous comparison. As Frye observes, Huxley's novels bear some similarities to the prose satires of Peacock; but neither is similar

to Julian the Apostate's *The Caesars* or Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. There is no Menippean satire which is quintessentially Menippean: there is no paradigmatic Menippean satire and there is no such thing as a 'pure' Menippean satire.⁶⁷ A form which is based on disjunction and impurity can have no final, refined form.

In fact, Frye and Bakhtin speak of Menippean satire's tendency to combine with other forms, which I take to mean its essentially grotesque nature. However, neither critic can resist trying (as Master Alcofribas may have succeeded in doing) to abstract the quintessence of Menippean satire. "The *Satyricon* of Petronius," writes Bakhtin at one point, "is nothing other than a Menippean satire extended to the limits of a novel" while "the *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*) of Apuleius... is a full-blown Menippean satire."⁶⁸ Frye writes at one point that "the Alice books are perfect Menippean satires, and so is *The Water Babies*, which has been influenced by Rabelais"⁶⁹ while at another point he notes that "there is a strong admixture of romance in Rabelais."⁷⁰

Even while recognising the protean nature of Menippean satire, neither critic resists attempts to define categorically by example through recourse to a paradigmatic concept. In Bakhtin's case it is the notion of carnivalization; in Frye's it is the subordination of Menippean satire to the 'super genre' of the anatomy. Even Kirk is not immune to this tendency: his yardstick for identifying Menippean satire as 'satire' is as a satire of either a *philosophus gloriosus* or a *theologus gloriosus*.

One of the more engaging studies of Menippean satire in recent years is Garry Sherbert's study of Dunton, D'Urfey and Sterne. For Sherbert, Menippean satire is, at least in the period under direct consideration, characterised by "learned wit."⁷¹ He also characterises Menippean satire by the rhetorical trope of catachresis, or the 'misuse' of metaphor "to such an extent that the meaning it aims at strikes us as forced."⁷² The difficulty with this, apart from any definitive 'definition' that may be offered for a genre which gleefully resists such systematic identification, is that notions of strained use or misuse must necessarily be contextual. As a master trope for Menippean satire it is useful but problematic. The fantastic or unusual diction that characterises Menippean satire is certainly catachretical from the point of view of the 'meanings' which are punctured or transgressed. However, these usages are transformative of meaning, along the lines discussed in relation to grotesque transformation in Chapter two.

Sherbert also speaks of laughter and the unconscious and in particular of the Menippean satirist's "literary unconscious" uncovered by the laughter of non-knowledge.⁷³ This has resonances with certain theorisations of laughter, particularly that of *Witz* as a form of sudden

illumination. For instance, Sherbert has made note of Weber's analysis of the "uncanny" similarities between wit and theoretical speculation in *The Legend of Freud*.⁷⁴ One of the most difficult aspects of Menippean satire is that the 'meaning' of a joke can never be fixed, even if one wishes to locate that fixity in the cathexis of laughter. This does occur, but there is a transformative aspect to the 'joke' that lies outside such notions of the mature intellect finding a mere 'jest of meaning' in the joke: it actually offers up new horizons in which meaning is presently mutable and, as a consequence, liberating.

For Weinbrot, Menippean satire is "a form that uses at least two other genres, languages, cultures or changes of voice to oppose a dangerous, false, or specious and threatening orthodoxy."⁷⁵ It has two tones: severe, in which a threatened angry satirist fails and becomes angrier still; and muted, in which the satirist offers a partial antidote to the poison he knows remains. Further, Weinbrot identifies four cognate devices which may be employed by the genre:

Menippean satire by addition enlarges a main text with new, generally smaller texts that further characterize a dangerous world. Menippean satire by genre sets a work against its own approximate genre, like an art of poetry, and either comments on it or uses it as a backdrop to suggest its own subject's danger to the world. Menippean satire by annotation uses the sub- or side-text further to darken the already dark text. Menippean satire by incursion is a brief guerrilla attack that emphasizes the danger in the text and then departs.⁷⁶

This paradigm of Menippean satire leads to some strange inclusions and exclusions. *Tristram Shandy* is excluded because "benevolence triumphs and reduces malevolence to a comic sputtering we enjoy."⁷⁷ Evidently, the misanthropic heritage of Menippus himself informs this moralistic definition of the satirical aspects of the genre; similarly, this is the reason for excluding the *Golden Ass* ("whatever instruction the Golden Ass offers is scarcely of the darker Menippean sort"⁷⁸) and, presumably, the *Alice* books as well. Weinbrot's Menippean satire is, like Bernstein's version of carnival a stern corrective to the fallacious optimism of Bakhtin's version of the genre. Indeed, it appears at times almost as if Weinbrot's reading of the genre is defined almost entirely in opposition to Bakhtin's.

The second device, "Menippean satire by genre" allows Weinbrot to identify Pope's *Essay on Criticism* as a Menippean satire. Clearly, this is wrong. One of the hallmarks of Menippean satire, as I shall argue, is radical heterogeneity, be it manifested formally, lexically or generically. The *Essay on Criticism* evidences none of these traits. At best, the essay may

be a gentle qualification of Boileau's *Art poétique*, but this hardly qualifies as "Menippizing."⁷⁹ The third and fourth devices Weinbrot identifies are surely correct, as they point to the disjunctive and heterogeneous nature of Menippean satire. However, Weinbrot's reconsideration of Menippean satire is not a success, for a number of reasons. His exclusive treatment of the eighteenth century means that his definitions work largely for the period he considers, but not outside it. He also seeks to restrict the genre too much and his preoccupation with the form is largely ethical, so that the Menippean theme of a dangerous orthodoxy threatening the world is often stressed over the Menippean form, which tends to project a world view of radical heterogeneity which is incommensurate with any attempt to contain it within a single world view.

Most critics of Menippean satire are constrained, in their formulations of the genre, by the conventions of academic discourse in their attempts to adequately come to grips with the genre. Almost without exception, they recognise that the Menippean resistance to systematization is crucial to any understanding of the genre. Barbara Merry proposes a definition of Menippean satire "based on 'rupture' which may be viewed as the genre's organizing principle" while Julia Kristeva does so in terms of "excess."⁸⁰ However, the exigencies of coherent 'arguments' or 'theses' mean that they rarely have any adequation with the task at hand. The result is more often than not informative, but the 'spirit' of Menippean satire can only ever be glimpsed behind such analyses. It is the same with this book, although it is hoped that the focus on the body and on the grotesque, with all the vagaries that these entail, has as a characteristic an openness which is in keeping with the excess of Menippean satire. In other words, following Frye, the anatomy of analysis must always remain incomplete.

Other scholars of Menippean satire, although they do not deviate significantly from the positions elaborated by the principal Menippean theorists, represent a relatively heterogeneous array of views. For example, F. Anne Payne has written of "Menippean tragedy", of which *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are examples, and of which Payne says "in these works the human inability to find any kind of validated method of handling the facets of the problem posed is felt as a destructive incapacity that looms larger than the joy promised by the freedom to investigate alternate possibilities."⁸¹ On the other hand, Sherbert states that Payne's reliance on Bakhtin has led to a fundamental confusion in identifying the *Canterbury Tales* as a Menippean satire and that her idea of Menippean tragedy "stretches the genre beyond all recognition."⁸² Neither of Payne's claims seem credible.

Juanita Sullivan Williams is one of those critics who stresses the importance of what Menippean satire, morally, can teach us. She writes that “Menippean satire has a particular ideology which transcends satire of a more personal and specific nature; it possesses at times a tone of tragedy, which lends it an expansive, universal significance”⁸³—which perhaps amounts to nothing more than saying that when Menippean satire is not serious it really is, and that when it is sad it is truly great. Theodore Kharpertian, a disciple of Robert C. Elliott, identifies what he sees to be “the genre’s four essential formal and functional conventions: attack, variety, fertility, and delight,”⁸⁴ a theme not unrelated to the argument that as a grotesque form, the Menippean satire often functions as a means of discovery.

Lastly, the intertextuality of Menippean satire (a form particularly prevalent in its postmodern incarnation) has been seen as a defining feature by Riikonen:

We can even call the Menippean satire a ‘supergenre’, whose individual works freely connect and mingle prose and verse as well as characteristics of other genres. As early as in Greek and Roman Antiquity the Menippean satire showed a high degree of intertextuality and since then it is the genre where the possibilities of intertextual play have been most courageously employed.⁸⁵

All of these views deserve serious consideration, but none convinces as an account which exhausts the genre. Paradigmatic definitions of Menippean satire are useful when grounded in a specific historical horizon, but are exposed as inadequate when they pretend toward an authoritative account of the genre.

Kirk’s empirical definition of Menippean satire is probably the best for the period up to 1660:

The chief mark of Menippean style was unconventional diction. Neologisms, portmanteau words, macaronics, preciousness, coarse vulgarity, catalogues, bombast, mixed languages, and protracted sentences were typical of the genre, sometimes appearing all together in the same work. In outward structure, Menippean satire was a medley—usually a medley of alternating prose and verse... Menippean topical elements included outlandish fictions (i.e. fantastic voyages, dreams, visions, talking beasts) and extreme distortions of argument (often, “paradoxes”). In theme, Menippean Satire was essentially concerned with right learning or right belief. That theme often called for ridicule or caricature of some sham-intellectual or theological fraud. Yet sometimes the theme demanded exhortation to learning, when books and studies had fallen into disuse and neglect.

The Menippean writer assumes an audience less learned, less intellectually committed, than himself; but he believes his audience is curious, sincere, sensible, and humour-loving enough to see his point, when that point is presented in an entertaining and knowledgeable way. The genre is nearly always written “downward” to this audience, though “down” is usually not very far “down”, to judge by the allusions the Menippean author expects his readers to detect.⁸⁶

Because not all of the above characteristics will be present in a Menippean satire at any given time, Kirk promotes Wittgenstein’s idea of “family resemblances”, in which

phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but... they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language’.⁸⁷

If we were to substitute ‘genre’ for ‘language’, then we could envisage a genre as a thread in which

the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres... Something runs through the whole thread—namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres.⁸⁸

Thus, Menippean satire is an heuristic term which does not necessarily relate to a precise form. If there is any *essential* feature of Menippean satire, then it is its disjunctive nature. On a formal level, it is a medley or an admixture of genres and it is often concerned with the absurd, the irrational and the contradictory.

Without any anchoring concepts, Menippean satire would frustratingly elude classification and analysis. Without paradigms, Menippean satire ceases to be a genre (as is the case, perhaps, with any genre) but instead becomes what Relihan has called an anti-genre: something we call a genre on the basis of the fact that those works which constitute the genre have a disjunctive nature, a disjunctive relationship to each other and are “a satire on literature itself and all its pretensions to meaning.”⁸⁹ It also becomes an anti-genre in the sense that it acts as a *pharmakon*, or corrective, satirising drug and also a contaminating poison within literature as a whole.⁹⁰ Menippean satire as *pharmakon* could well serve as a definition of the genre, for it is a remedy to systematizations and hierarchisations of literature and it is always a supplementary remedy to notions of the completeness of the ‘Institution of Literature.’ It is also a contaminating agent, subverting reason, replacing ends with means,