

Cynic Satire

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By

Eric McLuhan

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FOREWORD

The term “Menippean satire” has been a prominent one in three periods: the first century BC, the latter half of the sixteenth century AD, and the middle of the twentieth century. To be sure, between these last two eras it was not totally unknown formally, but the actual designation re-emerged among a notable group of scholars and critics only during the 1500s in Western Europe and in the English-speaking world enjoyed a resurgence from 1957 on, thanks to the extraordinary impact of four or so pages published that year in Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. Why the identification of this distinctive literary type became of interest at precisely these moments requires some investigation. A closer look at the historical circumstances that led to these revivals reveals much about the nature of literary forms and the cultural background that gave them significance.

Eric McLuhan’s study seeks to explore the opposition between Dialectic, on the one hand, and Grammar and Rhetoric, on the other, as a means of understanding this peculiar literary category in terms of its intellectual, artistic, and cultural background at each stage of its flourishing. Chapter four of his book is especially valuable in showing how the attention given to the audience by the rhetorical tradition helps explain the appeal of this quirky but sophisticated set of techniques and perspectives (originally inspired by the Cynic movement) in later antiquity, the later Renaissance, and the latter stages of twentieth-century modernism. He offers a fresh investigation that seeks to overcome the many barriers to a coherent account of an admittedly incoherent-seeming literary type by asking not how a Menippean satire is constructed or how a given work might be identified under some abstract rubric but what effect it has on its audience. It is not the content alone that makes a given work Menippean nor such structural features as the alternation of prose and verse (hardly a unique characteristic, since it occurs in the ancient Greek romance-novel as well). Nevertheless, McLuhan offers a very helpful list of “Menippean clichés” in his “Digression” (chapter nine), which deals with the Cynic attitudes towards reality and fiction, and chapter four, which explores its relationship to the rhetorical tradition. He chooses wisely not to neglect matters of structure and content, but he shows convincingly that they cannot suffice to explain the ultimate nature of that class of works

named after the third-century BC Gadarean known to us as Menippus.

The problem all critics and scholars face is a kind of literary nominalism. Despite concerted efforts, century after century, they have not been able to avoid using such vague terms as “genre” or “novel”; at the same time, those who seek to offer more precise categories or collective terms seldom succeed in imposing their preferred nomenclatures on the scholarly community. A good example is Northrop Frye himself, who, despite the considerable impetus he gave to the study of works in the Cynic tradition, failed to make his preferred term for them, “anatomy,” prevail for very long. He had already begun exploring the subject twenty years before his influential book, *Anatomy of Criticism*, was published, first in a paper written while he was a student at Oxford and five years later in a published article that incorporated many additions to his original investigations. Beginning with establishing a more exact distinction than that observed at the time between fiction and non-fiction, he sought to drive a wedge between them with a large and important category he identified, drawing on the titles of a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works, as literary anatomies. He was to integrate these preliminary explorations into a more comprehensive theory of fiction, with a revised version of his original remarks, in yet another article, published not long before his signature book appeared. This third version was little changed when it was absorbed into *Anatomy*. There it was one of four broad narrative “genres”: confession, romance, novel, and anatomy, this last being a substitute for the term “Menippean satire,” which he considered somewhat misleading. Though early followers of Frye's schema often used “anatomy,” in their books and articles, the preponderance of later criticism has stuck with the original designation, Menippean satire. Scholars have debated, since antiquity, the term “satire,” as well, and McLuhan offers some very sensible remarks about the range of references that term might be said to cover, etymology aside. But as with the tendency to style any prose narrative of some (indefinitely defined) length a novel, such terminology often hinders more than aids understanding by either excluding or including too much.

A second influential critic, the Russian writer Mikhail Bakhtin, seems to have anticipated Frye's early interest in Menippean satire, though his writings were not to reach the West in translation until the 1960s. When they did, however, they provided an alternative way of looking at it and consequently were responsible for a further impetus within that initial surge of interest. Bakhtin speaks not of “satire” but of “Menippea,” and he offers a very different prospectus in his discussions that includes anthropological elements, such as “carnival” and “polyphony,” which have

proven to be fruitful in expanding our understanding of the cultural underpinnings of the medieval and modern practitioners of literary Cynicism. But in his essays that propose an opposition between epic and novel, he presents the latter as an open form that seems to include the Menippea in its heritage. That distinction goes against the fourfold division of prose fiction that Frye offers in his *Anatomy of Criticism* and subsequent writings, showing once again that one man's term is another man's poison.

McLuhan remains attentive to the positive contributions of his precursors in writing about Menippean satire, but he is also shrewdly aware of their dangers and limitations. At the same time, he looks to certain unpublished works, such as doctoral dissertations, that have escaped the notice of most scholars. In them he finds approaches that offer positive directions that might be further advanced. Most conspicuous in his book, however, is the space he devotes to exploring the historic elements of rhetoric and the trivia, taken for granted by Menippean authors before the twentieth century but now too often neglected. It is there that he presents his most original ideas about the subject, demonstrating that it is above all the effect on the reader, as embodied not only in the author's intentions but in the work itself as executed, which defines the peculiar nature of Menippean satire. Moreover, he further illuminates this insight by examining not only some recent literary works that fall within the Menippean scholar's purview but those in other media as well. By demonstrating that Cynic satire goes beyond being limited by an exclusively verbal medium he presents some enticing possibilities for future critical developments in the arts as a whole.

I would like to conclude by offering a reflection of my own on the implications this book offers for even broader considerations of the arts. The Menippean challenge, which was given prominence in many a "post-modern" work of "self-reflective" fiction during the later decades of the past century, is a way of calling attention to the constitution of our cultural and historical environment. If the *Margites* may be enlisted among the earliest known examples of Menippea—coming centuries before the historical Menippus himself—then one concludes that the parodic element emerges precisely when certain works of art have achieved exemplary and canonical status that are taken to define the principal features of a given culture. By calling attention to them through distortion, through humour, and through incongruous mixtures of elements or contradictory, conflicting scenes and presentations, the Menippean artist makes us aware not merely of the artificiality of the intellectual environment that we have created for ourselves but of its necessary existence as a means of avoiding

an oversimplified understanding of ourselves and the world we have made. And thereon, doubtless, hangs a tale, full of sound and theory and signifying something or other.

R. S. Dupree
Dallas, Texas
December 2014

PREFACE

This book grew out of my doctoral thesis on arguably the greatest Menippean satire of all, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. It owes a considerable debt to Eugene Korkowski's slightly earlier dissertation, "Menippus and His Imitators: A Conspectus, up to Sterne, for a Misunderstood Genre." I have made frequent use here of the fruits of Dr. Korkowski's labours, and trust that the specific debts have been acknowledged. This will acknowledge the general one.

Recently, Garland Publishing brought out *Menippean Satire: An Annotated Catalogue of Texts and Criticism* by E. P. Kirk, a book that clearly owes a lot to Dr. Korkowski's ample dissertation. Two things, however, I feel are lacking. First, Dr. Korkowski's thesis contains many valuable discussions, whereas the catalogue format of Kirk's book prohibits discursive essay. Second, Dr. Korkowski's thesis runs only "up to Sterne": valuable work remains to be done to bring the survey the rest of the way, from Sterne to the present. In the last chapters of the present volume, I suggest some directions such studies might take.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary interest in the Menippean satire pretty well dates from the publication of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. That celebrated book needs no introduction; its influence on criticism and on more than a generation of students is well known. Although Frye accorded a scant four pages to the topic (virtually an aside), they have formed the manifesto for an entire school of Menippean criticism, one that is still growing.

In those four pages, Frye argued cogently for changing the term from "Menippean satire" (he felt it was inadequate) to "Anatomy." And in fact many Menippean satires are anatomies or include "Anatomy" in their titles, for example, Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. But then Frye, playing possum, quietly named his own book of essays *Anatomy of Criticism*. Somehow, Frye scholars have overlooked the implicit claim – that his book is a Menippean satire. At least, none have yet offered to discuss the implications. Yet his celebrated *Anatomy* is not Menippean: it—and he—is far too sober.

In a nutshell (and this serves as the rhetorical premise / thesis that underlies the essays that make up this book) ...

... a Menippean satire is a device for producing a specific kind of effect on the reader. Menippean satire is an active form, not a passive one: any work that produces the *effect* of a Menippean satire *is* a Menippean satire.

Whereas other kinds of satire work on the reader's ideas, or decry evil, or expose vice or folly or bad manners and someone else, Menippean satires act on their publics as would a Menippus or Diogenes or other Cynic philosopher on his. The satire stands in for the man: that's the key.

Menippus was a Cynic philosopher (third century BC). Now, Cynics are unique among philosophers. They sling no party line; they have no "school," no bodies of theories to expound, no policy to promote. Their constant aim is to restore balance to perception: they combat delusion and illusion and pretentiousness and intellectual boneheadedness of every stripe. The Cynics declared war on robotism; their target was—and is—any robot, any somnambulist individual or group, that crossed their paths. They will swipe any technique, resort to any extreme, to jolt the target (the

man-in-the-street reader) into wakefulness, to restore a sense of proportion, and to limber up the senses. Their techniques are satiric; their satires, polymorphic, topsy-turvy, and perverse. They will use *any* form. The Cynics are utterly democratic: they attack one another and even their own followers as readily as they attack anyone else.

But what does this have to do with today? For nearly two centuries, rhetoric attracted little practical interest...until fairly recently, that is. For electric media have profoundly changed the shapes of publics and audiences, and rhetoric, the science of transforming audiences, has revived. A rhetor's thinking begins with the audience and how to have an effect on it. Cynic-Menippean satires are deeply rhetorical because the satirist begins with the audience and the effect. He builds the work around the audience in order to manage the effect. Our predecessors, the Romantics, were too self-absorbed to summon much sympathy for rhetoric or interest themselves in rhetorical (audience-based) satire. Such is not now the case. We live surrounded by rhetoric most potent—ads, for example. Suddenly, this Menippean technology is yanked from the sidelines onto centre stage.

Yet while recent philosophy, from phenomenology on, and the current spate of derivative schools of criticism, have alike an interest in the hidden ground of experience (and all Menippean satires are experiences first and foremost and cerebral last), the critics, still mired in the mind-set of Romanticism, are over a century out of touch and out of practice with the tools needed to come to grips with Cynic satire.

Now is the “ground floor” time in the development of Menippean satire as a field of study. Scholarly interest is growing apace; each year, more and more university courses deal with it. As the field grows, awareness of it and its implications is profoundly affecting the way we look at the rest of satire, and at the rest of literature, and at serious art. For the catalogue of Menippean satires includes numerous surprises. It includes many of those wonderful misfits, books that don't fit into the conventional genres, such as Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, or *Don Quixote*, or Chaucer's *Tales*, or Byron's *Don Juan*, or *Alice in Wonderland*, or *Huckleberry Finn*, or *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or *Tristram Shandy*, or *Ulysses*, or *Finnegans Wake*.

Large numbers of works—many of them major works—hitherto safely accounted lyric, epic, etc., have suddenly been discovered to be part of the Menippean tradition. These include works by Homer, Lucian, Petronius, Seneca, Apuleius, Martianus Capella, Macrobius, Aulus Gellius, Aristo, Boccaccio, Erasmus, More, Cervantes, Nashe, Donne, Butler, Sterne, Swift, Flaubert, Carlyle, Byron, Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain, Wyndham

Lewis, Ezra Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Barth, Fowles, Rooke, Flann O'Brien...and Woody Allen, to drop just a few names.

~

This book approaches this unusual species of satire in an unusual manner. Instead of looking at the satires descriptively, instead of asking do they or do they not, say, mix verse and prose, or high and low subject and style, it operates from rhetorical analysis. That is to say, it begins by looking not at the content of the satire, but at the reader and the reader's encounter with a mixing of verse and prose or of high subject and low style (or vice versa). Given the multiplicity of tactics that Menippists have used over the centuries since Homer (who considerably antedates Menippus), descriptive approaches and formulas are too cumbersome to be workable. There is the further complication that many other authors over the centuries have employed "Menippean" tactics, such as mixing verse and prose, without making their work satire.

The first group of chapters is intended simply to give enough background information to orient the reader in the subject. (I assume throughout that the reader has a general knowledge of Western literature.) In chapter one, I sketch what is and is not Menippism. In chapter two, I relate Menippus and Cynicism to Menippizing.

The second group makes a crucial distinction, between Concepts and Percepts, and discusses how and why the conventional approach to Menippism fails to come to grips with this species of satire. Concept-based approaches will not serve to elucidate a percept-based activity. Most classicists stick rigidly to the "verse and prose" formula, as do many literary critics. Other literary critics use other formulas, but nearly all persist in basing their approaches on outward description. Only one of the new approaches, based on how Menippists imitate and plagiarize one another endlessly, does work to a point and is the first breakthrough in many a century.

The third group of essays, on Menippism and Cynicism, begins with the heart of the matter. All of the Menippists' perversities, from mixing verse and prose to mixing high and low styles and subjects to tweaking the reader's nose in various ways, are directed to a single end, that of violating rhetorical decorum. In turn, such violations produce in the reader a dislocation that stimulates fresh perception—the effect Menippists strive for and the point of all their satirizing. Two other essays examine the same matter from different perspectives. A fourth essay dwells on a purely Cynical and Menippean conceit: doggishness.

At this juncture, Intermission arrives in the form of a list of the principal tactics that Menippists have used. It is rather large and

cumbersome, which shows how unwieldy is any descriptive attempt to define Menippean satire. This *copia* may prove useful if future rhetorical study of these commonplace techniques reveals patterns we don't suspect.

A fourth group of essays looks at Cynic Satire and Tradition. The first essay drags up the centuries-old dispute concerning the proper etymology of the word "satire." A reconciliation is proposed, using rhetoric to mediate the dispute. The next essay discovers the etymology of each of the three strains of satiric activity in the threefold *logos* and examines how each strain relates to the trivium and to therapeutics. Menippean satire is found to be the satiric arm of Grammar; Horatian, of Rhetoric; Juvenalian, of Dialectic. Another essay discusses Menippizing as inherent in any serious artistic activity. The last essay in the group gives the tetrads for the three strains of satire.

The fifth group looks at Menippism in our time. First comes the matter of how it has begun to spread from literature to newer, electric media: the problem facing the satirist today is that the audiences for these new media are non-literary ones. Second, and finally, we attempt to devise a surefire test for detecting Menippism whatever the medium. "A mixture of verse and prose" is not much use when the medium is film, or TV, or interactive multimedia of one or another kind. Some basic tools (developed earlier in the book) are recapitulated, and the reader is invited to pitch in. Test cases (most Menippean, some not) are presented, for use in checking the litmus test.

An appendix briefly outlines the main texts that comprise the Western Menippean tradition.

PART I

COMPASS BEARINGS

CHAPTER ONE

MENIPPEAN SATIRE, IN BRIEF

Menippism is at once boisterously individual, intensely conservative, and doggedly playful. The two other principal streams of satire—Horatian and Juvenalian—target some private vice or public folly. Menippism instead attacks the audience, the man in the street. By coincidence, that’s just what the Cynics did. All the hijinx in a Menippean satire are artillery levelled at the ranks of readers. Now, here’s the nub: we use two standard critical approaches to Menippism—a theoretical one and a descriptive one. The critic begins with a theory about Menippean satire and its aims and discusses how these pervade examples of the genre. At some point the discussion turns to criteria for admission and lists of membership in the Club Menippean. Alternately, a critic might attempt to define Menippean satire by describing it. The descriptions can get pretty elaborate. Unfortunately, both approaches, which work pretty well with other genres, collapse when they come to bear on Menippism, because both focus on the content and ideas, and neither can account for the special decorum. The most significant feature of a Menippean satire is not the behaviour of the satirist but the behaviour of the satire and the reader. Interpretation of a Menippean satire, then, should be a hermeneutic of the audience as much as of the text.

Not everything dressed as Menippean, not everything that puts the Cynic disposition on, is Menippean. Books like John Barth’s *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*, filled with wit and horseplay, frolic with Menippean devices, yet they are wide of this particular mark because they are too self-absorbed. The real meaning of a Menippean satire springs wholly from its effect: it is what it does. Consequently, the “meaning” in the usual sense (the content) is beside the point; it could be anything that serves to entice the reader. T. S. Eliot struck at the heart of the matter when he remarked that the “meaning” of a poem is “like the choice piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the hound” of the mind so that the poem can go about its work unnoticed and unhindered. In consequence, the real content of a Menippean satire is the user. Criticism, then, needs to focus its attention on the audience and the effect the satire

produces (i.e., to use rhetoric), rather than on this or that theory of satire or of interpretation (i.e., philosophy). The present essays proceed by the Ancients' route, using Grammar (etymology and exegesis), on the one hand, and Rhetoric, on the other, rather than by the Moderns' one, which goes by theory, classification, and descriptive analysis.

So: any work in any medium is Menippean that produces the effect of a Menippus, i.e., that does to its audience what a Cynic philosopher would do, behaves as a Cynic would. As Dryden said, it puts on "the Cynic manner of Menippus." A Menippean satire will, amidst rollicking fun, attack the reader's sensibilities the way a Cynic goes after the numbskull, robotic, *homme moyen sensuel*, average guy.

**A written Menippean satire, then, is the literary
embodiment of a Cynic—of a Diogenes or a Menippus
or a Lucian or a Rabelais.**

Menippean satire, obviously, can and often does arise spontaneously: the author needn't have joined a club or imbibed a philosophy or set of theories or school of thought. In any case, clubbishness and philosophizing provided routine targets for Cynics. They were a most unphilosophical and unsentimental lot: they never formed or joined a school—unlike Stoics or Epicureans or Phenomenologists or postmodern deconstructionists, for example—and regularly attacked one another and even their own followers. Arch-independents, all.

Paradoxically, although it is thoroughly irreverent of its forebears, Menippism is the most intensely conservative and traditional of the three forms of satire exactly because it is through-and-through mimetic: it embodies/mimes a Cynic at work, while the Cynic works by miming the target. So one way to make a Menippean satire is to mime or update (steal) another Menippean satire. Or use (steal) one as a sub-plot or as a second plot. Lucian, for example, has been imitated, parodied, and ransacked continually for nearly two thousand years. Eugene Korkowski used this idea of mimesis, or "pedigree," as an investigative technique: with it, he mapped the main outlines of Menippism up to the eighteenth century. Menippism springs entirely from a need to stay alive, a refusal to be swallowed or subsumed; it steadily prods one into remaining awake and keeping a sense of proportion and of human scale. In *Fairy Queen* Spenser sounded the pure Menippean/Cynic strain with

A
NEW DISCOURSE
OF A
STALE SUBJECT;
CALLED THE
METAMORPHOSIS OF AJAX.

WRITTEN BY MISACMOS,
TO HIS FRIEND AND COUSIN PHILOSTILPNOS.



AT LONDON:
Printed by Richard Field, dwelling in the Blackfriars.

1596.

For sure a foole I do him firmly hold
That loves his fetters, though they were of gold. (III.ix.67–68)

As our culture continues to shift from the rational left hemisphere to the emotional and irrational right hemisphere—from Attic to Asiatic, as it were—real Menippism is sure to enjoy a renaissance. Certainly, the prevailing drift in North American culture and sensibility has contributed to the rise in interest in Menippean/Cynic satire, satire that is attitude-based rather than theory-based, and to the recent spontaneous surge of Menippism in film and on television.

T H E
L I F E
A N D
O P I N I O N S
O F
TRISTRAM SHANDY,
GENTLEMAN.

*Ταρασσει τὲς Ἀνδρώπεις ἃ τὰ Πράγματα,
ἀλλὰ τὰ περὶ τῶν Πραγμάτων, Δογματῆα.¹*

V O L. I.

1760.

CHAPTER TWO

MENIPPISM AND CYNICISM

The early history of Menippean satire is clouded, for several reasons. We possess only a few titles and shreds of the writings of Menippus himself—but then he was not particularly prolix (Varro produced a much larger corpus of Menippean satires), and his writings were of no special cultural interest or “high seriousness.” Nor, it now appears, was the form original with him. Menippus bestowed his name on a style of attack that had been practised for centuries before him, yet he did set the basic patterns and tone of the form for use by subsequent writers. Because Menippean satire is particularly given to paradox and topsy-turvyness, students of the form often point out with some relish that one or another writer who antedates Menippus, such as Isocrates, or Homer, actually wrote the first Menippean satire.

A Greek Cynic from Gadara, Menippus lived in the first half of the third century BC.¹ Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*,

¹ This note is taken from Eugene Korkowski, p. 70:

See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks (The Loeb Classical Library, 1925, 1959), 2 vols., VI.8. This date is confirmed by Donald R. Dudley’s *A History of Cynicism* (London, 1937), pp. 69–70. Oehler is alone in placing Menippus’ floruit at around 60 BC; this date conflicts with the credit given to Menippus by Meleager (fl. ca. 100 BC) in *The Greek Anthology* (ed. and trans. W. R. Paton, 5 vols. [The Loeb Classical Library, 1917, 1960]), Book VII, Epigrams 417 and 418. The Greek historian Strabo (63 BC–24 AD) refers to Menippus in his *Geography* (ed. and trans. Horace L. Jones, 8 vols. [The Loeb Classical Library, 1930, 1961]) without assigning any date (XVI.2.29), but he mentions Menippus in a series of famous men from Gadara, only the last of whom, Theodorus, is “of my own time.” Quintilian, furthermore, says that the “other kind” of satire besides the Roman satires that began with Lucilius (ca. 180–103 BC) is “an even older type of satire,” in his *Institutes* (ed. and trans. H. E. Butler, 4 vols. [The Loeb Classical Library, 1922, 1961], X.1.95). Valerius Probus (first century AD) wrote that Menippus “by far preceded” (“longe praecesserat”) Varro (see A. Riese, *Saturarum Menippearum: Reliquiae* [Leipzig, 1865], p. 7—though Riese sides with Oehler). Lucian’s claim in “Bis Accusatus” is that he “dug up” Menippus, “a prehistoric dog” (*Lucian*, ed. and trans. A. M. Harmon et al., 8 vols. [The

the main source for information about Menippus, presents remarkably little, aside from one anecdote about his usury and his death in despair following a robbery of his house. Otherwise, he offers the following key information.

There is no seriousness in him; but his books overflow with laughter, much the same as those of his contemporary Meleager....

Some authorities question the genuineness of the books attributed to him, alleging them to be by Dionysus and Zopyrus of Colaphon, who, writing them for a joke, made them over to Menippus as a person able to dispose of them advantageously...

However, the writings of Menippus the Cynic are thirteen in number:

Necromancy

Wills.

Epistles artificially composed as if by the gods.

Replies to the physicists and mathematicians and grammarians; and

A book about the birth of Epicurus; and

The School's reverence for the twentieth day.

Besides other works.²

Menippus was not a very orthodox Cynic, if the remarks about his usury be true. (In any case, "orthodox Cynic" is an oxymoron.) The comment that "his books overflow with laughter" is reinforced by Strabo,³ who speaks of him as *spoudogeloios*, as mixing serious and comic, high and low, in matter as well as manner. This serio-comicality, one of the main ways in which Cynicism informs Menippean satire, is a kind of shock tactic whereby "high" or elevated matters are accorded "low" treatment or style, and vice versa, as when mundane trivialities are accorded all the pomp and procedure of erudite scholarship. Handy examples of the latter process abound in the literature of paradoxical encomia, e.g., Gorgias'

Loeb Classical Library, 1913–1961], vol. 3, p. 147). For Oehler, see William Smith's article in the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. William Smith, 3 vols. (New York, 1967), vol. 2, p. 1042. An archaeological datum that bears on the issue is that, when returning to earth in Lucian's "Icaromenippus" (an imitation of a Menippus satire), Menippus spies the erect Colossus of Rhodes, a monument that stood only from 283–227 BC Cf. *Lucian*, ed. and trans. A. M. Harmon, vol. 2, p. 287, note.

² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, pp. 103–105.

³ Strabo, *Geography*, ed. and trans., Horace L. Jones, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1930, 1961), XVI.2.29.

Encomium Helenae, Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, and Swift's "Digression in Praise of Madness."⁴

To make of Menippus more than a convenient point of reference is to attribute to him too much originality. He invented neither the Menippean style nor the Menippean structure nor the Cynic attitude. Yet like Shakespeare, whose name adorns a sonnet form he did not invent, Menippus seems to have been regarded in antiquity as the outstanding

⁴ The use of paradox, as Chesterton has noted, is to awaken the mind, to jolt it into a condition of extra awareness—precisely the effect that Menippean satire strives for at every turn:

Take a good paradox, like that of Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities." It is amusing and therefore arresting; it has a fine air of defiance; it contains a real if romantic truth. It is all part of the fun that it is stated almost in the form of a contradiction in terms. But most people would agree that there would be considerable danger in basing the whole social system on the notion that necessities are not necessary; as some have based the whole British Constitution on the notion that nonsense will always work out as common sense. . . . (*Saint Thomas Aquinas*—"The Dumb Ox" [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933, rpt. New York: Doubleday & Company, Image Books, 1955/1956], p. 145)

Menippists frequently resort to the paradoxical or mock encomium: practitioners include Varro, Seneca, Lucian, Synesius, Erasmus (*Moriae encomium*), Rabelais, Burton, Swift. Korkowski discusses many others. In her study *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), Rosalie Colie lists characteristics of paradoxical encomia. Her lists and discussion suggest an almost complete convergence of the paradoxical encomium with Menippean satire. Both forms challenge some orthodoxy via "oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention" (p. 10). Both work paradoxically "by drawing attention to themselves and to the limitations they question or deny" (p. 12). Both "remove all standards by which the discourse may be measured to keep the reference wholly internal, so that readers are constantly off-balance" (p. 18). A great many examples of both have no formal ending (pp. 21 and 35), and both demand an audience or, rather, include the audience and its assumptions in the structure of the discourse. The more sophisticated the audience, the better. "As an acute critic of paradox has said, a paradox cannot be paraphrased. If it can, it is flat and dull: if it is flat and dull, then it is not a paradox" (p. 35). This is precisely the problem with the critical approaches to Menippean satire used to date. All of the critics define Menippean satire by describing it, and description is a form of paraphrase. Yet even such able critics as John Dryden and Northrop Frye have been frustrated in the attempt to come to grips with Menippean satire descriptively. To date, no single description or set of descriptions has been formulated that will serve adequately to define Menippean satire. My "Digression" (below) on Menippean clichés may illustrate the problem.

practitioner of the form. It was Varro who attached Menippus' name to the satires.

Cynics were, on the whole, uncompromising in their antagonism to “philosophy” of whatever ilk, and to all forms of systematized learning or living. The burden of their barking seems to have been a kind of fundamentalist humanism: to the great, remember you're human; to the proud, remember you're limited; to the learned, examine your ignorance; and to the rest, discard all your illusions and pretences. Who would call a constantly reiterated “Wake up, you clowns!” a philosophy?⁵

As the satirist Wyndham Lewis points out,

...the most virtuous and well-proportioned of men is only a shadow, after all, of some perfection; a shadow of an imperfect, and hence an “ugly” sort. And as to laughter, if you allow it in one place you must, I think, allow it in another. Laughter—humour and wit—has a function similar to that of art. It is the preserver much more than the destroyer. And, in a sense, everyone should be laughed at or else no one should be laughed at.⁶

Pure Cynicism. On these terms, laughing at individuals is just snobbery. So the audience is to be satirized, if anyone. Lewis' remarks betray him as an ancient Cynic in modern dress.

Juanita Williams presents the main tenets of the “practical Cynic”:

⁵ Wayne Booth found a parallel in his study of irony. Menippean satire rewards the reader for staying awake by increasing the enjoyment. By contrast, but in the same vein, “It is the virtue of irony—perhaps its supreme moral justification—that it wakes men by punishing them for sleep.... No one can be perpetually alert, yet perpetual alertness is in a sense what is required. About all we can say, beyond shouting ‘Wake up,’ is that we should modulate our confidence in our results to the degree of alertness we know ourselves to have shown.” (*A Rhetoric of Irony* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974], p. 224)

⁶ “The Greatest Satire Is Non-Moral,” in *Men Without Art* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 109. At this point, Cynicism intersects the venerable tradition of the medieval and Renaissance court fool. The fool, like the street-corner Cynic, had licence to pick on everyone and thus served a valuable function in keeping things in play. When he badgered the king, the court could see plainly just how far the man might be pushed today before he got angry and lost his temper. When, on the other hand, he badgered the courtiers, the king (and other courtiers) could see what temperature *that* water was today and how deeply he could plunge. As well, the fool could kid someone surly or moody out of a bad humour—or tease someone into a worse one if it suited a purpose. In some ways, the fool was in charge of the court and thereby of the kingdom. The rules of the game forbade attacking or punishing the fool for playing his role.

The Cynic tradition presented the surly, independent philosopher, the mocker of Platonic universals. The Cynic held that there could be no possible syntheses of things; there were no classes of objects, only the objects themselves. His emphasis on man's individuality caused him to condemn the artificiality of wealth and social position; religious dogmas and forms of government he held as harmful to the individual.

Cynicism rejects the complexities of the philosophical systems of the *philosophus gloriosus*; it advocates the simple and useful acceptance of fortune with a peaceful mind. The peaceful mind must scorn material goods; the mean and sure estate is best. Lucian shows Menippus painting the portrait of the human pageant; fortune equips men with the costumes of beauty and social position; after death, the costumes are removed and all men are equal.⁷

Cynic/Menippean satires attack excesses of all kinds, whether of ignorance, of (as Northrop Frye puts it) "maddened pedantry," of luxury, snobbery, power—in short, anything that obscures continued clear awareness of one's essential humanity and the limitations it imposes. To hold, however, that the Cynics espoused "the mean and sure estate"⁸ is to miss the point. An alert Cynic might regard such Icarian advice as preaching bourgeois mediocrity—neither too high nor too low, too athletic nor too bookish, etc. Too often, such fence riding just conceals servile somnambulism. The schlock tactics inherent in low-and-motley satire militate particularly against this sort of escapism, and a great many of the satires (e.g., *Bouvard et Pécuchét*) take just this mediocrity as a main subject.

A marked playfulness characterizes all Menippism and forms its special decorum. This playful quality (or strategy) generally distinguishes Menippism from other forms of satire: it diverts attention to the style and to the satire itself as an object.

Style must never show for the serious poetic because that means (1) someone is propagandizing us or (2) someone is having a good time for no good reason. Likewise, style and subject must cohere into a decorum. Just the opposite for play poetic. It aims at style/subject discontinuities. It depends on puns and other false wits. It fails to honour metaphor as a god-term, ignoring it altogether or cooking up outrageous ones.⁹

⁷ "Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire," Diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966, pp. 1–2.

⁸ Williams, *passim*. E.g., "*Saturarum Menippearum Reliquiae* presents a golden mean as the solution to the evils of the excess abundant in the Roman system of life" (p. 2).

⁹ Richard A. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 113.

Play prohibits Menippists from assuming a moral stance. For moralizing seems to demand rigid consistency of attitude and tone, if not of style—shackles shunned by Menippists and actually denied them by their Cynicism. To this day, the wellsprings of Menippean, Cynic satire are to be found in certain traits of the Cynic outlook and attitude.¹⁰

As one of Petronius' modern translators observes, "a main characteristic of Menippean satire was the union of humour and philosophy"—of the long face and the grin.¹¹ Cynics, Diogenes in

¹⁰ Accounts of Cynicism are available in Diogenes Laertius, and in Julian the Apostate's epistles "To the Uneducated Cynics" and "To the Cynic Heracleios"—admonitions to the lazy "new Cynics" to adopt the moral ideals and asceticism of old. Epictetus' "On the Calling of a Cynic," less detailed than Julian's account, was long regarded as definitive. Donald R. Dudley's *A History of Cynicism* (London: Methuen and Company, 1937) is a more useful account.

¹¹ Ed., J. P. Sullivan, *Petronius—The Satyricon and the Fragments* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965, 1972), p. 14. In his rejoinder, "To One Who Said 'You're a Prometheus in Words,'" Lucian discussed his blend of comedy and the philosophic dialogue:

Dialogue and comedy were not entirely friendly and compatible from the beginning. Dialogue used to sit at home by himself and indeed spend his time in the public walks with a few companions; Comedy gave herself to Dionysus and joined him in the theatre, had fun with him, jested and joked, sometimes stepping in time to the pipe and generally riding on anapests. Dialogue's companions she mocked as "Heavy-thinkers," "High-talkers," and suchlike. She had one delight—to deride them and drown them in Dionysiac liberties. She showed them now walking on air and mixing with the clouds, now measuring sandals for fleas—her notion of heavenly subtleties, I suppose! Dialogue however took his conversations very seriously, philosophising about nature and virtue. So, in musical terms, there were two octaves between them, from highest to lowest. Nevertheless, I have dared to combine them as they are into a harmony, though they are not in the least docile and do not easily tolerate partnership. (*Lucian*, vol. VI, pp. 425–47)

Lucian defends himself in a suit brought by Rhetoric (for desertion) and another by Dialogue (for maltreatment). Dialogue charges:

I was formerly dignified, and pondered upon the gods and nature and the cycle of the universe, treading the air high up above the clouds where "great Zeus in heaven driving his winged car" sweeps on; but he dragged me down when I was already soaring above the zenith and mounting on "heaven's back," and broke my wings, putting me on the same level as the common herd. Moreover, he took away from me the respectable tragic mask that I had, and put another upon me that is comic, satyr-like, and almost ridiculous. Then he unceremoniously penned me up with Jest and Satire and Cynicism and Eupolis and Aristophanes, terrible men for mocking all that is holy and scoffing at all that is right. At last he even dug up and thrust in upon me Menippus, a