



---

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Christian Thorne

Reviewed work(s):

The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron by Fredric V. Bogel

Source: *Modern Philology*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Aug., 2004), pp. 122-126

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3692932>

Accessed: 04/09/2010 08:58

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Modern Philology*.

a comic scene he wrote for a play of unknown provenance and a heroic scene he contributed to Howard's unfinished *Conquest of China*. And though the story of his coaching Elizabeth Barry to become the period's greatest tragic actress is apocryphal, his long-term liaison with the rising star of the London stage would have brought him into close contact with playhouse affairs.

If Zionkowski's story here is too neat, her accounts of the slippery, liminal figures Dryden and Pope are engrossing and less easily contradicted by "the facts." She argues that the commercial basis of the Dryden-Tonson Virgil edition paradoxically secured for Dryden just those aristocratic-gentlemanly accolades that his earlier writing for the stage and attempts to speak the Rochesterian lingo never could; while it was Pope, she shows, who most effectively affixed the label "queer" to those who depended on the precommercial patronage system. Her emphasis on Pope's "challenge to the cultural authority of leisured, aristocratic males" (p. 123) as demonstrated in book 4 of *The Dunciad* (1728) ought to be counterbalanced, however, by an account of his challenge to the cultural emergence of harassed, bourgeois males as demonstrated in books 1-3 of *The Dunciad*. Just as in economic terms he tried to render the machinery of his epic invisible, so in gender terms, his desire to "please in manly ways" was "now master up, now miss." If this balance is not quite ideally struck in her account of Pope, Zionkowski's book is at its most valuable in showing that the two discourses can, and probably should, be coupled.

Brean S. Hammond  
*University of Nottingham*

The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron. *Fredric V. Bogel*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001. Pp. x+262.

Students of Tory wit often find themselves on the defensive. Augustan verse satire often reads like rap music without the dance beats, all boasts and hos, name-calling and nasty rhymes, and this has always posed a problem for scholars jealous of their good names. Is there anything amid satire's obscenity and invective to merit the attention of the high-minded literary critic? It is difficult, after all, to imagine Cleanth Brooks having much to say about Eminem, unless one fancies that the well-wrought urn was all along a spittoon. How do you make satire presentable enough for a proseminar or a Penguin Classic?

How do you stave off the suspicion that Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), say, far from being a family classic, actually belongs on one of the library's higher, more clandestine shelves?

Two strategies have, over the last half century, proven successful in this regard. You might, for a start, travel the formalist route. In that case, you would need to demonstrate that satire is fully a literary genre, a mode of writing as convention-bound as the sonnet and other such reputable forms. You could rehabilitate the Augustans, in other words, by suggesting that satire's seeming crudeness has nothing to do with their personal failings, their putative loutishness, but is, in fact, an inherited artistic voice, which their poetry directs to orthodox moral ends. Alternatively, and this is currently the more popular strategy, you could embrace satire's ferocity by claiming for it certain salutary political effects. Eighteenth-century studies is now crowded with attempts to enlist Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope in the ranks of the Left. Jürgen Habermas and J. G. A. Pocock have identified Swift and Pope as the first modern British intellectuals to carry out a public critique of state power. Edward Said declares Swift to be "the exemplary author for vanguard contemporary criticism." Even E. P. Thompson lionizes the Tory wits for sticking it to the Whig ruling classes in an era without a working class to do the job right.<sup>1</sup> Each of these two approaches, the New Critical and the left-theoretical, works reasonably well, but they do not, on the whole, work well together—though there are some who have claimed that Tory satire's great distinction is its writerliness, in which case we can, in fact, make a political virtue of satire's very form. Satire, in all its pun-laden playfulness, exposes the mechanisms of the eighteenth century's new print culture and thus inoculates its readers against modernity's most familiar ideological modes, its realism, its empiricism, its tedious show of the truth.

Such, then, is the achievement of Fredric Bogel's book: it combines these two approaches in a rigorous and programmatic way, splicing together a sophisticated formalism with a politics of difference drawn from René Girard and Mary Douglas. It is Bogel's primary contention that formalist readings of satire have never gone far enough. If we are to attend to the challenges of satirical rhetoric, we will have to

1. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 477; Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 72–73; E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), esp. pp. 216–18.

purge satire more completely of its referents. We will have to give up the idea that all we need to do to understand satire is to identify its polemical targets. We will, in short, have to forswear our annotated editions, stifle the urge to fill in those teasing asterisks. "In satire, referentiality and factuality are essential conventions, products of certain rhetorical strategies, and the kind of historical analysis to which we have mostly been treated blinds us to the nature and significance of those strategies" (pp. 11-12). Bogel aims to prevent readers from assuming that satirists simply encounter their victims, manifest and preexisting, in some historically authentic world. He clearly has in mind critics such as Pat Rogers, who, in a much cited book, asks why the Tory satirists attack Grub Street writers with such vehemence and then answers, in effect, "because Grub Street writing is so obviously bad."<sup>2</sup> Bogel refuses to make common cause with his authors in this way. We would do better, he suggests, to explain how Augustan satire creates the objects of its attack, constructing an other whose difference it can safely revile.

Perhaps "revile" is not quite the right word, however. For once Bogel suggests that satire, rather than simply discovering its antagonists, actually produces them, he can show that the relationship between the satirical voice and the satirical target involves something more intricate than mere battery. The traditional view of the Augustans depicts satire as enforcing clear, Christian humanist norms; the successful satire cajoles the reader into closing ranks with the satirist against the degenerate satiric object, which is to be eliminated or reduced to rubble. Bogel's deft, patient readings of Swift, Lord Byron, Ben Jonson, and John Gay work to upend such verities. Throughout, Bogel shows that satirist and reader are perpetually in danger of being transfixed by the objects of their scorn, of giving into the fascination of vice or of identifying with its iniquity. And this covert solidarity with the other is no accident, no inadvertent by-product of satirical gusto. It is the form of pleasure that pervades satire—the pleasure of mimicry, the thrill of vice's proximity, the delight of high dudgeon. Satire, then, never has the authority it seems to claim for itself, the authority of assured indignation, of a morally impeccable self squaring off against some unambiguously despicable other. Properly understood, it is more like an anthropological ritual of pollution and purification, as when a tribe bands together first to reverence and then to destroy whatever it takes to be threatening it. Satire is not an instrument of moral order. It is a "poetics of disequilibrium" (pp. 246-57).

2. Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1973).

Bogel is an accomplished exegete of imbalance. He has a knack for honing in on the intricacies of a poem without fuss or preamble. One worries, however, that Bogel may be rather too accomplished, that his readings may, in the end, be too good. The final effect of Bogel's argument is to turn the satires he examines into literary texts of a comfortably old-fashioned kind: temperate, ironic, slow to judge. Every satire in his canon coaxes the reader into a reasoned meditation on the play of identity and difference, as though Swift and Company were all unwitting and proleptic Hegelians. Satire's distinguishing mark is that it "criticizes or questions its own mode of authority. . . . Reading satire is not so much about finding a position we can plug ourselves into as about exploring the complexity of a particular moral position" (p. 62). That last sentence should serve as a small warning: "ambiguity," "complexity"—Bogel's otherwise precise and witty prose keeps circling back to these shopworn terms, and they end up making the satires sound like pretty much any other text after Yale deconstruction has had its way with it. *The Difference Satire Makes* bills itself as an exercise in genre theory, elaborating what Bogel contends is "a single, complex satiric structure" (p. vii). In general, though, Bogel's broad generic claims tend to vitiate the keen detail of his readings. It is hard to tell whether Bogel is claiming that satire has some special claim to ambiguity and complexity, in which case one would like to know which genres he considers unambiguous, or whether he is merely claiming that satire shares the ambiguity and complexity that is inherent in all genres, in which case one would like to know what, if not these, distinguishes satire from other forms.

Bogel, it should be said, does make some effort toward specificity, though of a different kind. Augustan satire, he suggests, is distinguished from other examples of the genre by its philosophical skepticism, a skepticism that he discovers in other, nonsatirical eighteenth-century writings, such as John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) or even, in a typically ingenious reading, Captain Cook's *Journals* (1768–79). Tory wit works to make its readers wary of concepts, of the illusionary coherence that concepts project. It fosters "a double attitude toward categoriality and oppositions that simultaneously posits and criticizes not only particular categories and oppositions but also the very idea of categorial distinctness" (p. 215). Bogel is on to something important here, with his suggestion that satire has more to do with doubt than with a confident Christian ethics or the philosophical homilies of a nonexistent English Enlightenment. But the problem of specificity reappears here in changed form. One cannot help but hear in Bogel's language a ventriloquized poststructuralism, and perhaps we should hesitate for a moment before turning Swift and Samuel

Johnson into DeManians in quite this fashion. Bogel says at one point that he hopes his formalism will spur more sophisticated historical readings of satire than are currently available. Here, then, is one place a historically-minded critic could get right down to work: If the eighteenth century has a skepticism all its own, then what distinguishes its doubt from Bogel's deconstruction? What, for that matter, distinguishes either of these from the Christian Pyrrhonism of the Renaissance? Can early modern skepticism be glossed, as Bogel would have it, in poststructuralist terms? Or does doubt, too, have a history?

Christian Thorne  
Syracuse University

The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists. *James Noggle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv+269.

It is widely known that the Tory satirists found the sublime funny: it was a curiosity in the *Antiques Roadshow* of ancient letters, and they were fond of examining its bottom under the rubric "The higher you climb, the more you shew your Arse." Serious proponents of the sublime—John Dryden, Leonard Welsted, and John Dennis—were exhibited by them in various duncely postures expressive of the bathos of too naive a belief in the promise of sheer poetic power. Jonathan Swift was perhaps more remorseless than Alexander Pope in his puncturing of sublime afflatus. In the *Essay on Criticism* (1711) room is made for Longinus and for that peculiar power of self-realization the sublime demands (Pope's Longinus shares with others the faculty of being sublime upon the sublime, "and is himself that great Sublime he draws" [line 680]). In Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704), on the other hand, the closest the sublime gets to performing what it describes is in the ecstasies of madness, "the perpetual possession of being well deceived" (sec. 9).

James Noggle traces a coherent line of wit between John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Dryden, Swift, and Pope that is characterized by an extreme but agile skepticism derived from Michel de Montaigne and René Descartes. By repeated tests of the limits of reason these poets find, according to his argument, a kind of strength in the discovery of their own ignorance that Noggle calls the sublime. Arriving at the *ne plus ultra* of rational enquiry, an absolute limit that exceeds the capacity of thought and expression to conceive or describe, these sublime skeptics forge the armature of their wit and the proof of their integrity. Insofar as skepticism is the positive rendition of a negative expe-