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Introduction

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Vile Bodies is the title of Evelyn Waugh's 1930 novel, a satire on the lives and exploits of the Bright Young Things of London's Mayfair in the 1920s. The phrase itself occurs lodged at the end of a memorably long parenthesis:[1]

> (. . . Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Russian parties, Circus parties, parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and swimming baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris--all that succession and repetition of massed humanity. . . . Those vile bodies . . .)

In this fine piece of writing, Waugh demonstrates what is quintessential to satire: human bodies packed tight and invading one another's personal space. As Alvin Kernan says: "The scene of satire is always disorderly and crowded, packed to the very point of bursting. The deformed faces of depravity, stupidity, greed, venality, ignorance, and maliciousness group **[End Page 247]** closely together for a moment, stare boldly out at us, break up, and another tight knot of figures collects . . ." [2] The parties attended in relentless sequence by Waugh's "vile bodies" maximise the display of the corporeal in the crowded multicultural urban setting so typical of satire.

What is more, Waugh's description of the parties emphasises the primacy of the body. These bodies are masked and decorated, they are dressed up and undressed (to the point of nudity), they are plied with food and drink and cigarettes--and there is a sub-text of frenetic, monotonous copulation. This demonstrates the profound interconnectedness of satire and the material body. Satirical texts do not shy away from bodily functions. On the contrary, they tend to use bodily functions as an index of human conduct. This explains the prominence in satire of things that enter and leave the body and of the concomitant focus upon the bodily orifices. Eating and drinking, the sexual and excretory functions: whatever breaches the boundaries of the closed, self-sufficient, classical body is the business of satire.

To mention the classical body like this is to imply the grotesquerie of the body in satire. This, in turn, cannot fail to evoke Bakhtin's views on carnival and on the triumph of the lower bodily stratum. [3] At first sight, it may appear that Waugh's parties offer a Bakhtinian vision of the carnival in which bodily functions have precedence over the spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic elements of human beings. But this is satire, not comedy. Bakhtin's view of carnival works well when applied to comedy, particularly Attic Old Comedy, where the release of inhibitions granted by the holiday atmosphere and the celebration of fertility are in strong evidence. We have to think no further than plays such as Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Peace* where successful closure is celebrated in the form of coitus. Even in New Comedy, the boy-gets-girl motif which underlies most of the plays (albeit rather buried in some cases) is a manifestation of this impulse towards fertility and the renewal and continuation of the community. In satire, by contrast, any celebration of fertility is at best ambivalent. The treatment of the body is fundamentally different: in satire, the body is negative and sterile. In Freudian terms, if comedy lets the *id* out to play, satire calls for the *superego* to lock it up again. **[End Page 248]**

This volume of essays sets out to explore the role of the body in satire through a range of perspectives, including Bakhtinian and feminist perspectives, that reconnect the voices and bodies of satire. There has, after all, been a significant interest in recent years in the voices of Roman satire which perhaps took its impetus from W. S. Anderson's ground-breaking work on the concept of *persona* ("mask") in Roman satire, in Juvenal especially. [4] It seemed to us that it was high time to put the body back into the picture. So we organised a panel which was presented at the 1995 meeting of the American Philological Association in San Diego. This volume is the result of that panel. It contains three of the papers from the original panel, those by Paul Allen Miller, Kenneth Reckford, and Jonathan Walters, along with contributions by the two editors, Susanna Morton Braund and Barbara Gold, and by two other scholars who showed an interest in the topic, Paula James and Dan McGlathery.

We believe that this volume will contribute important insights to an underappreciated area of classical literature in which there has been a dearth, though not a complete vacuum, of scholarship. In his important book, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire*, John Bramble confronted the bodily element in Persius' *Satires* systematically. More recently, Emily Gowers explored the functions and symbolism of food in Roman satire. Currently, there is a rise in interest in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin: his insights into satire are beginning to be scrutinised and are a fundamental part of the debate. This has already been recognised in a special issue of *Arethusa* entitled *Bakhtin and Ancient Studies: Dialogues and Dialogics,* edited by Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter (*Arethusa* 26.2.1993). Clearly, the subject of corporeal discourse in Roman satire is a rich and underexplored one. So, the opportunity to present the panel and, now, this volume of essays in a special edition of *Arethusa* is one for which we are most grateful. We hope that these essays will offer a provocation and inspiration for further work on this field.

Paul Allen Miller offers a crucial rereading of Bakhtin on the body in his paper entitled "The Bodily Grotesque in Roman Satire: Images of Sterility." Against a backdrop in which Bakhtin has been criticised for failing to differentiate the negativity of the grotesque bodies of satire from the revivifying fecundity of the carnival, Miller argues for "the essential **[End Page 249]** correctness of the Bakhtinian position in regard to Latin satire" (p. 258). He demonstrates that Bakhtin's views on carnival have been hijacked to apply to satire without due attention to Bakhtin's own distinctions between satire and the carnivalesque. He returns to Bakhtin's own words to show that the grotesque bodies of Roman satire are icons of sterility, degradation, and death. Further, Miller illustrates how the open, leaking bodies of satire are condemned and, drawing on the work of Catharine Edwards, [5] how this condemnation participates in Roman morality and ideology which values not the fluid, the open, and the soft (characterised as feminine), but the solid, the closed, and the impenetrable (characterised as masculine). He sees Roman satire as "a phallic form that specifically eschews the relativizing and revitalizing dialectic of the carnivalesque" (p. 262-63) and as a vehicle for the aggressive phallic ideology first described by Amy Richlin [6] which does not welcome change, but seeks to affirm past and present rigidities by depicting the violation of boundaries as leading to sterility and to death.

Kenneth Reckford develops this concern with decay and death by focusing upon the leaky body in his paper entitled "Reading the Sick Body: Decomposition and Morality in Persius' Third Satire." He argues that Persius chooses horrifying imagery which permeates corporeal boundaries and which reveals "the fragility, the porousness, the open-endedness of all human bodies, most emphatically including the satirist's own" (p. 340). Reckford suggests that the "Hogarthian scenes of decay, suffering, and death" (p. 340) in *Satire* 3 do not just revivify the Stoic equation of physical and moral sickness, but are so powerful that they threaten to subvert it. What is more, Reckford wants to locate this fear of loss of corporeal integrity in the body of the satirist himself, in the situation of his original performance of the satire. Finally, in the personal statement with which he concludes, Reckford invites us to remember that we too are present in the (decaying) body and he urges us to hear Persius' voice in his body--a striking challenge to us intellectuals who tend to live in our heads. That is, unlike the other contributors in this volume, Reckford views satire as potentially restorative, curative, and reconstructive.

In their paper, "*Quasi Homo*: Distortion and Contortion in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*," Susanna Morton Braund and Paula James explore the fit between Bakhtin's Lord of Misrule and the case of one particular grotesque **[End Page 250]** body, that of the emperor Claudius. Throughout Seneca's satirical skit, Claudius is portrayed as a veritable "vile body"--a distorted monster who can barely be recognised as human and whose control over his own body is sadly lacking. The focus upon his physical deformities and infirmities has usually been regarded as trivial ridicule. But Braund and James argue that his physical appearance and conduct have a more profound ethical and political significance. They demonstrate that, in ancient political theory, the ideal ruler is one who is beautiful and who exhibits self-

control. Seneca uses Claudius' failure on both counts--his ugliness and misshapenness and his failure to control his farting and defecation--for a broader ideological purpose, to condemn him and his reign as ethically flawed. The body of this buffoon emperor symbolises the chaos that (Seneca alleges) he has brought to the running of the state. His reign, which should have been a temporary glitch, a Saturnalian interlude on the lines of a Bakhtinian carnival, has in a chaotic and nightmarish version continued for far too long. The *Apocolocyntosis* celebrates the end of this extended period of Misrule by denying Claudius admission to the immortals, by sending this empty and broken but too tenacious body to the darkness of the underworld, and by welcoming the advent of the beautiful young emperor Nero.

Daniel McGlathery shows how a Bakhtinian theoretical approach can illuminate a passage from the *Satyricon* in his paper entitled "Petronius' Tale of the Widow of Ephesus and Bakhtin's Material Bodily Lower Stratum." Emphasising different aspects of Bakhtin from those in Miller's and Braund and James' papers, he argues that this episode lends itself to analysis via Bakhtin's theories about folklore and parody. Specifically, the tale recreates the milieu of the public square and presents a parody of epic in ways that enhance the carnivalesque leveling of the "high" and "low" categories of human existence. McGlathery sees Menippean satire as significantly different from Roman verse satire, as discussed by Miller in his paper. This essential difference validates the application of his view of the renewing power of carnivalesque laughter, particularly in an episode with such an obvious folkloric flavour (n. 12): the widow is first "a spectacle subject to veneration" (p. 317) and is then decrowned and made an object of ridicule. The result is the transformation of the tomb of the widow's dead husband into a locus for food, drink, and sex, which represent the widow's return to life. Simultaneously, through the cross-fertilization enacted by Petronius' parody of elevated genres, "the tomb of epic"--a moribund genre--"becomes the womb of the novel" with its fertile dialogics (p. 317-18). **[End Page 251]**

In his paper entitled "Making a Spectacle: Deviant Men, Invective, and Pleasure," Jonathan Walters draws attention to the surface of the body, "that dangerous boundary between the inner and the outer" which "functions not only to project outward into the world the character of the person inhabiting the body [but] is also the point at which the body can be penetrated from without, penetrated sexually, or penetrated by the knowing gaze of the onlooker" (p. 357). He sets out to illuminate the policing of the acceptable use of the male body in Roman culture by examining the rhetorical process of stigmatisation of non-conformist behaviour evident in Juvenal *Satire* 2. Central to Walters' argument is the exposure of male gender deviancy, particularly in the context of spectacle, a recurring theme of this volume. He sees Juvenal's second satire as a literary analog of the *flagitatio*, the practice of publicly shaming wrong-doers, and he proceeds to draw a link with Roman public spectacles in which the performers "were defined juridically and socially as other than respectable Romans" (p. 363). On this view, any use, sexual or otherwise, of a man's body by other men for their pleasure denotes a lowering of his status. Walters' final point is that the game played by this satire is to offer to its audience--its spectators--the pleasure of looking at the reprehensible and the deviant. This allows the spectators who form a "community of the righteous" (p. 363) to indulge these forbidden pleasures while preserving their own respectability.

Barbara Gold, too, is interested in the performative aspect of the texts of Roman satire and balances Walters' emphasis on male bodies with a paper whose title, with a phrase from Hélène Cixous, announces a concern with female and transgressive male bodies: "'The House I Live in is Not My Own': Women's Bodies in Juvenal's *Satires.*" [7] She starts by raising wide questions about bodies and satire--in particular, "how Roman satire defines the relationship between body and 'self' for women: how it shaped, controlled, and represented the female self through the gendering of the body" (p. 369). She argues that the "binary taxonomy" (a term taken from Judith Butler) of the categories of male and female is destabilised in Roman satire by the complexity of Juvenal's gender categories. She demonstrates that, in most classical texts, in the case of men, there is no discrepancy between outer appearance and internal character, while women's bodies are seen as sites of concealment and deception with emphasis upon their bodily fluids and corporeality generally. But Juvenal's transgressive **[End Page 252]** men who take on women's roles and dress "are characterized by disguise and deception, fluidity of gender traits, and corporeality" (p. 381). They are, in short, "defined by their bodies and their sexuality--normally female attributes--and not by their social status as Roman male citizens" (p. 381). Juvenal is actually fascinated not with women as much as with men who act, dress, think, and look like women or with women who imitate normatively male behaviour. Gold sees Juvenal's collapsing of sexual distinctions as a central characteristic of his oeuvre and a manifestation of anxiety about crumbling gender codes and "the rips in the system" (p. 383) which undermined the certainties of social and political roles and boundaries.

Certain issues recur in several of these essays. Bakhtin's views on the grotesque body, which provided our starting-point, are addressed by Miller and by McGlathery and touched upon by Braund and James. While Miller convincingly rehabilitates and clarifies Bakhtin's ideas on Latin satire in a way that illuminates Roman verse satire, especially Juvenal, McGlathery equally convincingly argues for the value of the carnival model when it is applied to the folkloric material of Menippean satire. McGlathery's analysis of Petronius' tale of the widow of Ephesus demonstrates the carnivalesque leveling of "high" and "low" and the cross-fertilisation through parody which renders "the tomb of epic . . . the womb of the novel." Similarly, Braund and James see Seneca's Menippean portrayal of Claudius' reign as a Saturnalian interlude marked by his lack of self-control, which is so graphically depicted as lack of control of speech and gesture and as involuntary farting and defecation and is symbolic of his lack of control in matters political. But Claudius' Saturnalian reign is no true carnival: the carnivalesque celebrations finally begin with the dethroning of Claudius and his despatch to the Underworld and with the exaltation of the beautiful, young, god-like Nero in his place. Miller's emphasis on satire's tendency towards sterility and negativity is developed extensively by Reckford in his examination of the imagery of decay, disease, and death in Persius *Satire* 3 (although he also sees satire as restorative) and by Braund and James in their study of the physical deformities and infirmities of Claudius in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, where this sterility has an ideological, political manifestation. The particular manifestation of negativity which Gold finds in portrayals of the body in satire involves ideas of concealment and deception and of filth associated with women in particular.

Reckford and Walters both emphasise the performative aspect of satire, but in rather different ways. Walters presents a view of satire as an analog of Roman public spectacle where the bodies of deviants are **[End Page 253]** displayed for the pleasure of the spectators, in which the stigmatization of those whose bodies are on display is a source of solidarity for those "spectators," that is, the audience or readership of satire who are safely the right side of the barrier (or at least think they are). Reckford takes a different line. He draws a connection between Persius' portrayal of bodily fragility and the satirist's own original performance of the poem in the body, and he sees the performative element of satire as a direct and continuing challenge to its audience, including us, a challenge to examine our personal disintegration and, perhaps, to reintegrate ourselves.

And gender issues are never far away. Miller describes satire as a phallic form of negativity which opposes the fluidity and softness associated with the feminine and imposes a rigid conformity with masculine impenetrability. Miller and Walters both graphically demonstrate how this phallic form operates against its victims, whether women or men, and Reckford highlights satire's concern with the loss of bodily fluids and disintegration of boundaries. Gold develops these ideas further with an emphasis upon the interconnectedness of performance and gender. Satire uses corporeality as a mark of "woman," even in Juvenal's complex destabilisation of the "binary taxonomy" of gender whereby "men" can become feminised. This is another manifestation of Miller's view of satire as a controlling phallic form in which the transgressive are penalised.

This volume is a contribution to studies in Roman satire, which have developed significantly during recent decades, and to the debate about corporeal discourse which has arisen from, on the one hand, growing interest in Bakhtin's work and, on the other, feminist and gender theory. It is by no means the last word. There are many other questions to be addressed in this arena, questions which these essays have at best just touched upon. Work remains to be done on the presentation of the body in satire, including the following: (1) The fetishisation of the body and the use of the "close-up" and the "long-shot" (to use cinematic terms), a topic to which Swift's treatment of the body in *Gulliver's Travels* may offer a useful analog. (2) The processes of bodily destruction and dismemberment in satiric texts--this would include poisoning and cannibalism. (3) The extent to which Roman satire breaks taboos in its discourse about the body, which might be examined through a study of which bodily parts and functions it was (un)acceptable to refer to in (im)polite discourse in Roman society. (4) The extent to which the things that enter and leave the body in satirical texts constitute a coherent and self-consistent system of signification. (5) How satire's use of the body materialises the ancient concept of the body politic. (6) **[End Page 254]** The myths, ideologies, and pathologies associated with male and female bodies in satire. (7) The use of animal imagery in satire and the confusion of animal and human boundaries. (8) The connection between the bodies displayed and voices heard in satire. Can satire ever speak through the female body or with a female voice? And are these "vile bodies" invariably associated with "vile voices"?

We shall finish with a quotation from Bob Dylan, whose song *Desolation Row*, from the album *Highway*

61 Revisited, is a darkly satirical evocation of the modern cityscape and the sick and exploitative relationships of the individuals that populate it. Dylan's nightmarish vision puts the emphasis on bodies, not souls, on perversion and inversion, sterility and decay and death. It starts:

> They're selling postcards of the hanging
> They're painting the passports brown
> The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
> The circus is in town
> Here comes the blind commissioner
> They've got him in a trance
> One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker
> The other is in his pants
> And the riot squad they're restless
> They need somewhere to go
> As Lady and I look out tonight
> From Desolation Row [8]

This is a nightmarish world of selfish bodies seeking gratification at any expense, like Waugh's party-goers in *Vile Bodies*; yet throughout this song, and especially in the final verse, Dylan acknowledges our fascination with the nightmare. This suggests that the stern morality implicit in the rigidity of satire is continually undermined by the vicarious pleasure it affords author and spectators alike in the disgusting scenes it stages. To revisit Freudian terminology, the satirical *superego* needs to act ever more strongly to control the wanton *id*. Dylan, like Juvenal in *Satire* 3, challenges us to be honest about whether or not we want to go to Desolation Row, to **[End Page 255]** live on Desolation Row. And that presents one final question to all of us: how stable a genre is satire? Or, to put it another way, to what extent are we attracted to the vile bodies of satire?

This inquiry raises central issues about the nature of satire. Should we or can we read satire as a supreme masculine effort to stop the seeping away and intermingling which is associated with those people and those activities which cross boundaries, particularly with women and with sex? Can satire help us achieve bodily and psychological and even holistic integrity, or does it wholly tend toward fragmentation and dissolution? Is satire written to separate us from its repellent characters--or to attract us to them, in spite of ourselves? These and other questions we invite others to pursue.

Notes

1. Page 123, Penguin edition.

2. See Kernan 1959.7-8. This tendency applies with equal validity to both the élite of Waugh's novel and the lower characters we meet in Roman satire.

3. See Miller's paper, notes 2-9, for Bakhtin references; for discussions of Bakhtin see, e.g., Eco 1984, Stallybrass and White 1986, Emerson 1993, Rubino 1993.

4. Anderson 1982, esp. 3-10, 293-361. These ideas have been developed since Anderson wrote; see for example Braund's recent book, *The Roman Satirists and Their Masks*.

5. Edwards 1993.

6. Richlin 1992.

7. Cixous 1986.68.

8. The lyrics from *Desolation Row* appear by permission. Copyright © 1965 by Warner Bros. Music, copyright renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music.

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