
This edited volume is an excellent addition to the critical literature on satire. In his introduction the editor points modestly to the gaps in coverage, and describes the book as a stimulus to further research; but the overall scope is wide and the majority of chapters are carefully researched, as well as stimulating. The collection begins with Pascal Debailly’s rich and detailed chapter on Horace in the Renaissance and ends with Martial Martin’s informative discussion of the Satyre Menippee; in between it covers theatre, maps, poetry, the polemic of the religious wars, and includes a number of illustrations. The work’s breadth and variety come from the useful definition of satire as a technique rather than a genre, an adaptable, transformative mode that exemplifies the creativity of the Renaissance. This is a productive idea that helps to identify the elusive nature of satire, and produces varied and enjoyable accounts of both satire and its influence. It enables Michèle Clément, for example, to argue that Tabourot des Accord’s Bigarrures are satirical despite (or perhaps because of) contradictory textual indications. The capacious definition of satire also seems in keeping with contemporary theories, where the etymological confusion between ‘satire’ and ‘satyr’, the coexistence of classical and medieval traditions, and preference for Horace, Juvenal, or Lucian’s paradoxes combined to create a mobile and shifting technique that was employed for very different purposes. The book suggests that, while theorists still favoured the gentle, ludic, and general satire of Horace, the religious wars saw a shift towards Juvenal’s bitter and recognizable attacks. Some chapters incorporate recent classical scholarship on satire, which raises intriguing questions about the voice and the persona of the satirist (François Rigolot on Labé and Debailly on Horatian satire). Classical scholarship’s focus on the pose of the satirist goes further, however, than any of the contributions do here, to argue that the ultimate target of the satire is the voice of the satirist: the ostentatious anger that makes writing satire a compelling duty. While this approach ignores the crucial connection between satire and reality, it nevertheless provides a provocative angle on satirical writing. Another aspect that is perhaps under-represented here is satire’s conservative force: it is mentioned (Sarah Beam on the theatre of the Basoche; Guy Poirier on aggressive satires of Henri III’s court; Jean-Claude Carron on anti-Petrarchan satire), but not fully explored. The opposition outlined in the introduction, namely that satire hovers between a kind of free-wheeling, transgressive criticism and mean-spirited, gratuitous defamation (p. 11), ignores satire’s normative power, which can be seen, for example, in the rhetorical exchanges of the querelle des femmes and in particular (although these lie outside the chronological limits of the book) in the satires of the Académie française in the 1630s. However, to point this out seems churlish in a book that does not claim to be comprehensive, but nevertheless offers a generous, varied, and suggestive series of analyses of Renaissance satire.

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This volume explores the ways in which five sets of celebrated letter writers manipulate the accepted rules of the ars dictaminis in order to achieve specific agendas: Baudri of Bourgueil and Constance of Angers; Abelard and Héloïse; Christine de Pizan; Marguerite de Navarre and Guillaume Briconnet; and Étienne de la Boëtie and