



PROJECT MUSE®

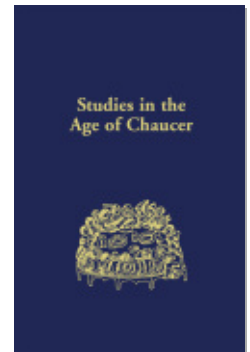
Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition by Martha Bayless (review)

A. G. Rigg

Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Volume 20, 1998, pp. 232-237 (Review)

Published by The New Chaucer Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.1998.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/660852/summary>

own interests and his readers', yet, to the last, a poet who brilliantly thematizes his own alienation.

The readings in Batt's collection add much to our understanding of an unusually elusive poet and his historical context. The contributions of all four critics provide us not only with a raft of new ways to read Hoccleve but with new approaches to the problems posed by post-Chaucerian, Lancastrian poetry. In regard to issues of textual production, gender and politicized interpretation, these essays point the way to further work on the difficult relationship of medieval poets to princes and power.

RUTH NISSÉ
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

MARTHA BAYLESS. *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*. Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Pp. xii, 425. \$52.50.

Parody is one of the most satisfying forms of literary humor. Its success depends on a wide knowledge of the target texts, of which the Middle Ages had an ample supply in the Bible and liturgy, with its verses, responses, hymns, prayers, and a structure known intimately by every cleric. Almost equally well known were the techniques of biblical analysis. In its title and preface, Bayless's study explicitly challenges Paul Lehmann's pioneering *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (1922, 1963); the texts she studies and edits largely overlap with Lehmann's, and in some ways her book could be described as a third (and improved) edition of Lehmann, though its subtitle might more accurately have been *The Latin Religious Tradition*.

She restricts herself to self-standing parodies on nonfictional works, excluding incidental parodies and parodies of genres. For Lehmann's two broadly based chapters ("Critical, Argumentative, Exultant Parody," and "Cheerful, Amusing, Entertaining Parody"), Bayless, after an introduction on methodology, has four very focused chapters, with the relevant texts (all translated) in appendix 2. Chapter 2 deals with the mock feast of the *Cena Cypriani*, with its biblical guests and

their antics, and its redactions and derivatives (such as the *Arras Cena*, app. 2.1); she interprets the *Cena* as a parodic allegory. Chapter 3 describes the entertaining pseudosaints Nemo (Nobody, who had seen God) and Invicem (One-Another, who was entertained, abused, and frequently addressed); texts of these rare and barely accessible parodies are in app. 2.2–7, in their various versions. Bayless shows that these immensely funny stories also call into question the literal interpretation of the Bible. Chapter 4 presents the drinker's masses that parody the liturgy (App. 2.10–12), substituting self-indulgence for religion. Chapter 5 describes *centos*, parodies that generally preserve the exact words of their original text (here the Bible) but misplace and reorganize them for satiric effect (the money-gospels, app. 2.8–9) or for pure nonsense (app. 2.13–17). Chapter 6 is a socioliterary analysis, very sensitively done, of the role of parody within medieval Christianity. (App. 1 is a list of parodic texts; app. 2.18 is a digression on mock acrostics).

For seventy-five years Lehmann's studies have held the field, but his sprawling work is hard to use (and not just because it is in German). Bayless's more restricted scope allows her to focus more efficiently, and her refined literary sensitivity produces many insights. This focus comes at a price, however, since she omits a great deal. The omission of incidental parody (such as openings that parody Ovid) is understandable, but it was one of the things that made Lehmann entertaining. More important is the entire neglect of parody for political purposes (Lehmann's *Leidensgeschichte*, anti-Hussite masses, parodic hymns against Piers Gaveston, and other parodies of the hymn "Pange lingua"); these are not even in her list in app. 1, despite its claim to all-inclusiveness, but they are pure parodies or *centos*. The same applies to her omission of parodies based on grammatical texts (erotic, antipeasant, etc.); these *are* listed in app. 1 but are not discussed, even though they would have reinforced her argument that parody was not subversive of its target-text, since presumably no one wanted to abolish Donatus. She touches briefly on "Devil's Letters" (p. 156) but does not put them in her list, which also omits the parodies she discusses on pages 53–56. She lists mock recipes but does not discuss them. All these omissions are forgivable, since there is a corresponding gain in depth of treatment, but I wish her title sounded less comprehensive.

Of the seventeen texts edited in appendix 2, eight have not been edited before in these versions (though most were known in some version or another). Of the rest, most were available in rare or inaccessible journals like *Anzeiger*. Moreover, she provides a full apparatus of variants where previous editions use one manuscript only and (as in 15–16) provides the biblical sources. She has reshuffled and clarified texts edited by Lehmann (particularly the Money Gospels and Drinker's Masses). In several cases (3–5, 11–12) she gives separate texts of what are basically scribal versions (e.g., the Abbreviated Long Nemo, which is not the same as the Short Nemo). This is easier on the reader than printing them as variants in the apparatus (though she has to do this with 2), and also illustrates the way these parodies were subjected to constant revision, expansion, or reduction. This results in some repetitiveness, but in a good cause; what I complain of is the translation of every single version. Surely the non-Latinist would have been content just with the longest of each type? Further, although I would defend the integrity of scribal versions, the scribes should not be followed in absurdities: at page 339, *nutrabis* cannot be from *nutrive*, and can be corrected with minimal ease to *intrabis*.

Some textual matters deserved more attention. For the Long Nemo she prefers to print the fuller Second Recension, while recognizing that the First (represented in OM) has the support of the earliest “witness,” Stephen’s mock-rebuttal (and “mock” is surely right). It should be noted, however, that the Second Recension must derive from a corrupt archetype. At 49 *dum* (OM) is needed for the sense, and 69 *spretis* (OMH) must be right against *sumptibus*. At 48 *aliud*, although in the Vulgate, is clearly not authentic, since it makes no sense here; it is not in OMALG, and was clearly added by some scribes officiously correcting back to the target-text. Similarly at 74, where the Long and Abbreviated Nemo has simply *Nemo considerat*, some scribes of the Short Nemo add the words *nec percipit corde*, which are liturgically correct but (because of the *nec*) nonsense in context. Possibly 19 *venit* (OMGHP) is to be preferred to *potest venire*, the Vulgate reading, and 101 *misteriis* (OM) to *meritis*. Another example of a scribe “correcting” back to the Vulgate is in the Long Invicem (6/26), which has *superiores*, with the Vulgate, whereas the earlier Short Invicem (7/15) has the correctly modified *superiorem*. Minutiae such as these contribute to the history of the texts (and indeed are the principal reason for providing an apparatus of variants).

No one is without fault, as Cato said, except Nobody (Long Nemo 70–71), and this includes editors. I offer the following corrigenda for a future edition.

- p. 54 “for four marks”: perhaps “for the three of them at a mark and a penny.”
- pp. 55–56 *vagam* probably “stray animal”; *verberavissem* apparently = *vapulavissem*.
- pp. 65–66 (p. 261): “who do not care to increase their learning for any other reason except to . . .”
- p. 68 (p. 273) *per predicta* of later recensions must be correct.
- p. 75 “let Nobody light . . .”
- pp. 76–78 the Zurich text is clearly very corrupt. We can translate *sapientie illi* as “to that Wisdom” and read *sicut* for *sanctis*, but *quia . . . preventus* and *non etiam . . . eligeretur* must be wrong.
- p. 83 The construction is: “We will take care to turn the authorities of the Bible on Nobody’s head . . .”
- p. 88 “But the brothers of the monastery which he planned to enter . . .”
- p. 89 (second quote) for *Quid* (twice) read *Qui*.
- p. 90 for “disregard” read “make excuses for.”
- p. 98 (and pp. 99, 100, 341, 350) *Confitemini* is imperative plural (not “we confess” as she consistently translates); similarly p. 118 *sequamini* “you [not “we”] may follow.” In other places she translates *-mini* endings correctly.
- p. 100 (last quote) *virgini*.
- p. 106 *capitulo* “heading.”
- p. 106 (and pp. 347, 351) must be “come to Falerna.”
- p. 107 *decantando* perhaps a pun “decanting.”
- p. 111 (p. 339) *Sic* for *Sit*, and perhaps *nunc* for *non*.
- p. 113 “clearly” (*de claro*), perhaps a pun “from the claret.”
- p. 114 (p. 352) “it is wicked to condemn wine and must.”
- p. 115 (p. 353) there is no negative: “lead us into drunkenness” (thus negating Bayless’s next remark).
- ibid. (and pp. 344, 352) “in the tavern as it is in the die.”
- p. 117 “paying for carnal things.”
- p. 118 note that *Lucius* is also the name of a fish.
- p. 123 “who descended on behalf of the heretics.”
- p. 124 “reborn for the devil.”

- p. 139 delete *ad* before *habenti*.
 p. 147 for “perpetually justified” read “instantly made just.”
 p. 148 *delectabilis* “pleasant.”
 p. 155 *voluerit* is from *volo* not *volvo*.
 pp. 161–62 *autem* should be rendered “but” throughout the passage.
 p. 165 (p. 374) *Florenus* perhaps a pun on “florin.”
 p. 173 “for there are no virgins” would be a better joke.
 p. 205 for “are made silly” read “delight.”
 p. 311/4 perhaps read *eum* for *quem*.
 p. 312/53, 55 (and p. 315) *Invicem* is vocative in both cases: “One—
 Another, do not tell lies.”
 pp. 339, 343 see above on *nutrabis/intrabis* (cf. p. 354).
 p. 340 for *pro quod* read *pro quo* throughout.
 ibid. *audemus*: read *audeamus*.
 p. 341 *origine*.
 ibid. *Ite, mensa . . .* (so translated on p. 345).
 ibid. *ut filiorum*: read *et filiorum*.
 p. 342 *sternat* “lays low,” not “sneezes” (which is *sternuo* or *sternuto*).
 p. 344 “rewards”: read “fights.”
 p. 345 for “By Bacchus, the god three times lifted up” read “To the god
 Bacchus a triple punishment.”
 p. 350 “thy sense”: *sensum* is probably a spelling for *censum* “money.”
 p. 353 delete “by” before “the cups.”
 p. 364 *totorum*: read *cocorum* (and translate “cooks” on p. 367); this is the
 reading of the Septuagint, and is found elsewhere in Latin, as in
 Gregory and Hildebert, *Epigram* 43.
 p. 367 “she (Mary, not Peter) thought she saw a vision.”
 There are a few typographical slips in the Latin: p. 55 *clamabat*,
verberaverunt. p. 68 *castitatem*. p. 113 (second quote) *Domine sancte*.
 p. 142 *sermonem*. p. 143 *faciem*. p. 265 note to 184–85 *considera*.
 p. 338 (*Introitus*) *plangunt*. p. 373 *denario*. p. 383 *posuerunt*. p. 401
lucidos.

These quibbles notwithstanding, Professor Bayless has produced an excellent study, and I hope she will write more on the subject. She has helped to define parody more closely, by concentrating on the target-texts (Bible and biblical exegesis, gospels and saints’ lives, liturgy and hymns) rather than the satirical intent. Although she detects the serious

consequences of some of the parodies, she never loses sight of the fact that these clerical *jeux d'esprits* were written primarily for fun.

A. G. RIGG
University of Toronto

JOYCE COLEMAN. *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, vol. 26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 250. \$59.95.

Public Reading and the Reading Public pursues two related, but distinct, projects. The first, and more ambitious, is an extended assault upon what its author calls the strong version of orality/literacy theory, that is to say the version espoused, in their different ways, by Jack Goody and Walter Ong (chapters 1–3). The second is a detailed investigation of the practice of public reading (Coleman's term for this practice is "aurality") in the late middle ages in England, France, and Burgundy (chapters 4–7). The relationship between these projects is clear enough: if Goody's position really does imply a "great divide" between literate and oral societies (as Ruth Finnegan has claimed), then public reading can all too easily be dismissed as, at best, a transitional phenomenon and, at worse, a throwback to an earlier age. For this reason, Coleman believes, the way in which poets such as Chaucer represent themselves as writing for oral presentation (a phenomenon first noted by Ruth Crosby) has too often been marginalized as mere "fictive orality" (that is to say, a deliberate or unconscious carryover from a departed age of minstrel performance), a position that derives its force "from the fallacious assumption that 'orality' becomes superfluous upon the appearance of its evolutionary successor 'literacy'" (p. 149).

While the first part of Coleman's case is vigorously and often cogently argued, the book's dust jacket goes too far by claiming that it "offers the first sustained critique of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*." Critics of the strong theory of orality have not been lacking in the last decade, and it is hard to see how Coleman's theoretical objections really displace those of Ruth Finnegan or Brian Street. Moreover, Coleman shares