

SUBVERSIVE SATIRE: THE GLASGOW VERSES

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The Glasgow Verses constitutes a formal anomaly in terms of genesis, appearance and meaning. Discovered only in 1995, the verses are part of a larger text, the so-called Hunter Codex, a manuscript Marulić wrote and dedicated to his friend Dmine Papalić. Closer investigation revealed that this collection of poems had been entirely overlooked by traditional scholarship, and that it was neither chronicled nor categorized within the authoritative compendia one uses in order to consult on such matters. It was thus established that the verses were a varied and separated compilation in their own right, completely new and unknown to critic and reader alike. Complicating the situation further was the erroneous ascription of these verses as epigrams. *Marci Maruli eiusdem Epigrammata* would seem to suggest that all 141 poems are somehow uniform in nature, and that they all abide by the conventional standards of a single rhetorical form. To the surprise and delight of the reader this is not entirely correct, for manifested within the verses is a playful satiric strain, which is not only subversive and individualistic, but also unprecedented within the known corpus of Marulić's work. This discovery augments the novelty and significance of the text as a recent scholarly find truly worthy of further research and examination.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined the epigram as »a dwarfish whole, its body brevity, and wit its sole.«¹ It is immediately obvious that on a structural level some

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aesthetic Essays*, ed. John Shawcross, London 1962, p. 167.

of Marulić's verses do not fit the norm of Coleridge's rendition, with certain verses exceeding the succinct intention of the brisk and biting comment. Wit, however, is an integral component to all the verses and it manifests itself in a surprisingly diverse and amusing way. Communicating in rhyme and writing in Latin, Marulić uses wit as a modality that is both critical and persuasive in origin, and thus fitting for the didactic mould one expects from a scholar of his stature and time. In his verses he, however, also moves beyond the instructive framework of words, challenging them to impart something more than mere righteousness and indignation over other people's shortcomings. His employment of satire as a rhetorical device grants him a certain leeway in the execution of his duties and his verses convey a distinct playfulness of observation not encumbered or formally burdened by the requirement of didactic teachings.

Rather than maintaining the sombre balance of *prodesse* and *delectare*, Marulić appears to tip the scale towards the *delectare* aspect of words — capturing and illuminating in the process an imperfect world in its own terms. A most notable admission to the imperfect secular world is his inclusion of certain erotic themes to the collection, which are not found elsewhere in Marulić's work. Scholars such as Darko Novaković have already pointed out that his depiction of corporeal love is entirely unprecedented within the corpus of his writing.² There is a certain voyeuristic quality to them, which is absent from other, more celebrated, works by the author. However, rather than focusing on thematic issues, what is perhaps more daring in these writings is the strong presence of a satiric and vigorous *tone*. With surprising felicity and deftness, Marulić uses satire to tackle and expose a variety of different follies, all in an attempt to tell the truth to the world through laughter. The question that inevitably arises from this endeavour is *whose* truth is exactly being told. Several of the more scathing epigrams are specifically reserved for an attack on other poets, making Marulić castigations intentionally selective and perhaps even personal.

The famed critical theorist Northrope Frye qualified the satirist as »someone who attacks neither the man, nor the institution,« but rather as someone who attacks »an evil man who is given gigantic stature and protected by the prestige of the institution.«³ With this in mind, we must ask ourselves how does this manifest itself in the following epigrams in which Marulić focuses his criticism, singling out a particular fellow-poet:

34. *In Iacobum Iacotinum malum poetam*

Magni inter uates quando Iacotinus habetur

Magni inter numos et bagatinus erit.

² Darko Novaković, »Dva nepoznata rukopisa u Velikoj Britaniji MS. ADD.A.25 u oxfordskoj Bodleiani i Hunter 334 u Sveučilišnoj knjižnici u Glasgowu«, *Colloquia Maruliana* VI, Split 1997, pp. 5-31.

³ Northrope Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton 1957, p. 237.

Iacotinus' name carries over to other epigrams as well, in which Marulić continues to attack him as a singular figure. Epigram 35 thus follows:

35. *In eundem*

*Causidicus, rhetor, uates uis, Iacobe, dici?
Hac ratione, puto, qua sine prole pater.*

Marulić's invective tone against Iacotinus finally culminates in epigram 47, which is aptly and superlatively titled *In Iacotinum pessimum poetam*. Traditionally, a satirist is forced by his conscience to speak out – *facit indignatio versum* – and his critical outlook is intended towards the larger improvement of a quality of life. The satiric impulse is therefore, in essence, humanistic because it does originate in the desire to wish the world well. Laughter as an agent is meant here to maintain and facilitate the precarious balance between the spark of *humanitas* that illuminates satire, and that of *indignatio*, which motivates and underlies the satiric expression. In these particular epigrams Marulić appears, however, to taint this composition of satire, by adding his own professional pride as an additional feature to the blend.

Unfortunately, little is known about the true identity of the poet Iacotinus. None of his work is available for scrutiny and we can therefore not weigh or judge his efforts in an objective light. What we do learn from Marulić's response is the reaction and stance of a poet towards his craft, the deep attachment of which he promotes in several other verses as well. In what is sequentially designated as epigram number two, he lambastes another poetic figure in the same manner:

2. *In Pamphagum malum poetam*

*Allia cenarat cupiens cum pangere uersus
Pamphagus Aonias iussit adesse deas.
Ast illę offensę diro ructantis odore
Conuersis capiunt passibus inde fugam.
Lautius hinc pransus tentat reuocare fugaces,
Sed neque sic pranso Pieris ulla fauet.
Mitte aliis igitur condendi carmina curam:
Tu tantum uentrem, Pamphage, pasce tuum!*

His light-hearted depiction of the bad poet combines all the classical elements of satiric expression: it is whimsical, incongruous, ludic and ultimately amusing for an audience, who as common denominator, may not understand all the subtleties of poetic expression. By employing this particular brand of humour, Marulić not only exposes the slovenly habits of a despised colleague, but he forges a common ground for the overall image of a professional poet, bridging the gap of perception and making that image accessible and feasible to ordinary man. In this particular case he does this in a distinctly clever fashion. Rather than evoking a mere mental

image of what a true poet should or should not be, he assures an attentive hearing by appealing *beyond* the imaginative faculties of his audience. By incongruously pairing garlic with the muses, he creates a dichotomy within the intended image, allowing it to resonate beyond a mental projection alone, and by appealing to one's basic sense of smell to make his point.

By creating such improbable combinations, Marulić respectfully aligns himself with the semantics of satire. Construed as a medley of elements, satire (Latin: *satura* = dish of mixed fruits) is meant to encompass a full variety of images and intentions. Meant primarily to decry and discredit, its generic trait remains to attack, expose and censure. By doing so, it also inevitably draws attention to the cause on hand, exposing the existing negativity as a sad contrast to a possible good. Although more tone than form, satire becomes an extrovert structure akin to a stage on which something is set up to be both shown and flaunted. Its provocative stance is an immensely useful tool for implicating emotions and for drawing the reaction of an audience to a particular side of a cause. However, despite his obvious and sophisticated use of satire to highlight what one would assume is his own *bona fide* status as a (good) poet, Marulić is also capable of showing remarkable restraint towards the same end, demonstrating that for him the topic is not only a polemical issue both practical and convenient to discuss, but also one that is close to his heart for other reasons as well.

In some verses satire is entirely supplanted by a sentimentality that seems remarkably incongruous when compared to the tone of other verses in the collection. The odd grouping of the poems within the collection should not be attributed to Marulić's own predilection, for it is the work of the anthologist who compiled the finished manuscript. It is, however, with some poignancy that one reads entries such as *Ad Musas in amore supplicatio* (epigram 46) or *In somnum diurnum querela* (epigram 129), in which Marulić laments the absence of inspiration and his own writer's block. Observant in praise as he is in criticism, he is apt to show magnanimity of spirit for colleagues whom he perceives to embody the same high level of commitment as he does. In *Ad Caterinum poetam Pharensem* (epigram 40) he bestows praise upon a young poet of whom he says:

*Est tibi Musarum certus fauor atque canenti
Non negat argutam Cinthius ipse lyram.*

Marulić, however, assumes a decisively combative stance in the verses he directs towards his critics, whom he taunts in the following self-titled epigram:

26. *Marcus Marulus in criticum suorum scriptorum*
*Cur mea scripta notant multi, tua, critice, nemo?
Hunc qui nil scribit, critice, nemo notat.*

The absence of constraint and his identification with the form reveal Marulić here to be an individual, rather than a poet, expressing freedom of thought through the literary means given to him. Vexed by the situation, Marulić lashes out on

personal grounds, without any pretence of assuming or adopting a larger societal role. Rather than pretending to represent the common good, or to air a public, collective aberration — pretexts to which satire traditionally is geared — Marulić uses the poetic form to get personal. His lack of critical detachment and failure to use even the mildest of sublimations give these verses a distinctly anti-satirical tone. Placing a personal injustice ahead of the public ones he is meant to represent, Marulić becomes angered instead of bemused, and he uses his verses seditiously and against the authorities who have crossed him; transforming satire in the process into a licence of disobedience, while implicitly subverting the larger powers at large.

It would be misleading, however, to claim that this alone is the only motive behind the collection of poems, and that in all of them Marulić merely has his own axe to grind. His verses are for the most part topical — some of them are epitaphs — and they deal with events or figures recognizable to the public at large. In the epigrams many contemporary issues are addressed, allowing the reader knowledge into the social climate and the reality of Marulić's days. In addition to some confirmed biographical references, among them a mention of his brother Šimun, his depiction and criticism of verifiable historical events was especially beneficial to scholars who were able to use the information to date the verses accordingly. These findings were immensely useful to *Marul* scholarship, establishing not only that the verses were written over the span of many years, but also that they offered unprecedented episodic insight into the wider spectrum of Marulić's life.

Most obviously, scholars had to concede that the author was more of a prurient and scopic observer than previously known. Tacitly, at least, he showed an uncanny ability to read and understand common secular vice. This manifests itself in his candid presentation of erotic themes, but also in his depiction of local figures, such as the prostitute Margarete or the drunkard Peschius, both of whom he chastises in a very direct, and as some might add, crude way. However, what is further surprising, but most evident from *The Glasgow Verses*, is the extent of Marulić's familiarity with classical Roman satire. In this collection of verses, he not only uses, but also consciously manipulates the tactics of the Satirical Greats, all in an attempt to express what he so haphazardly deems appropriate.

Both thematically and stylistically, Marulić borrowed heavily from the satiric tradition, which, in itself is not that uncommon. As research has established, a good writer of satire is traditionally someone who reads other satirists, and who will, at some point, attempt to mimic or outdo them. In *Colloquia Maruliana* Darko Novaković did an excellent comparative study of the various influences on *The Glasgow Verses*.⁴ He concluded that of all the great figures, Marulić most closely aligned himself with Martial, with whom he shares striking similarities in style, choice of language and poetic metre. In light of this overwhelming and obvious influence, it is curious to note that Marulić never acknowledged his indebted status. In the one poem of the collection in which he does pay homage, giving tribute to the great satirical voices of the past, he at no point mentions even a word on his

⁴ D. N o v a k o v i ć, op. cit.

mentor Martial. In epigram 49, *In pręsens seculum*, he cites the names of Horace, Juvenal and Persius, stating:

*At si uiueret ille nunc uel ille,
Nulla esset satyris satis papyrus.*

His reticence concerning Martial could be interpreted here as either subliminal or subversive, but in any case as an instance in which credit is not given where it is most obviously due. The relationship between Marulić and Martial continues to be somewhat of a puzzle and requires further attention and research.

This returns us to the question of purpose underlying Marulić's satire. Able and versed in its usage, he wrote it discriminately, consciously choosing whom he was to address and how much he was prepared to reveal. But in doing so, was he incensed by public injustices and voicing common aberrations, or was he using the satiric tone towards a different, more deliberate, end? Digressing from the ethical security of the doctrine, one could argue that in the satiric mode Marulić found a manner of expression that granted certain freedoms and a licence that went *beyond* the convention of form without losing the form entirely. Or, more precisely asserted: without him having to risk the loss of a safe place to retreat, if necessary. If this is in fact true, Marulić demonstrates not only a cunning ability to subvert his own readers' expectations, but also a clear ability to switch: exchanging the permanency of the inscription for a moment of stating, and opting to explore the latter.

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SUBVERZIVNA SATIRA: GLASGOWSKI STIHOVI

Za Marulove proučavatelje glasgowski stihovi predstavljaju anomaliju. No, unatoč njihovom značenju unutar Marulićevog djela, još se uvijek slabo proučavaju. Zasnovani na jedrim i jezgrovitim istinama o svakidašnjem životu, isto toliko otkrivaju svojom formom koliko i sadržajem. Promatrajući život epigramskim okularom, Marulić je u stanju prikazati čitav kaleidoskop složenih i raznolikih ljudskih iskustava, a satirički ton i kratka epigramska forma individualiziraju i, što je još važnije, izjednačuju svaki događaj, omogućavajući raznolikost zapažanja i komentara. Tako koncentrirajući svoju meditativnu inteligenciju, Marulić se usredotočuje na prigodu u kojoj se sam događaj zbio, objelodanjujući ne samo spektar živih prizora, nego i prizore kako su oni uhvaćeni u vremenu. Istančanost njegove metode nadilazi tekst kao takav i nudi uvid u namjere autora koji je odabrao upravo taj način za infiltriranje u svjetovni život. Taj posebni vid Marulićeva epigrama, međutim, neizbježno zasjenjuje vlastita jetka satira epigrama, koja se odbija od autorove refleksivne svijesti tako što se čini kao da se ograničava tek na iznošenje izvanjske lepeze uobičajenih ljudskih ludosti.