

JOHN OF SALISBURY'S *ENTHETICUS* AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION OF SATIRE

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John of Salisbury's modern reputation depends chiefly on his prose writings. The *Metalogicon* and *Policraticus* have established the author's position as an eminent Christian humanist of the twelfth century. In fact, his name is usually discovered amidst clustered superlatives and confident affirmations of his enormous influence, especially in contexts which involve the classics. For example, Frederick Artz refers to John as "the most gifted Latin stylist of his age, and the most learned classical scholar,"¹ while to Charles Homer Haskins he was simply "the best classical scholar of the age."² These statements are typical and wholly familiar to students of John's life and work. However, one literary contribution strongly imbued with the humanistic spirit remains largely unnoticed among John of Salisbury's writings. The *Entheticus de Dogmate Philosophorum*, a poem of 926 elegiac distichs, is John's major work in verse.³

Literary historians of the Middle Ages, with few exceptions, have haltingly dismissed or merely acknowledged the *Entheticus*. To Wright and Sinclair it was simply "a curious poem."⁴ Hans Liebeschütz referred to the work as an "introductory poem," and Professor Christopher Brooke followed this view in calling it a fragment, a "first draft" of the *Policraticus*.⁵ Yet, the piece offers an important eclectic survey of philosophical doctrines in its more narrowly didactic portions, and important insights into social abuses in its satirical passages. This paper concentrates

on the latter: satire of vices in the schools, court, and cloister and, especially, the influence of classical satire on John of Salisbury.

The *Entheticus* was composed in 1155 or 1156 and was dedicated to Chancellor Thomas à Becket. One section of the poem itself argues strongly for this dating: lines 1435-1522, in which John describes the efforts of Becket to recall the royal court from scandalous ways by conforming for a time to its depraved customs. This *insinuatio* (John's term) indicates an early stage in the political activities of Becket, for such a ruse could hardly have been undertaken after a long period of residence at court and participation in its affairs.

The *Entheticus*, then, appeared at a time of abounding satire. Before the mid-twelfth century, a tide of invective against institutions had begun to flow, and it did not abate for more than a century. This was, of course, the age of the *vagantes* and the monastic diatribe. The vices of church, court and cloister were favorite targets of vitriolic wit. Monks, magistrates, innkeepers, and, of course, "femina foetida" were fond objects of vehement satire. Student writers, trained in cathedral schools, borrowed liberally from Horace, Persius, and Juvenal to attack contemporary abuses.

John of Salisbury's background and personality accorded perfectly with this turbulent age of satire. He was a student for twelve years on the continent, an intimate observer of court life through his clerical position, and a widely-travelled ecclesiastical emissary. Furthermore, John was a man of robust humour and distinctive literary gifts. He drew upon his talents, experiences, and, perhaps, a measure of hasty indignation to produce his own satire in the classical tradition.

As noted above, the poem is not entirely satirical. Much of the text surveys ancient philosophical doctrines, interspersed with John's critical observations and culminating in the assertion that all pagan tenets yield to Christian teaching. The distinctly satirical portions of the poem, however, result in a *farrago*, a mixed dish. For example, early in the work, as part of John's defence of the verbal arts, he ridicules schools which denigrate the *trivium* and *quadrivium* in favour of a quick, practical course in "natural eloquence." In taking up this theme, to which he would return in the *Metalogicon*, John vividly portrays his enemies as

boors who care nothing for serious studies:

Sic nisi complacito pueris sermone loquaris,
 Conspuet in faciem garrula turba tuam.
 Si sapis auctores, veterum si scripta recenses,
 Ut statuas, si quid forte probare velis,
 Undique clamabunt "vetus hic quo tendit asellus?
 Cur veterum nobis dicta vel acta refert?
 A nobis sapimus, docuit se nostra juvenus,
 Non recipit veterum dogmata nostra cohors,
 Non onus accipimus, ut eorum verba sequamur,
 Quos habet auctores Graecia, Roma colit." (39-48)

The poet's use of ironic wit and dialogue in this portion of the *Entheticus* is clearly in the Roman satirical tradition. His repetitions of *auctores* and *veteres* contrast nicely with the negative connotations of *pueris*, *nostra juvenus*, and *nostra cohors* by which he characterizes the immature defamers of Greece and Rome. John underscores the ignorance of his boasting opponents by condemning them through their own words, much as Horace did with his bore.⁶ Before the lengthy speech ends, the brash spokesman for a speedy, practical course has shown himself to be a vain-glorious, naive trifler. John can finally dispose of this crowd by asserting its madness:

Insanire putes potius quam philosophari,
 Seria sunt etenim cuncta molesta nimis.
 Dulcescunt nugae, vultum sapientis abhorrent;
 Tormenti genus est saepe videre librum. (119-22)

The main satirical thrust of the *Entheticus* comes in the long section which concludes the work. Here (1283-1852) the author directs his scathing wit against the folly of the royal court, tyranny, monastic hostels, and a host of rampant vices. This final portion of the poem best illustrates John of Salisbury's debt to the classics.

John's grammar studies had imparted to him a clear impression of the nature of satire and the chief ancient practitioners of the genre. Although the Roman satirists differ in tone and attitude, they employ a

common core of themes and techniques which shape the genre.⁷ John of Salisbury might not have distinguished literary types with the precision of our specialized age, but he was confidently aware of classifications based on form and content. Though he freely adapted classics to his own purposes, as recent researches have clearly demonstrated he revered the *auctores* and cited them often. Thus, perhaps mindful of Quintilian, he speaks of Terence as "comicus" and Cicero as "orator." When John refers to a satirist, he employs the term "ethicus." This is his title for Horace and Juvenal, whom he also designates by the adjective "satiricus."⁸

The words are fittingly applied to the *Entheticus* also, for moral purpose is central to John's satirical endeavour in this poem. This is the social function of his literary art, one shared by most satirists. He returns again and again in the concluding passages of the work to the contrast between virtue and vice. His attacks on the manifold faces of the latter are always, in the classical tradition, a summons to virtue, which, he declares (1800), is its own reward:

Virtus se contenta sui praemia semper habet.

Of course, John's Christian faith compelled him to write with a moral authority alien to his Roman sources, though in a much less heavy-handed fashion than Bernard of Morval's *De Contemptu Mundi*.⁹ Certainly his moralistic invective is a legacy more of Jerome than of Juvenal.

John of Salisbury's reliance on the Roman satirical tradition is revealed in his use of techniques and language of the ancient poets. The *Entheticus* has some thirty-five echoes of Horace, Persius, Petronius, and Juvenal. Significantly, almost all (27) occur in the concluding portion of the poem. Actually, every Juvenalian allusion (16 in all) appears in this part of the *Entheticus*, fortifying a harsh censure of contemporary ills. John borrowed phrases and lines to underscore his own themes, and he used pseudonyms from Petronius and Juvenal to revile contemporaries. For example, a recurring theme in the poem is detraction. John cautions his readers against treacherous spies eager to malign anyone for a price. In reviling these base characters, the poet twice (lines 1515 and 1692) employs Juvenal's image of the informer dropping his poisons into a ready ear.¹⁰ Thus, John establishes a legacy from the vicious network of *delatores*

under Domitian among his own contemporaries in court and cloister. Like the Roman satirist, he mocks the slanderers who would advance their own interests by backbiting and he alerts his literate friends to the omnipresence of these dangerous enemies. John's learned audience would recognize such Juvenalian reprobates as Mato ("mens plena dolis") and Pedo:

Nam quotiens facili Pedo vilis in aure susurrat,
Toxicat interius cordis et oris opus. (1707-08)

The Roman writers provided John of Salisbury with an impressive list of pseudonyms, which he used liberally in the *Entheticus* to score a variety of moral ills. Horace's Balatro appears, along with Persius' arrogant Dinomaches and effeminate Polydamas, and Juvenal's cowardly Sergiolus. When John assails careless, unproductive monks at Canterbury, he turns to Petronius' *Satyricon*, a rare text in the twelfth century, for Eumolpus, Encolpius, and Giton.¹¹

These classical borrowings were more than stylistic affectations, such as one sometimes observes in the student products of the early twelfth century. For John of Salisbury they were a safe communicative channel with a select group of friends. Janet Martin, in an article focussing chiefly on Petronius' *Satyricon*, says that "one of the important uses of the classical tradition of John and his circle may have been the reinforcement of their sense of being a small group, an elite."¹² This statement is certainly correct; John employed ancient sources known to his literate colleagues, but unfamiliar to the courtiers whose folly became his foremost object of contempt. He characterizes the latter at the outset of the satirical finale to the *Entheticus*:

Sed quia nemo potest stultis ratione placere,
Sufficiat gravibus te placuisse viris.
Vix indoctorum poterit quis ferre cachinnos,
Si non sit forti pectore, mente gravi.
Sannas et rhonchos geminat lasciva juvenus,
Audit ab ignoto si nova verba libro. (1283-88)

The last lines imply that the ignorant courtiers whom John mocks have recourse to laughter as their defence against the learning they observe in

"serious men."

These lines, and others, clearly contrast his rude enemies with the schooled and serious friends upon whom learned allusions would not be lost. For example, John here employed words (*sanna*, *cachinnus*, and *rhoncus*) taken from the satirical vocabulary of Persius and Juvenal. In fact, Persius, in his first satire (I.62), uses *sanna* to describe the hostile reception that a poet might expect for asserting the truth in high society.

Elsewhere in the satirical portions of his work, John uses rare expressions from Roman sources, chiefly Persius, to ridicule his opponents. For instance, one he calls *tressis agaso*, "trifling lackey," and another *cíniflo*, "hair-curler."¹³ One suspects that John of Salisbury invokes such terms to remind his close friends of the vast gulf between themselves and the mocking triflers at court. Such allusions in the *Entheticus* support Professor Martin's view that the classical tradition reinforced the sense of scholarly superiority for John and his clique. Moreover, a recurring accusation of alarming ignorance in school, court, and cloister pervades the *Entheticus*, and places the poem in an enduring tradition of satire, lament for the decline of letters.¹⁴

The inner circle of John of Salisbury included Peter of Celle, Odo, and William Brito. The latter, monks of Christchurch, Canterbury, are affectionately hailed in the *Entheticus*. Brito was later the recipient of several letters written by John in exile;¹⁵ notably, these epistles contain the few allusions to Juvenal, Horace, and Persius which appear in the collection of later letters. This fact also suggests that John and his learned colleagues viewed themselves as an élite clique in possession of a literary trust which excluded all who had not been immersed in the classics.

John of Salisbury's use of Roman satire did more than offer a sense of superiority to his intimate group; it imparted a measure of relative safety to a critic of highly placed officials and nearby associates. This Juvenalian legacy would become a standard device for satirists (e.g. Walter of Chatillon and Water Mapes) who, like Lucilius, "rub the city with much salt."¹⁶

The *Entheticus* is, indeed, a caustic poem, whose sharpness probably

caused it to be suppressed.¹⁷ The biting satire of the concluding section is aimed at high officers of the royal court and depraved Canterbury monks. The former, especially, were dangerous adversaries, since the king himself was clearly implicated in their vicious activities:

Hoc sub rege lupus metuit suspendia pauper,
Absolvi dignus, si dare posset ovem. (1315-16)

and

Nam fur, consortem qui regem ducit habendum,
Non perit et justos saepe perire facit. (1325-26)

The court is called *nova curia rege sub puero* (1463-64). Henry II must have seemed a mere "boy," at least in experience, when he ascended the throne at twenty-one in 1154. At that time John of Salisbury probably saw this temperamental, strong-willed youth as just another Norman tyrant in the guise of a Christian prince. Thus, the pseudonyms employed by John were not merely "inside jokes," but a protective measure against retribution. After all, the king and his magistrates are compared (1305-1310) to the lion and the tiger in ferocity, the fox in cunning, the wolf in greed, the pig in defilement, and the goat in wantonness.

The *Entheticus* satirized the moral climate at Henry II's court and not, as has been the prevailing theory, the anarchic reign of Stephen.¹⁸ John of Salisbury might have openly assailed Henry's bitter enemy with impunity, as he would do later in the *Policraticus* (6:18). Rather, the verses of the *Entheticus*, as their rhetorical immediacy suggests, decry abuses in the court of Henry II, the "Hircanus" (i.e. "Henricus") of the poem. The poet not only rehearses injustices perpetrated by the royal courtiers but is also at pains to warn his patron of hostility at court, a drunken, insane setting for frivolity and malice:

Insanire putes aequae juvenesque senesque,
Insanit iudex officiumque suum.
Curia nugaces solos amat, audit, honorat,
Artes exosas aulicus omnis habet,
Artes virtuti famulantes aulicus odit,

Sed famulas carnis aulicus omnis amat. (1465-70)¹⁹

Writing years later, after Becket's death, John of Salisbury reviewed the Chancellor's tribulations at this time when "he endlessly fought against the beasts of the court."²⁰ With some hagiographical exaggeration, perhaps, John claims that Becket was so worn down by toils, oppressed with afflictions, assailed by ambushes, and exposed to snares by the malice of courtiers that often he grew weary of life.²¹ There is no doubt that in these lines of his *Vita Sancti Thomae* John of Salisbury impugns Henry II and his court, as he did earlier in the *Entheticus*.

The poem details some of the vicious activities of royal magistrates under pseudonyms. "Mandrogerus," "Antipater," and "Sporus" have been variously identified, but without convincing evidence.²² Nevertheless, the offenders whom these names shroud were undoubtedly prominent figures known to John's literate friends. Perhaps these characterizations had something to do with the famous disgrace of John in 1156.²³

In addition to the moral earnestness and the cautious device of pseudonyms, other distinct features of classical *satira* occur in the *Entheticus*. The topicality of John's satire against innkeepers and monastic hostels is in the classical tradition. As one reads the poet's admonitions to beware of hosts who lie in wait for an unsuspecting *viator*, one suspects that John's own journeys had been marred by such encounters.²⁴ The poet's mockery serves to warn decent men of lurking perils: a full knapsack is a likely target for a thieving host, but worse yet are Bavius and Dolo, those false witnesses who note one's very word. These *delatores* are intent upon distorting even a wayfarer's jests, and they seek to malign him for a price:

Hospes in insidiis sedet hospitibus peregrinis,
 Et malus auditor singula verba notat.
 Linguaque si profert verbum leve sive jocosum,
 Mantica si paucis rebus onusta jacet
 Involat aut rebus aut verba recenset iniquus
 Hospes et interpres perniciosus erit,
 Et testes adhibet Bavium vanumque Dolonem,
 Ut pereas rebus, aut cuncta tua tibi. (1535-42)

Of course, Catus' serious bearing belies the vices to which his penis and his palate testify:

Fronte gravi Catus vitam mentitur honestam,
Cauda tamen, quid sit, indicat atque gula. (1561-62)

One must avoid the house where men like Carinus dispense goods, for they fear any expenses. Only a whore has a fair welcome there:

Hi metuunt sumptus faciemque viantis amici,
Nam meretrix illis plus peregrina placet. (1593-94)

Reading these passages on treacherous hosts, one senses the bitter experiences of John himself in his travels. The satire is not as personal as Horace's famous journey to Brundisium, or Hugh Primas' awful affair with the "hospes rufus." However, the tradition of topicality is plainly adhered to in John's poem, not only in this part but also in the earlier portion deriding the feeble defamers of liberal studies and their pupils. Such artful ridicule embraces the social concern of satire -- moral improvement.

John Salisbury does not slavishly bind himself to every device of ancient satire. For example, he preferred the elegiac metre to hexameter, as did Walter of Chatillon and other twelfth-century satirists. His own personality does not intrude in the poem. Dialogue and physical descriptions revealing inner moral condition are limited in the *Entheticus*. One suspects that this may be due to the widespread use of pseudonyms. The qualities associated with Gnato, Zoilus, and Thersites would be unmistakably clear to the classicists at Canterbury for whom John was chiefly writing his work.

As the *Entheticus* draws to a close, the author warns his book that it will find at Canterbury those who love reading and who strive toward wisdom, mingled with others who value all literature at not a penny. Thus, he urges:

Legis amatores adeas et scripta colentes,
Contra nugaces nummicolasque cave. (1649-50)

Among the former, John identifies Brito and Odo. The latter include a host of cowed rascals thinly veiled by names drawn from classical satire, concealing real persons whom John and his friends could publicly scorn, as well as the vicious types which satire universally upholds to ridicule. Again, the true identities which these names mask are beyond our recovery, but John's circle undoubtedly recognized them.

John of Salisbury even bowed to the requirements of the genre by including a measure of indecent humour in the *Entheticus*. Genial Horace had spiced his *Sermones* with indecency, while Juvenal's rancorous verses exhibit a cruder obscenity. The indecent pervades Martial's epigrams and even occurs in the brief corpus of Stoic Persius.

John was not prudish, but he rarely employed indecent language or imagery in his writings, even in personal letters and the passages of severe social criticism in the *Policraticus*. It seems clear that John viewed his *Entheticus* as primarily a vehicle of satire, and thus he followed classical models even in the earthy tone used to inveigh against crass vices. For example, John censures monastic lusts with references to prostitution and genitals; he characterizes detraction as a tongue born to lick up filth, and the depravity of the court as a threat to young boys without sprouting hair. The latter image (*fruticante pilo*) is indebted to Juvenal's ninth satire, on sodomy.

The preceding survey of classical influences on John the satirist illustrates, albeit briefly, his reliance on the Latin literary tradition. But more, the *Entheticus* demonstrates the mature synthesis of secular and divine learning which best characterizes the Christian humanist. For even when he discloses the most base aspects of human folly, John does so from a posture of enlightenment and virtue. He is ever a churchman, and, therefore, a high moral purpose inspires his sharp reproaches of vice. In his Christian zeal and his love of classical letters, John of Salisbury proves himself a worthy kin to Augustine, Jerome, and Dante.

NOTES

This paper originated at the Sewanee Mediaeval Colloquium, 1980.

¹ Frederick B. Artz, *Renaissance Humanism 1300-1550* (Kent State 1966) 7.

² Charles H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the 12th Century* (repr. Cleveland 1966) 225.

³ Ronald E. Pepin, "The 'Entheticus' of John of Salisbury: A Critical Text," *Traditio* 31 (1975) 127-93.

⁴ F. Wright and T. Sinclair, *History of Later Latin Literature* (New York 1931) 232. See also Maurice Hélin, *A History of Medieval Latin Literature*, tr J.C. Snow (New York 1949) 108.

⁵ Hans Liebeschütz, *Medieval Humanism in the Life and Writings of John of Salisbury* (London 1950) 19; C.N.L. Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (New York 1970) 59. Other scholars who follow this view are Phyllis Barzillay, "The Entheticus de Dogmate Philosophorum of John of Salisbury," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 16 (1964) 19-20 and Beryl Smalley, *The Becket Conflict and the Schools* (Totowa, N.J. 1973) 89.

⁶ *Sermones* I.9.

⁷ A useful book on the nature of Roman satire is Charles Witke, *Latin Satire: The Structure of Persuasion* (Leiden 1970). There is no comprehensive history of mediaeval Latin satire published to date. One recent contribution to the genre history is Rodney M. Thomson, "The Origins of Latin Satire in Twelfth Century Europe," *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch* 13 (1977) 73-83.

⁸ See, for example, John's letter (No. 243) to William Brito in W.J. Millor and C.N.L. Brooke, *The Letters of John of Salisbury* (Oxford 1979) II, 480. In Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (repr. Oxford 1961) there is a chapter on Juvenal in Medieval culture.

⁹ H.C. Hoskier, ed., *De Contemptu Mundi by Bernard of Morval* (London 1929). George J. Engelhardt published his three part study of this poem in *Mediaeval Studies* 22 (1960), 26 (1964), and 29 (1967).

¹⁰ *Saturae* 3.123.

¹¹ See comments by Janet Martin, "Uses of Tradition: Gellius, Petronius and John of Salisbury," *Viator* 10 (1979) 73-74.

¹² Ibid. 68.

¹³ Persius 5.76; Horace *Sermones* I.2.98.

¹⁴ Witke (at n. 7) 240.

¹⁵ Millor and Brooke (at n. 8); see Nos. 242-43, 245, 247, 293-94, 303, 323.

¹⁶ Horace, *Sermones* I.10.3: "sale multo / urbem defricuit."

¹⁷ W.J. Millor, H.E. Butler, rev. C.N.L. Brooke, *The Letters of John of Salisbury* (London 1955) I, xlix.

¹⁸ C. Petersen, *Johannis Saresberiensis Entheticus de Dogmate Philosophorum* (Hamburg 1843) iii, states that King Stephen is the "Hircanus" of the poem. This unproven assertion was followed by C. Schaarschmidt, *Johannis Saresberiensis nach Leben und Studien, Schriften und Philosophie* (Leipzig 1862), and the view has found no challengers to date. See Barzillay (at n. 5) 20-21.

¹⁹ The expression "insanire putes" is borrowed from Horace *Sermones* II.3.302.

²⁰ John of Salisbury's *Vita Sancti Thomae* was published in J.C. Robertson and J.B. Sheppard, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, (London 1875-85) II. In chapter seven John details Becket's trials at court and writes "indesinenter oportebat eum pugnare ad bestias curiae."

²¹ Ibid. "In primis autem cancellariae suae auspiciis tot et tantas variarum necessitatum difficultates sustinuit, tot laboribus attritus est, tot afflictionibus fere oppressus, tot insidiis appetitus, tot laqueis in aula expositus a malitiâ inhabitantium in ea, ut eum, sicut archiepiscopo suo et amicis sub lacrymarum testimonio referre solitus erat, saepe in dies singulos taederet vivere."

²² Petersen (at n. 18) attempted to identify the real persons behind John's pseudonyms in the *Entheticus*. His evidence is too shallow to be convincing, but he is followed by Egbert Türk, *Nugae Curialium: Le règne d'Henri II Plantegenêt et l'éthique politique* (Geneva 1977) 82-84.

²³ John of Salisbury attributes his disfavour with the king to his support of freedom and the defence of truth. His cautious remarks on the subject appear in two early letters (Nos. 96 and 115) to Peter of Celle in volume one of *The Letters of John of Salisbury*. It is entirely possible

that the severe criticisms of Henry's court in the *Entheticus*, written at the very time of John's disgrace, had reached the king's ear. The chronology of John's strained relations with Henry is traced by Giles Constable, "The Alleged Disgrace of John of Salisbury in 1159," *English Historical Review* 69 (1954) 67-76.

²⁴ John's career required considerable travel, both in England and on the Continent. In 1159 he could write that he had crossed the Alps ten times (*Metalogicon* III prologue).