KATHRYN PERRY

"I do it onely for the Printers sake:" Commercial Imperatives and Epigrams in the Early Seventeenth Century

A browse through the *Short-Title Catalogue* reveals an odd group of texts which advertise their connections with animals, by title, animal personae or dominant metaphor, but which rapidly discard those connections, or handle them in a half-hearted or barely competent way. These are all hastily, and often badly written ephemeral texts, in which gratuitous animal references seem to be part of the paraphernalia designed to attract prospective buyers. Generically, these texts are quite

1610s go to great lengths to entice desirable readers, that is, successful members of the urban elite, and to reject undesirables—the uneducated, the upstarts, the vulgar. Addresses to readers in collections of epigrams betray signs of the anxieties of their authors, negotiating between commercial pressures and their own social aspirations. These authors do not, however, aspire to anonymity in the public sphere of print: their aim is to attract the right readers, and the right kind of public exposure. The actual readers of the five collections of epigrams to be examined have left no traces. However, other evidence—the material forms of the books themselves, the rhetorical maneouverings of their authors, and the conclusions of social historians—suggest that the epigrammatists' efforts to determine the readerships of their books were doomed to failure.[3]

Early modern culture, oral and written, was saturated in references to animal personae and metaphors which criss-crossed hierarchies of class and education. Animal fables, for example, could be used as means to instruct the young and subordinate, doctrinally (via sermons) or grammatically (via Latin primers); they could also be put to sophisticated political purposes, as Annabel Patterson has demonstrated in *Fables of Power*.[4] In the latter case, the supposed simplicity or "lowness" of the animal vehicle is often remarked upon; it simultaneously attracts and deflects penetrating readings. In his *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation,* written in the Tower, Sir Thomas More puts th

Readerships for specific texts and genres tend to change over time, sometimes sliding down the social scale, and texts with animals which drew on their popular associations were particularly vulnerable to social slippage. The beast epic *Reynard the Fox* illustrates this movement; it was originally tran

begins, “Printer or Stationer, or what ere thou prooue.”[19] The most powerful person in this tripartite relationship was the stationer, who effectively owned the manuscript, once it was in his possession, and who determined the presentation and marketing of the book.[20] George Wither, admittedly an unreliable commentator as a result of his bitter disputes with the Stationers’ Company, specifies the nature of the bad bookseller's control, and priorities:

> If he get any written Coppy into his powre, likely to be vendible, whether the Author be willing or no, he will publish it; And it shall be contriued and named alsoe, according to his owne pleasure: which is the reason, so many good Bookes come forth imperfect, and with foolish titles. Nay, he oftentymes giues bookes such names as in his opinion will make them saleable, when there is litle or nothing in the whole volume sutable to such a Tytle.[21]

Although Marjorie Plant, in her study of the economics of the book trade, says flatly that “the author had no bargaining power whatever,” it is fair to assume that the balance of power in each transaction varied according to the individuals involved.[22] Ponsonby negotiating with Fulke Greville over the 1591 publication of Sidney’s *Arcadia*, was presumably more conciliatory than stationers dealing with unknown penurious epigrammatists. Such authors came cheap: among the two hundred and fifty odd epigrams of *Chrestoleros*, Bastard often alludes to his want of money, and petitions the printer for more. He refers to the printer buying his epigrams “at pence a peece,” for a book which would sell for sixpence (the price for most pamphlets of average length).[23] On my calculations, Bastard earned something over a pound for *Chrestoleros*, at a time when Henslowe was paying five to six pounds for a play. Since Bastard announces baldly in another epigram “I want an hundred pounds,” he had a significant problem.[24]

The printed book may have been a joint production, but was not always the result of amicable collaboration. Some books are sites on which contests amongst the

author, printer and stationer are played out. The printer, typically, complains about the

sort," which introduced a new element into this bi-polar language, was not in common use until the 1640s; Wrightson argues that, prior to this period, contemporaries were certainly well aware of the existence of a middle range of people, but that "the anxieties and hostilities attending social and cultural polarization cast the 'middle sort' into conceptual shadow."[35] This was despite the fact that, because of London's rapid growth and change, many urban dwellers lived in the middle, in that conceptual shadow where the distinctions between the citizen and the gentleman were often blurred: the sons of citizens or yeomen could become gentlemen through education in the universities or the Inns of Court; younger sons of landed gentlemen might become apprentices.[36] In the lives of many of the authors of the period—Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, Drayton, Nashe—such movements up and down the social scale were played out.

An acute awareness of social status is characteristic of the content, and practice, of formal verse satire and of its poor relation the epigram in the 1590s.[37] Epigrams were often associated and published with satires—for example, in Guilpin's collection *Skialetheia* in 1598—and occasionally adopted their railing tone. The epigram flourished initially in coteries—at court, where it was practised by Sir John Harington and his imitators, and at the Inns of Court, whose adversarial culture provided the ideal training for barbed literary utterances or "paper bullets."[38] Some of the authors who exploited the form after the 1590s had little or no connection with the Inns, but continued, in print, the fiction of youthful *sprezzatura* and gentlemanly negligence associated with the earlier epigrammatists. In *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), Dekker mocks the upstart who affects this pose:

> If you be a poet, and come into the ordinary (though it can be no glory to be an ordinary poet), order yourself thus… after a turn or two in the room, take occasion, pulling out your gloves, to have some epigram, or satire, or sonnet

> fastened in one of them, that may, as it were unwittingly to you, offer itself to the gentleman.[39]

Parrot speaks to the reader in the voice of Dekker's gull when he stresses his casual approach to creativity: "in briefe, I would be thought as guiltlesse of blaming, as I was carelesse of the lines composing."[40] The epigram, marked by its elite origins and classical antecedents, was perceived to be distinguished by its ability to make a witty point or terse comment, as Dekker's and Parrot's comments suggest, rather than tell a story. Jonson, in conversation with Drummond, disparaged Harington's epigrams as mere "narrations," rather than true epigrams. Bastard goes further, labelling the taste for stories as archaic and uneducated; he contrasts his epigrams, full of "matter," with pamphlets and ballads full of "whole legends of the rustie store, / Of stories and whole volumes voyde of sense."[41]

Manley sees the epigram as peculiarly vulnerable to downward social mobility, because of its tendency to slide away from its classical beginnings into association with primarily oral, popular forms like jests and proverbs.[42] The epigram (often read with the assumption that it referred to recognisable individuals or current events) was perceived as ephemeral, with a throwaway topicality. Weever compared epigrams to almanacs, serving only for the year in which they were made, and out of date by the time they appeared.[43] The pressures on epigrammatists—built-in obsolescence, the need to demonstrate gentlemanly flair, the tightrope-walk between the elite and the popular—were imposed in an increasingly crowded market, which peaked in the 1610s, when there were roughly three times as many published collections of epigrams as in the preceding and following decades.

Jonson, whose *Epigrams* appeared first in his folio *Workes* in 1616, is widely credited with reversing the rapid decline of the form. Far from being casual or

Whether it was advertised or not, a collection of epigrams lying on a stall needed to be distinguished from others for it to sell in an over-crowded market and, despite their disclaimers, authors with names of less celebrity than Jonson's, in collaboration with their stationers, needed devices to attract attention. One of those devices was the fore-grounding of animal references—in the title, in the title-page illustration, or as a conceit in the formation of the author's persona or the epigrams themselves. There were two epigrammatists in particular—William Goddard and Henry Parrot—whose collections exploited this practice.

Goddard, a one-time member of the Inner Temple and a soldier stationed in the Netherlands, was enthusiastic about animal metaphors and allegories. The full title of his first collection, published around 1599, is *A Mastif Whelp with Other Ruff-Island-Lik Currs Fetcht from amongst the Antipedes. Which Bite and Barke at the Fantasticall Humorists and Abusers of the Time,* illustrated with a mastiff springing to the attack. The title positions this book in the tradition of the rough, biting, snarling satirist, as opposed to the older tradition of the honest, plain-speaking revealer of abuses. Goddard boasts, in the epistle to the reader, of the savagery of his mastiff, who hunts down the most intimidating opponents. The dog device is also used as a structural principle: the first series of verses is followed by the supposedly milder series, "Dogges from the Antipedes," dealing with what Goddard thinks of interest to women—fashion and gossip.[49]

Parrot's 1615 collection attaches itself to Goddard's earlier book, being entitled *The Mastive, or Young-Whelpe of the Olde-Dogge* and showing the mastiff on the title-page in the same stance as *A Mastif Whelp*. That this title was not simply foisted on the book by the stationer is demonstrated by the signed epistle to the reader, which adopts the snarling tone suitable to a dog, and elaborates on the dog

reference—Parrot's critics are "barbarous or fowle-mouthed *Mungrells*" who will be left to the "lashing *Dogge-whipper*."[50] Parrot and his stationer may have been influenced in the choice of the dog image because of the impact of a book published earlier in the same year—Joseph Swetnam's *The Araignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women*, in which he represents himself as Cerberus. Animal epithets are common in invective and satire, but Swetnam may have regretted his choice, since the responses to him, by Rachel Speght and "Constantia Munda," mockingly

"To the plaine-dealing Reader;" Parrot adopts the pose of the native, plain-speaking satirist and assumes a reader prepared to play this game:

> I could haue said *Right Courteous, woorthy, and respected Reader*, but that

epigrammatists: he envisages the stationer refusing to sell his book to undesirables, saying "*Hands off: It is not for your turne*."[65] The key to author anxiety about anonymous, uncontrollable readers of the printed book may lie in the commercial

Notes

[1] William Goddard, *A Mastif Whelp with Other Ruff-Island-Lik Currs Fetcht from amongst the Antipedes. Which Bite and Barke at the Fantasticall Humorists and Abusers of the Time* (London, 1599); William Goddard, *A Neaste of Waspes Latelie Found out and Discovered in the Low-Countreys* (Dort, 1615; facs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); Henry Parrot, *The Mous-Trap* (London, 1606); Henry Parrot, *Laquei Ridiculosi, or Springes for Woodcocks* (London, 1613); Henry Parrot, *The Mastive, or Young-Whelpe of the Olde-Dogge* (London, 1615).

[2]

[6] Edmund Spenser, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, eds. William A. Oram and others (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 336.

[7] Richard S. Peterson, "Laurel Crown and Ape's Tail: New Light on Spenser's Career from Sir Thomas Tresham," *Spenser Studies* 12 (1998), 14, 7.

[8] Peter de la Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie*, trans. T. B. (London, 1594), Ff2^{v}.

[9] John Dando and Harrie Runt, *Maroccus Extaticus, or Bankes Bay Horse in a Trance*, ed. E. F. Rimbault (London, 1843); Richard Carew, *A Herrings Tayle: Contayning a Poeticall Fiction of Divers Matters Worthie the Reading* (London, 1598); Thomas Cutwode [pseud.], *Caltha Poetarum, or The Bumble Bee* (London, 1599).

[10] *The History of Reynard the Fox: Translated from the Dutch Original by William Caxton*, ed. N. F. Blake, EETS O. S. 263 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[11] *The Most Delectable History of Reynard the Fox. Newly Corrected and Purged from All Grossenesse, in Phrase and Matter* (London, 1620); Charles C. Mish, "Black Letter as a Social Discriminant in the Seventeenth Century," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*

[16] Bastard, Lib.6, Ep.28; Peter Woodhouse, *Democritus his Dreame, or The Contentions betweene the Elephant and the Flea (1605)*, ed. A. B. Grosart, Occasional Issues of Unique and Very Rare Books, 4 (Manchester, 1881), 5.

[17] Parrot, *Mastive*, A4[v].

tometomElephant U [18] Roger Charti Cha o,TJ/TT5-0.41 761.839 380.4809 676.6394 Tm0.009 Rogerf87 t in12.5(Ea-6.25)rly MJ12.5(d-6.25)6 Fra-

[34] Keith Wrightson, " 'Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England," in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550 – 1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 34.

[35] Ibid., 44.

[36] Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 422; Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49-52.

[37] Manley, 372-74, 410.

[38] Everard Guilpin, *Skialethia, or A Shadowe of Truth, in Certaine Epigrams and Satyres*, ed. D. Allen Carroll (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1974); John Wilcox, "Informal Publication of Late Sixteenth-Century Verse Satire," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 13 (1949-50), 195-97; Manley, 428; William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, 2.3.228, in *The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[39] Thomas Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London: De La Mare Press, 1904), 43.

[40] Parrot, *Mastive*, A3^{v}.

[41] Ben Jonson, *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, in *Ben Jonson: The Man and his Work*, eds. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1952), 1.133; Bastard, Lib.6, Ep.28.

[42] Manley, 411.

[43] John Weever, *Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut and Newest Fashion*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London, 1911), 13.

[44] Manley, 411, 430; Jonson, *Works*, 8: 25.

[45] Joseph Loewenstein, "The Script in the Marketplace," *Representations* 12 (1985), 101.

[46] Jonson, *Epigrammes*, in *Works*, 8.27-28.

[47] Parrot, *Mastive*, A4^{v}; see also Saunders, 154-55, 159.

[48] Jonson, *Works*, 8.28; Marotti, 242.

[49] Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959), 50-62; Goddard, *Mastif Whelp*, A^{v}-A2, G4.

[50] Parrot, *Mastive*, A3-A3^{v}.