



## The poem known as Satire from London, British Library, MS Harley 913: a new interpretation

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## The poem known as *Satire* from London, British Library, MS Harley 913: a new interpretation

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London, British Library, MS Harley 913, written in Ireland in the fourteenth century, contains works in English, French and Latin. Among these is the English satirical poem commonly referred to as *Satire*. Although not only amusing but also cleverly composed, it has never been particularly popular. The issue has been that many modern readers find it difficult to understand its allusions to the social milieu and customs of a medieval Irish town. This paper attempts to uncover these allusions and proposes that the poem portrays and satirizes religious, merchants, traders and artisans in an Irish marketplace on Michaelmas Day.

London, British Library, MS Harley 913, written in Ireland probably about 1330 or a little later,<sup>1)</sup> contains various kinds of works in English, French and Latin, such as satires, proverbs, hymns, homilies and records of the Franciscan order.<sup>2)</sup> Of them all, *The Land of Cokaygne* is the best known satire in English.<sup>3)</sup> However, another English verse satire in the same manuscript, *Satire*,<sup>4)</sup> attacking religious orders, traders and small-scale artisans, has not attracted the attention it deserves.

The poem consists of twenty stanzas, six lines each: the first five refer consecutively to five saints; the next five portray five kinds of religious; the nine following identify nine traders and craftspeople; and the last stanza rounds off the poem. The same stanza makes it clear that *Satire* is meant as a song to entertain an audience in a drinking house with portraits of the “life of people who live in the land” (l. 117).

Makith glad mi frendis, ye sitteth to long stille,  
Spekith now and gladieth and drinkith al yur fille!

Ye habbeth ihird of men lif that wonith° in lond; *live*  
 Drinkith dep and makith glade, ne hab ye non other nede.  
 This song is y-seid of me.  
 Euer iblessid mot ye be. Explicit. (ll. 115-20) <sup>5)</sup>

The *lond* (l. 117) in question should probably be read as Anglo-Norman Ireland, as suggested by the presence in the poem of two Irish (Gaelic) words, *corrin* (l. 43; “a drinking pot, tankard”)<sup>6)</sup> and *tromcheri* (l. 106; “liver”)<sup>7)</sup> as well as the place-name *Drochda* (“Drogheda”).

At first glance *Satire* appears to be a very amusing but trifling piece, but actually that impression is misleading because the poem presents considerable difficulties for the modern reader, which may explain why this work has not been particularly popular. St John D. Seymour identified some of these difficulties in his remarks on this song and its first five stanzas:

[The poem is] plainly the work of a wild harum-scarum Goliard, a youth bubbling over with mirth and mischief. He pokes fun at everyone—archangels, saints, monks, nuns, secular priests, shopkeepers, hucksters—all are butts for his keen wit. .... Why he gibes gleefully at these [saints in the first five stanzas] we cannot tell; but here, as well as in other passages in the poem, we must assume that there are topical allusions, which, as always, are easily understood by the people of the period, but have no meaning for later generations. Indeed, the poem seems full of such allusions, and this is why it is so difficult to understand in places.<sup>8)</sup>

As Seymour recognized, to appreciate the satire to the fullest, these allusions to the social milieu and customs of a medieval Irish town need to be fully uncovered. In this paper I should like to explore these allusions and propose therefrom a new interpretation of *Satire*.

The first five stanzas on five saints go as follows:

Hail, Seint Michel with the lange sper!  
 Fair beth the winges vp thi scholder.  
 Thou hast a rede kirtel a-non° to thi fote, *all the way*

Thou ert best angle that euer God makid.  
 This uers is ful wel iwroght.  
 Hit is of wel furre y-broght.

Hail, Seint Cristofre with thi lang stake!  
 Thou ber Ur Louerd Jesus Crist ouer the brod lake.  
 Mani grete kunger swimmeth abute thi fete.  
 Hou mani hering to peni at West Chep in London?  
 This uers is of Holi Writte,  
 Hit com of noble witte.

Seint Mari bastard, the Maudlein is sone,  
 To be wel iclothed wel was thi wone°. *custom*  
 Thou berrist a box on thi hond ipeinted al of gold.  
 Woned° thou wer to be hend°, yiue us sum of thi spices. *accustomed, generous*  
 This uers is imakid wel,  
 Of consonans and wowel.

Hail, Seint Dominik with thi lang staffe!  
 Hit is at the our° end crokid as a gaffe. *upper*  
 Thou berrist a bok on thi bak, Ich wen° hit is a Bible. *think*  
 Thogh thou be a gode clerk, be thou noght to heigh.  
 Trie rime la°, god hit wote! *an excellent verse certainly*  
 Soch an-othir an erthe Inote°. *I do not know*

Hail, Seint Franceis with thi mani foulis—  
 Kites and crowis, reuenes and oules,  
 Fure and tuenti wildges and a poucok!  
 Mani bold begger siwith thi route°. *follows your company*  
 This uers is ful wel isette,  
 Swithe furre hit was i-vette°. (ll. 1-30) *got*

Commenting on these opening lines, Seymour expressed puzzlement:

...for no reason apparent at first sight, he [i.e. the author] commences his poem with stanzas dealing with St Michael, St Christopher, and St James (this is presumably St James the Less, the son of Mary (Mark xv, 40), though there is no reason for identifying her with Mary Magdalene; possibly the writer did it through ignorance). But, from a study of the matter in stanzas 1-5 we are strongly of the opinion that the writer has before his mind's eye five stained-glass windows, representing (1) St Michael, clad in the red tunic, and bearing a long spear; (2) St Christopher, carrying Christ across the water, and leaning on his staff, while round his feet the fish are swimming; (3) St James, gorgeously clad, and holding a gold box. This description is derived from some apocryphal source unknown to the present writer; (4) St Dominic, with a book on his back, and carrying a crosier; (5) St Francis preaching to the birds.<sup>9)</sup>

Seymour's opinion that "the writer has before his mind's eye five stained-glass windows" is highly questionable.<sup>10)</sup> The introduction of Saint Michael in the opening stanza, rather, establishes the chronological framework of the poem as Michaelmas Day (the 29th of September), one of the most important feasts of the year and a celebration that had been introduced into Ireland by the Anglo-Normans following their invasion and colonization of the country in 1169.<sup>11)</sup> This interpretation fits the context of the poem very well in many ways. First, September 29 was one of the quarter days together with Lady Day (March 25), Midsummer Day (24 June) and Christmas (25 December), on which debts and rents were due. The day used to be the time for Mop Fairs or Hiring Fairs when laborers looking for a new job for the following year went to the marketplace in the centre of the town to meet their potential employers. They took their trade tool(s) with them to show what kind of work they could offer.<sup>12)</sup> It explains why various traders and artisans appear in the verse as well as friars and the secular clergy who took the opportunity to preach to large crowds or to collect money.<sup>13)</sup> Secondly, Michaelmas Day is also called Goose Day because geese hatched in spring were now ready to be sold for market at the beginning of Michaelmas.<sup>14)</sup> Traditionally, Irish families celebrated the day by having a roast goose, and farmers gave geese to the poor.<sup>15)</sup> Geese are

mentioned twice: in the fifth stanza *fure and tuenti wildges* (l. 27)<sup>16)</sup> follow Saint Francis together with other birds; and a “goshorne” (i. e. a terrible noise like the honking of a goose)<sup>17)</sup> is mentioned in stanza 19 (l. 111).<sup>18)</sup> Thirdly, the same stanza may contain a reference to Saint Michael hurling Satan from heaven. According to English folklore the devil fell onto a blackberry bush and was so angry that he spat or urinated on the fruit. That is why they say one should not pick blackberries after Michaelmas Day.<sup>19)</sup> Stanza 19 seems to allude to this story of the devil’s landing on a bush.

Fi a debles°, kaites° that kemith° the wolle,                      *Fie upon devils, rascals, comb*  
 Al the schindes° of the tronn° an heigh opon yur sculle!                      *shames, scale*  
 Ye makid me sech a goshorne° ouer al the woves°,                      *terrible noise, torment*  
 Ther-for Ich makid on of you sit opon a hechil°.                      *flax-comb*  
 He was noble clerk and gode  
 That this dep lore vnderstode. (ll. 109-14)

The devil in this stanza is represented as a dishonest wretch who cards the wool and who is consigned, not to a blackberry bush, but to a *hechil* (“hackle” or “flax-comb”) full of needles.<sup>20)</sup> The *tronn* (l. 110) is a large pair of scales on a high post, located in the marketplace to weigh goods, which also served as a pillory.<sup>21)</sup> The author wishes that the wool-combers in the poem should be punished with their head and hands locked high up into the pillory because they cheat their customers in weighing the wool they sell them. The wretch in the pillory protests loudly like a *goshorne*, so that the author eventually lets him down— but only to re-locate him on his flax-comb, which then pricks his body, as the blackberry bush had pricked the devil’s.

Another reason why it is appropriate that Saint Michael should appear in the first stanza is that he was the patron of mariners in Normandy,<sup>21)</sup> the territory from which the ancestors of the Anglo-Normans originally came.

Many foreign merchants traveled to towns where large-scale markets were held.<sup>22)</sup> That custom would explain why the next stanza is about Saint Christopher who was the recognized patron of mariners, ferrymen and travelers of all kinds.<sup>23)</sup> Travelling traders always sought his protection since merchants transporting goods were constantly under attack on the highways or from pirates, and frequently got robbed or were held captive for large ransom.<sup>24)</sup> Many

churches had an image or statue of St Christopher, usually located opposite the south door; travelers would stop there to pray for a safe journey before they set off, and thank the saint when they returned.<sup>25)</sup>

The saint in this stanza is depicted as a man carrying Christ across a body of water with a long staff in his hand. So far, this image of the saint is conventional, but what is unusual is the mention of many huge conger eels swimming around his feet. The image of the saint surrounded by many eels might represent the fact that there were so many weirs to catch eels and salmon in Ireland.<sup>26)</sup> Eels were a very important and desirable source of fresh food in the middle ages because they could be kept alive for long periods in running water.<sup>27)</sup>

It also seems strange that the author asks the saint how many herring one can buy for a penny at West Cheap in London. Herring was the most important sea-fish export from Ireland. The Irish Sea fishery, closely connected to the ports of County Dublin and the Pale, enjoyed ample herring supplies.<sup>28)</sup> Michaelmas Day marked the end of the fishing season and by then they had cured or salted a lot of herring to preserve and sell it.<sup>29)</sup> Thus Saint Christopher might represent a shipman/fisherman/merchant coming over the sea for trade in Ireland on Michaelmas Day. As a traveler, he presumably knew the prices of similar commodities in London; he might have been involved in international trade like Chaucer's Merchant of the General Prologue.<sup>30)</sup>

The third stanza is the most problematic. There is no doubt that the *Seint Mari bastard* mentioned there is Saint James the Less, as explained above by Seymour<sup>31)</sup>. Given that Saint Michael in the first stanza wears a long kirtle and holds a long spear while Saint Christopher in the next stanza carries Christ on his back, supporting himself with a long staff, the audience would therefore expect in stanza three something iconic of Saint James. The saint is conventionally depicted with a fuller's club since he was smashed on the head by that tool and died after he was thrown off the summit of the Temple and stoned.<sup>32)</sup> The poem, however, says, "Your custom was to be well dressed. You carry a box in your hand painted all of gold. You used to be generous; give us some of your spices" (ll. 14-16). It is possible that because of his association with a fuller's club Saint James came to represent a wool trader and even a rich international merchant. The box in his hand might signify a safe because it is known that in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries most Irish wool exports were managed by Italian merchant bankers.<sup>33)</sup>

The third stanza presents another problem: *the Maudelein is sone* is rather mystifying because Saint James was not Magdalene's son; there is no mention in the Gospels of Magdalene's having a son. Moreover, Seymour's comment that "there is no reason for identifying her [i.e. *Seint Mari*] with Mary Magdalene; possibly the writer did it through ignorance",<sup>34)</sup> seems unlikely for this clever and witty author. One possibility is that "Magdalene's son" simply denotes a bastard since Magdalene used to be a prostitute.<sup>35)</sup> The other possibility is that *Mari* and *Maudelein*, in the context of Saint Christopher as the mariner's guide, refer to the names of ships; certainly "Mary" and "Magdalene" were very common names for a ship.<sup>36)</sup> Interestingly, "Saint Mary's bastard" and "Magdalene's son" (l. 13) are in apposition in the first line of this stanza. The putative wealthy trader might have owned ships with these names. The word *bastard* is a derivative of Old French *bast*, a packsaddle, with the Old French suffix, *-ard*, used as a masculine formative morpheme, intensive, and often pejorative.<sup>37)</sup> "Mary's bastard" might then be interpreted as a shipman/trader who carries packs of merchandise and "rides" a ship called Mary just as a packsaddle sits on a horse.

Now the scene changes from the sea to the waterfront: one sees all manner of people one might have come across in the marketplace of a medieval Irish town on Michaelmas Day. Among these would be the friars, taking advantage of the occasion to preach to large crowds; many of them stood a very good chance of collecting money.

Hence the reference in the fourth stanza to Saint Dominic with the a long staff whose end is "crooked like a hook" (l. 20). This is apparently a crosier, a symbol of office usually associated with a bishop, not a friar.<sup>38)</sup> The saint also carries a book, which the author "thinks" is a Bible, but curiously enough the book is on his back. In the conventional image Saint Dominic holds a book in his hand, but our Dominic does not, presumably because the saint is depicted as if he were a bishop, whose right hand is supposed to be free to bestow blessings. We can imagine Dominican friars walking around on the street pontificating like a bishops. That is why the author warns Saint Dominic not to be too proud (*be thou noght to heigh*) (l. 22).<sup>39)</sup>

In the next stanza various kinds of birds, including twenty-four wild geese and a peacock, are following Saint Francis, who is well known to have preached to birds.<sup>40)</sup> Many bold beggars are also coming behind him. They are clearly Franciscan friars who as mendicants begging in shabby clothes were often looked down upon and called beggars in medieval Ireland.<sup>41)</sup> Both



peacocks and wild geese made a good dinner in the middle ages, so the bold beggars following them in the poem might represent Franciscan friars going to preach in order to gain free meals.<sup>42)</sup> It may be significant that while Saint Francis is hardly presented in a flattering light, he is not severely satirized here—unlike Saint Dominic.

The next five stanzas do not directly address saints of religious orders individually but rather their members collectively. First, “friars with the white copes” (l. 31), namely, Carmelites,<sup>43)</sup> are targeted.

Hail be ye freris with the white copis!  
 Ye habbith a hus at Drochda war men makith ropis.  
 Euir ye beth roilend the londis al a-bute;  
 Of the watir daissers ye robbith the churchis. (ll. 31-4)

The mention of their “house at Drogheda where ropes are made” agrees with the fact that the Carmelites had established a friary in Drogheda around 1300<sup>44)</sup> and that the town was famous for its ropes. They are “wandering idly all about the lands” and “rob the churches of the water dashers” (i.e. aspergilliums or sprinklers for holy water) (ll. 32-4). This probably should not be taken literally: it is more likely that the Carmelites infringed on the rights of the secular clergy to perform blessing rituals which required sprinkling holy water, thereby depriving them of a significant source of income.<sup>45)</sup> The poem’s description of their *roilend* “wandering” around (l. 33), may accurately reflect the activity of priests moving about while sprinkling the public.

In the next stanza “Williamites hermits” with their black robes are Austin friars.<sup>46)</sup>

Hail be ye Gilmins with yur blake gunes!  
 Ye leuith the wildirnis and filleth the tiuns.  
 Menur with-oute and prechur with-inne,  
 Yur abite is of gadering, that is mochil schame. (ll. 37-40)

Like the Carmelites this order also originated as hermits, but changed its contemplative lifestyle to that of mendicants.<sup>47)</sup> That is why they “leave the wilderness and fill the towns; minors without and preachers within”, while they pursue their “customary practice of

collecting money” (ll. 38-40).

They are followed by corrupt monks drinking ale and wine all day.<sup>48)</sup> They “discipline frequently with Saint Benedict’s scourge” (l. 46); however, this behavior is inimical to Saint Benedict’s spirit. He was well known for his moderation, stipulating in his Rule that, “... in his [i.e. the monk’s] corrections, let him act with prudence, and not go too far, lest while he seeketh too eagerly to scrape off the rust, the vessel be broken.”<sup>49)</sup>

The author next addresses the nuns of Saint Mary’s house:

Hail be ye nonnes of Seint Mari house,  
 Goddes bourmaidnes and his owen spouse!  
 Ofte mistredith° ye yur schone, yur fet beth ful tendre; *tread amiss*  
 Datheit° the sotter that tawith yure lethir! (ll. 49-52) *a curse on*

The nuns are called *bourmaidnes*, “chambermaids”, a word with another meaning, that is, women of a *bour*, or a bedroom. Perhaps taking his cue from the latter meaning the author says, “You often dance inappropriately”, in other words, “you often lose your chastity” (l. 51). Since their feet “are very tender”, the following line, “A curse on the shoemaker who dresses your leather to make it soft!” might imply shoemakers trying to make love to the young nuns. The verb, *tauen*, denotes preparing an animal skin for use, by dressing or treating it to produce a supple white leather.<sup>50)</sup> The tenth stanza castigates the last category of religious, the secular priests, who have beautiful curly locks and only distribute alms in a niggardly fashion.

The next nine stanzas describe petty retail traders and small-scale artisans. They are all depicted as dishonest, sinful and degenerate members of the community. The first of these are merchants:

Hail be ye marchans with yur gret packes  
 Of draperie, auoir depeise, and yur wol sakes,  
 Gold, siluer, stones, riche markes and ek pundes!  
 Litel yiue ye ther-of to the wrech pouer. (ll. 61-4)

They carry “large packages of cloth, avoirdupois (i.e. goods bought or sold by weight),<sup>51)</sup> gold,

silver, precious stones and large sums of marks and pounds but give little of them to the miserable poor” (ll. 61-4). The avoirdupois weight system was introduced in England in about 1300 and at that time it was used especially to weigh wool sold in bulk on large balances.<sup>52)</sup> “Marks and pounds” denote money here,<sup>53)</sup> but the mark and the pound were also units of mass used for precious metals such as gold and silver.<sup>54)</sup> These mercantile terms highlight the fraud and dishonesty of merchants notorious for manipulating weights and measurements in their transactions.

Next come tailors who cannot make hoods in a proper shape but are very busy sewing to make warm clothes in preparation for midwinter. “Though their seams look fine, they do not last long” (l. 70), suggesting that they produce defective goods. Then follow *sutters* or shoemakers with many tools, whose teeth are black and disgusting (ll. 73-6). They were detested so much that the word *sutter* (“shoemaker”) was used as a curse in Middle English.<sup>55)</sup> Their teeth were dark and filthy presumably because they bit on greased thread with their mouth and pulled it through their teeth when sewing shoes. Even more repulsive are the skimmers:

Hail be ye skimmers with yure drench kiue°	<i>a vat (for soaking hides)</i>
Who-so smellith therto, wo is him aliue,	
Whan that hit thornnerith° ye mote ther in schite.	<i>thunders</i>
Datheit yur curteisie, ye stinketh° al the strete!	
Worth hit were that he wer king	
That ditid° this trie thing. (ll. 79-84)	<i>composed</i>

They work with a poisonous “vat” and “whoever sniffs it, it is woeful to him who is alive” (ll. 79-80). The author is relentless in attacking them: “When it thunders [which, probably, means when you fart or your bowels rumble loud], you may void excrement in it. A curse on your manners. You stink up the whole street” (ll. 81-2). Skimmers’ work, indeed, involved several unpleasant stages in the manufacturing process, such as scraping the underlayer of fat from the skin, soaking the skin in a vat full of very smelly liquid which included urine. When the author curses their “manners”, he ironically uses the elegant word borrowed from Anglo-French, *curteisie*. With a touch of wicked irony he uses the word *king*, as well as the borrowings from

Old French, *ditid* (“composed”) and *trie* (“excellent”), in this most disgusting stanza, to boast about what a good poet he is: “He who composed this excellent thing would deserve to be a king”) (ll. 83-4).

Potters are described next:

Hail be ye potters with yur bole ax!  
 Fair beth yur barmhatres°, yolow beth yur fax°. *aprons, hair*  
 Ye stondith at the schamil°, brod ferlich° berness°, *stall, terrible, men*  
 Fleis yow folowithe, ye swolowith y-now. (ll. 85-8)

They hold an ax for cutting wood that is obviously intended as fuel for the kiln; they wear a dirty<sup>56)</sup> apron and have “yellow” hair, which could mean blond, but in this context probably refers to yellowish brown hair discoloured by dried clay.<sup>57)</sup> They are so filthy that flies follow them; the potters swallow enough of them (l. 88).<sup>58)</sup> Next, the verse on bakers tells how they make a variety of many small loaves of bread; contrary to God’s law, they scrimp on the proper weight of flour. They bake small loaves because the medieval assize of bread was designed to allow bakers to make profits in terms of the number of loaves sold rather than wheat purchased.<sup>59)</sup> The author warns that they should take heed not to be locked in the pillory.

Brewers serve drink throughout the towns with vessels of a gallon, a half-gallon and a quart; however, the next line goes:

Yur thowmes berrith moche awai, schame hab the gyle,  
 Beth iwar of the coking stole, the lak is dep and hori. (ll. 99-100)

According to the poet, their thumb-measures take much away, for which fraudulent behavior they should “take heed of the cucking stool; the lake is deep and dirty”.

*Hokesters* or petty peddlers are selling “candles, pails, iron pots, tripe, cows’ feet and sheep’s heads” down by the lake. Their living conditions are by no means hygienic.

Hail be ye hokesters dun bi the lake,  
 With candles and golokes and the pottes blak,

Tripis and kine fete and schepen heuedes!  
 With the hori tromcheri hori is yure inne.  
 He is sori of his lif  
 That is fast to such a wif. (ll. 103-8)

The booth is dirty with filthy *tromcheri* or liver (from the Old Irish word, *tromchride*),<sup>60)</sup> an aspect rhetorically emphasised by positioning the adjective *hori*, both before and after *tromcheri*, and rhyming the two in line 106. These vendors did business by the lake presumably because it was convenient for them to have water at hand when they dealt with gutting carcasses. There is no doubt that the peddlers are women: the author makes fun of them in the last two lines of this stanza, “He who is intimate with such a woman is ashamed of his life.”<sup>61)</sup>

The next stanza is about deceitful carders whom the author calls devils. They are probably female, too, because carding was usually a female profession in the middle ages.<sup>62)</sup> As already argued above,<sup>63)</sup> this stanza may allude to the story of Saint Michael throwing a devil onto a bush, thereby creating a *goshorne* or an obnoxious cry like that of geese, which no doubt people often heard on Michaelmas Day. In the next and last stanza the author concludes the poem cheerfully by asking the audience to drink much and make merry to their hearts’ content.<sup>64)</sup>

As we have seen, *Satire* is set in the marketplace of an Irish town on Michaelmas Day. It was an important day for different kinds of people. Not only markets and fairs were held then, but also rents and tithes were due and people advertised themselves to find a job for the next year.<sup>65)</sup> Thus the marketplace became a center of social interaction. Friars and monks also showed up for preaching. In addition, the mayor was elected on Michaelmas Day and for this occasion a troop of traders and artisans marched in procession.<sup>66)</sup>

*Satire* is composed so well that we can easily imagine an audience happily drinking and laughing while listening to the song. A striking characteristic of the poem is that all its stanzas, except for three, begin with the interjection, *hail*, addressing saints or people. It is a word used for a salutation usually showing respect or reverence,<sup>67)</sup> but it could be a pun on “hale” denoting “wassail” or “to your health”, which seems appropriate for a drinking song. The poem, however,

is not just intended for entertainment or fun; rather it is a harsh indictment in the manner of estates satire against the deadly sins, avarice in particular, as manifested in the blatant commercialism of everyday life in this medieval Anglo-Norman town.

The image of the world as a marketplace in medieval sermons has been noted by Siegfried Wenzel, who cited a passage from *Fasciculus morum*, a handbook for preachers written in Latin in the early fourteenth century.<sup>68)</sup>

The world is a deceitful marketplace [*forum*]. In a marketplace everything is sold and bought, and sellers and buyers mutually cheat each other. So in this world many desirable wares are displayed, and among its merchants there is hardly one that does good....Likewise, just as a marketplace now is filled with people and many goods, joyful and glamorous, and in a little while all go home, some with gain and some with a loss, and suddenly the market becomes deserted, ugly, and hateful—just so it goes with this world....”All things have passed as a shadow and as a ship that passes over the sea” [Wisdom 5:9f].

Seymour’s characterisation of *Satire* as “plainly the work of a wild harum-scarum Goliard, a youth bubbling over with mirth and mischief” hardly seems accurate.<sup>69)</sup> All its characters are vivid and alive. Through *Satire* we can see their everyday life on an important market day: men and women working hard to make a living and very often to make as much profit as they can. We hear the noise and cries of the street and we smell the various odours—none of them pleasant—of the marketplace on Michaelmas Day. *Satire* is one of the most cleverly and elaborately written works in MS Harley 913.<sup>70)</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 ) Benskin, “The style”, 57; Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, p. 14. Fletcher has suggested the manuscript was transcribed from 1338 to 1342 or a little later (Fletcher, “The date”, 306-10).
- 2 ) Fitzmaurice and Little, *Materials*, pp. 121-6; Cartlidge, “Festivity”, 49-52.
- 3 ) The edited text is found, in Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, pp. 141-50; Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse*, pp. 136-44; and Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, pp. 46-54.
- 4 ) The text is edited in Pinkerton, “Early Anglo-Irish poetry”, 268-79; Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, pp. 150-8; and Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, pp. 58-65. Thomas Wright proposed the title *Satire on the People of Kildare (Reliquae Antiquae*, p. 174), while Wilhelm Heuser found it difficult to find a proper title for the

poem (*Die Kildare-Gedichte*, p. 150). A. G. Little and A. J. Bliss and J. Long assumed that it is a satire on the people of Dublin rather than Kildare (*Materials*, p. 122 and 'Literature', p. 728). The present title, *Satire*, is by Angela Lucas.

- 5 ) All lines cited in this paper are from Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*.
- 6 ) *MED*, n. **corrin**.
- 7 ) *MED*, n. **tromcheri**; Breeze, "Middle English *tromchery*", 16.
- 8 ) Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature*, pp. 109-14.
- 9 ) Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature*, p. 114.
- 10) Seymour's opinion is accepted by Cotter, *The Friars Minor*, p. 164.
- 11) Danaher, *The Year*, p. 187.
- 12) Holton, "From charters", p. 20; see also <http://irishcultureandcustoms.com/ACalend/Michaelmas.html> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiring\\_and\\_Mop\\_fairs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiring_and_Mop_fairs)
- 13) Robson, "A ministry", p. 130; <http://www.medieval-spell.com/Medieval-Market.html>
- 14) Danaher, *The Year*, pp. 188-9; <http://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Michaelmas/>
- 15) Danaher, *The Year*, p. 188.
- 16) See p. 85 above.
- 17) *MED*, **gōs** n. 4 (c).
- 18) See p. 87 below.
- 19) <http://irishcultureandcustoms.com/ACalend/Michaelmas.html>
- 20) *MED* **hechel(e)**.
- 21) *MED* **trōn(e** n.(1) (b).
- 22) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10275b.htm>
- 23) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Christopher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Christopher) There is a record of a large ship called *Christofre* (O'Neill, *Merchants*, p. 79).
- 24) O'Neill, *Merchants*, pp. 84-5 and 122-6.
- 25) Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, **Christopher**. See also <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03728a.htm>: "His statues were placed at the entrances of churches and dwellings, and frequently at bridges; these statues and his pictures often bore the inscription: 'Whoever shall behold the image of St. Christopher shall not faint or fall on that day'".
- 26) It is known that sailors complained regularly about obstructing boats caused by weirs on the rivers (Holton, "From charter", 28).
- 27) O'Neill, *Merchants*, p. 41.
- 28) Down, "Colonial Society", pp. 487-8; Childs and O'Neill, "Oversea trade", p. 504.
- 29) *Encyclopaedia Briatannica or a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Miscellaneous Literature* (Edinburgh: A. Bell and C. MacFarquhar, 3rd edn, 1797), vol. 7, **Fisherry**; O'Neill, *Merchants*, p. 30.
- 30) The shipman in Chaucer's General Prologue "knew alle the havenes, as they were, / Fro Gootlond to the cape of Fynystere, / And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne" (ll. 407-9) (Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 21).
- 31) See p. 86 above.
- 32) [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=356](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=356)
- 33) O'Neill, *Merchants*, p. 60. The box might be also associated with Judas Iscariot in John 12:6 and 13:29, who carried the communal box and was accustomed to pilfer its contents. He did not care for the poor.

- 34) See p. 86 above.
- 35) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09761a.htm>
- 36) *MED Marie* 3. (b); *MED Magdalene* 1. (d). Chaucer's shipman in the General Prologue also owned a ship called *the Maudelayne* (l. 410) (Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 21).
- 37) *OED n. bastard*.
- 38) Morrisroe, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *crossier*.
- 39) Lucas's translation does not seem to fit the context: (Though you be a good cleric) "you are not exalted" (Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, p. 59).
- 40) Celano, *St. Francis*, pp. 31-2.
- 41) Begging friars were despised in Dublin in about 1320; see, for example, Fitzmaurice and Little, *Materials*, p. 109: "There is extant in the Registry of St. Mary's Abbey, near Dublin, an account of a remarkable sermon preached by him (Alexander de Bicknor [Archbishop of Dublin]) in Christ Church against sloth and idleness; wherein he bitterly complained of the mischiefs arising from the stragglers and beggars that infested the city and suburbs of Dublin, and so warm was he in his discourse that he cursed every one that would not exercise some trade or calling every day more or less. His sermon had such influence that the then Mayor of Dublin exercised his authority upon the occasion, and would not suffer an idle person within his liberties, but such who spun or knit, as they walked the streets; even the begging Friars were not excused".
- 42) *Fure and tuenti wildges* in line 27 reminds us of a line "Four and twenty blackbirds / Baked in a pie" from the English nursery rhyme called "Sing a Song of Sixpence". The verse can be traced back at least to the times of Shakespeare ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sing\\_a\\_Song\\_of\\_Sixpence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sing_a_Song_of_Sixpence)).
- 43) Jotischky, *The Carmelites*, p. 47.
- 44) Andrews, *The Other Friars*, p. 25; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 288.
- 45) Andrews, *The Other Friars*, pp. 140-45.
- 46) Andrews, *The Other Friars*, pp. 76-7.
- 47) Jotischky, *The Carmelites*, p. 3.
- 48) This is a popular image of corrupted monks in the middle ages. In *The Land of Cokaigne* "there are great and fine rivers of oil, milk, honey, and wine" (ll. 45-6), from which monks can drink as much as they like.
- 49) Rule 64: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02467b.htm>
- 50) *MED tauen*.
- 51) *MED avoir-de-pois* 1.
- 52) *MED avoir-de-pois* 2.
- 53) *MED mark*e n.(2) 2(c); *MED pöund*(e) 1) 2(c).
- 54) *MED pöund*(e) 1) 1(b).
- 55) *MED söutēr*(e) (a).
- 56) The adjective *fair* in the text is actually used ironically (*MED fair* 12 (b)).
- 57) *MED yelwe* 1 (a).
- 58) Lucas interprets the line as "You are subservient to the flesh, you swallow enough" (Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*. p. 63).
- 59) Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, p. 235.
- 60) Breeze, "Middle English *tromchery*", 16. *Schepen heuedes* (sheep's heads) which the *hokesters* sell were "the chief dish of a special town-council dinner held at Michaelmas at the nomination of the next term's



councilors" (*MED* tup n. (8)).

- 61) "The term 'huckster' was frequently applied to those who dealt in small batches of victuals on a casual basis. They were often women (hence the feminine form '-ster'), dealing in a selection of low-priced vegetables, poultry and dairy products. .... Hucksters were usually at the bottom of the marketing hierarchy in both status and wealth, making only meager gains through trade" (Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 8-9).
- 62) Piers Plowman also depicts the miserable lives of women in the middle ages, some of them engaged in carding: "Burdened with children and landlords' rent; / What they can put aside from what they make spinning they spend on housing, / Also on milk and meal to make porridge with / To sate their children who cry out for food. And they themselves also suffer much hunger, / And woe in wintertime, and waking up nights / To rise on the bedside to rock the cradle, / Also to card and comb wool, to patch and to wash, / To rub flax and reel yarn and to peel rushes, / That it is pity to describe or show in rhyme / The woe of these women who live in huts" (Passus IX; Economou, *William Langland's Piers Plowman*, p. 82).
- 63) See pp. 86-7 above.
- 64) It would not be too wild to speculate that *Satire* is another poem of MS Harley 913 composed by the same "Michael of Kildare" whose name appears in *Song of Michael of Kildare* as its author (Lucas, *Anglo-Irish Poems*, p. 72). As we have seen, the poem starts with the stanza about Saint Michael, whom the author calls the *best angle that euer God makid* (l. 4), and in the penultimate stanza he alludes to the saint overthrowing Satan, where he says, "I made one of you sit upon a hatchel" (*italics mine*) (l. 112). In the last stanza the poet declares, "*This song is y-seid of me*" (l. 119). We could also surmise that the author was a wandering scholar: the first stanza about Saint Michael finishes with the line, "It [i.e. this verse] is brought from very far" (l. 6) and the fifth stanza about Saint Francis, "From very far it [i.e. this verse] was brought" (l. 30). In addition, the author calls himself a clerk ("a member of the clergy" or "a scholar") twice in the poem: "*The best clerk of al this tun craftfullich makid this bastun*" (ll. 89-90) in stanza 15 and "*Sikerlich he was a clerk that so sleilich wroghte this werk*" (ll. 101-2) in stanza 17.
- 65) <http://projectbritain.com/year/october.htm>
- 66) <http://irishcultureandcustoms.com/index.html>; in County Waterford they used to observe the custom of holding a procession and casting an effigy of Saint Michael into the sea on this day (Danaher, *The Year*, p. 189).
- 67) *MED* heil interj. (a).
- 68) Wenzel, "Chaucer", 151.
- 69) See p. 84 above.
- 70) I should like to thank Professor Patrick P. O'Neill for reading my first draft and giving me helpful comments. This is a product of research financially supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) for 2012.

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