

Noelle Gallagher, “Satire as Medicine in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century: The History of a Metaphor.” *Literature and Medicine* 31.1 (2013): 17-39.

In this focused piece, Noelle Gallagher unpacks the nuances and the development of the satire-as-medicine commonplace from 1660 to 1760, examining the work of both canonic and understudied authors as they engage with and modify this rhetoric to suit a variety of social, political, and aesthetic goals. Gallagher surveys the many uses and implications of the metaphor by lining up medical and satiric theories and showing how satirists tend to use the trope strategically, “identifying satire as a therapeutic practice sometimes in alignment with, and sometimes in opposition to, the work of contemporary medical practitioners” (18). Ultimately, she suggests that writers employ the satire/medicine commonplace not only to license potentially libelous claims (thus positioning their verbal affronts as unpleasant but necessary cures or therapies), but also to engage with a series of larger cultural debates central to both literary and medical practice, “including the clash between the ancients and the moderns, the divisions between the arts and the sciences, and the shift from a patronage-based system of production to a commercialised marketplace” (18). Gallagher suggests that this metaphor persists with such resilience across the period both because it is remarkably flexible and because it reflects the then-dominant model of health that links physical and mental states of being.

Gallagher divides her essay into four main sections. The first describes how medical practitioners in the Galenic tradition tend to link physical and moral ailments, with the doctor treating “the mind or the morals as well as the body” (19). This “sense of medicine’s ethical purposes” provides the main “rhetorical underpinning for a parallel with satire,” a genre long associated with pursuing “an elevated moral purpose” (19). The connection between moral and bodily health allows satirists to present their work as a kind of therapy or medicine for the mind “designed to treat moral corruption,” and thus “satirists were often compared with medical practitioners, or identified as ‘diagnosing’ or ‘curing’ society’s vices” (20). Gallagher’s next section, “Cure and Punishment”, outlines how different authors figure the trope in different ways, with most viewing satire “not just as curative, but as punitive” (21). In discussing Dryden, Young, and Swift, Gallagher also demonstrates that satire could be seen to function as either “remedy for social vice” or an “affliction with disease-like ‘virulence’” itself (24).

In “Satirist as Physician and Physician as Satirized”, Gallagher discusses how and why writers manipulate the satirist/physician parallel: while the commonplace allows satirists to defend their work, the metaphor might also be reformulated to expose the satirist as “a quack or mountebank—and satirists working throughout the long eighteenth century sought to attack their political or literary rivals in exactly these terms” (24). In this vein, satirists connect “writers-for-hire” with “quack doctors,” and target especially those who participate in both fields (e.g., Richard Blackmore) (24). This type of attack raises issues of intellectual authority and creates a link between medicine and aesthetics, with good and bad medicine correlative to high and low art. In her final section, Gallagher explores how the commonplace allows writers to explore larger issues beyond the validation of satire. For example, some manipulated the trope to express fears that medical and literary practices “were changing [. . .] in similar ways”: increasing commercialization led satirists like Garth

and Pope to attack prominent figures in both fields for “subjugating their profession’s higher moral purposes to a selfish desire for material gain” (28). Thus used to explore commercialization, party politics, and high and low art, the trope offers a means of investigating a wide range of cultural and philosophical questions.

Overall, this is a strong piece, and Gallagher makes a persuasive case that the “‘harsh Remedies’ of both satire and medicine played key role in the English satiric tradition” (32). The best aspect of this essay lies in its specificity: Gallagher’s patience with the complexity of the trope and with understudied source material allows her to track carefully the deployment of medical rhetoric across time. She also concludes on a strong note with the provocative suggestion that the metaphor’s significance changes as new material understandings of the body take precedence in the late century (a claim that begs further investigation). While Gallagher focuses on satire and medicine, she also discusses medical rhetoric more generally, and in this sense some attention to other, specific forms of medical practice (e.g., surgery, blood-letting, dissection and anatomy) – and/or some indication of how the medicinal metaphor relates to well-known satire-as-surgery and satire-as-dissection commonplaces – would be of great interest here. That said, Gallagher offers an informed study of specific fields of discourse that share a common set of concerns; this type of work is vital to the future of the study of literature and science, as it enables a type of scholarship that productively operates across disciplines and in so doing illuminates new aspects of their co-development. One leaves this article hoping that it is just one chapter of a future monograph.

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