

# Culinary humour in early 17<sup>th</sup> century pornographic poetry

**Jérôme Laubner**

Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, France  
[jerome.laubner@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:jerome.laubner@univ-montp3.fr)

## Abstract

*In the early 17th century, a unique genre of pornographic poetry, termed “satyrique” in French, gained prominence for roughly two decades. Presented in small formats ready for a quick consumption, these collections of poems, while pretending to embody the art of satire, also playfully invoke obscene and sexually charged situations. In defiance of the rising courtly civility, the poets promote raw and unbridled bodily appetites. Intriguingly, these texts rely on a vivid culinary imagination. Based on a dozen poems selected from the most popular lewd collections of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, this study delves into the relationships between humour, food and (dis)taste in order to show that, beyond the playful spirit with which food is frequently invoked in these poems, culinary humour outstandingly reflects and reasserts an aggressive masculine dominance upon female bodies.*

*Keywords: humour, food, disgust, satire, pornographic poetry.*

## 1. Introduction

After half a century of unprecedented brutality, early 17<sup>th</sup> century France slowly recovers from the massacres perpetrated during the civil wars. The signing of the Edict of Nantes in 1598 not only puts an end to the eighth war of religion (1585-1598); it also imposes the forgetting of past dissensions to ensure the pacification of the kingdom. This “work of memory adjustment” (Pocquet, 2014, p. 204) leads to the regulation of verbal and physical violence since the Edict strictly prohibits attacking, insulting, offending or outraging others (Merlin-Kajman, 2003, pp. 170-171). On a literary level, the first decades of the new century are marked by the development of a “high satire of morals” (Debailly, 2015, p. 13), inspired by the texts of ancient Roman authors (such as Lucilius, Persius, Horace and Juvenal) and placed at the service of the new ideals of appeased civility. Taking shape as a specific literary genre from the Renaissance onwards, satire seeks to expose humanity’s shortcomings in a comic mode. Writing in the first-person, the satirical poets adopt an enunciative posture that allows them to “identify with the judge, the lawyer, or the prosecutor”: the “regulation of morals” lies at the very heart of satirists’ work (Debailly, 2003, p. 80). However, amidst these productions with a clear moral purpose, several works stand out for their vehement and obscene writing, which refuses to conform to

the new standards of writings and values. For about twenty years until the trial of libertine poet Théophile de Viau in 1623, which left a mark on public consciousness and led to a notable decrease in licentious publications (Jeanneret, 2003, p. 24), France had witnessed a unique and significant surge in lewd productions (Peureux, 2015a). Presented in small formats and sometimes negligently printed, these collections of obscene poems were designed by publishers for a “quick consumption” (Peureux, 2012, p. 123). The spelling of the term denoting them as “*satyriques*” plays on ambiguity. Since they are rooted in slander and mockery, these texts draw from the tradition of satire, leaning more towards the sense of indignation of Juvenal than the gentleness of Horace. Moreover, the inclusion of the letter “y” in “*satyrique*” also intentionally alludes to the mythological satyr, the half-goat symbolising raw sexuality and unbridled desires (Lavocat, 2005, pp. 234-261). By claiming such a lineage, *satyrique* poets audaciously position themselves against the prevailing social, moral, and aesthetic norms of their time. Advocating unabashedly for coitus rather than forbidding it, their poetry represents a provocative counterpoint to the developing “civilizing process” (Elias, 1939) that Norbert Elias associates with the rise of courtly civility, the control of emotions and interpersonal violence, and the peaceful social interactions that ensued. Eschewing prudishness, the authors acknowledge the body’s primal needs, as in the case of poet François Mainard in his unpublished *Priapées* [*Priapeia*], where he declares that “sans foutre, la vie est amère [without fucking life is bitter]” (Mainard, 2018 [17<sup>th</sup> century], p. 78). The interplay between taste and provocative humour signals a type of poetry where bodily appetites are both acknowledged and constantly engaged.

Amongst the most popular lewd collections of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, many poems rely on obscene humour based on food imagery. Drawing from a selection of significant poems, this study aims to understand the various functions that culinary fantasies play when invoked in a *satyrique* context. While food-related humour serves to celebrate bodily appetites and build genuine complicity with a reader invited to consume these verses as if they were invigorating sustenance, a strictly playful and joyful reading of this type of humour would be insufficient. A detailed thematic analysis using the tools of gender studies reveals how culinary humour remarkably reflects and reinforces an aggressive male domination over female bodies. The presence and prominence of disgust suggest that food humour in the *satyrique* collections operates under a gendered double standard: women who do not conform to the poets’ tastes and desires are transformed into repugnant food and deprived of any agency. On the contrary arousing disgust is a way for male speakers to achieve a form of grandeur in the very act of being provocative and indecent.

## 2. Culinary humour and praise of appetites

The use of food-related imagery in a satirical context seems meaningful in several respects. One initial aspect lies in the prosaic nature of the realities described in these verses. Preferring the caustic pragmatism of an Aretino who catalogues lascivious postures to ethereal neo-Platonist discourses (Peureux, 2009, p. 57), the *satyrique* poets place their works on the side of the lower body (Bakhtin, 1970) and the “very tangible realities” where “all sublimation is an illusion, all transcendence excluded” (Roche, 2011, p. 159). The presence of a food-related imagery in these poems can first be linked to a peculiar moment of the year: Carnival. As indicated in the epistle to the reader that opens the *Recueil des plus excellans vers satyriques de ce temps* [*Collection of the most excellent satirical verses of this time*] of 1617, the poems are considered as “un passe-temps de Carneval [a Carnival pastime]” (*Recueil des plus excellans vers*, 1617, f. ã4v). Known for its comic power, provocation, and reversal of values, Carnival is also a festive time

of abundant food and indulgence before Lent and its strict diet<sup>1</sup>. Wishing to “faire bonne bouche [have a good treat]” during the “jours gras [fat days]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, f. 48r) of Carnival, to the extent that some poems are invitations among “friandes [greedy]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, f. 47v) prostitutes to make “beignets [fritters]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, f. 46v), satirical poetry draws from the outset a parallel between culinary delights and bodily pleasures, suggesting that this period of abundance cannot bear any form of deprivation. Unsurprisingly, prostitutes refuse to eat “des salades [...] trop fades [too bland salads]” and express a preference for rich and flavourful foods like “cervelas [sausages]” or “langues enfumees [smoked tongues]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, f. 48r), loaded with sexual innuendo. This partitioning of the calendar with respect to food standards seems essential to understand what is at stake in these collections of obscene poems where the glorification of the sensory and carnal pleasures associated to the Fat Days goes along with a rejection of abstinence and with a “carnavalesque reaction of liberation following the tensions, deprivations, and anxieties caused by the prolonged civil wars” (Debailly, 2015, p. 13). In these *satyriques* collections, the indulgence surrounding rich and fatty meats can thus be understood both as a characteristic of a poetic universe that revels in feasting and as a historical response to the trauma that marked an era grappling with multiple episodes of starvation during the wars of religion of the preceding decades.

This joyful connection between humour and food is even more meaningful in the satirical corpus since the poets primarily aim to celebrate the naturalness of appetites. Indeed, at the crossroads of the realms of food and sex, appetite explores all the potentialities of the belly and flows between the organs of digestion and reproduction. The satirical corpus willingly constructs the merging of these two domains, which not only serves to highlight the close links between gluttony and lust (Karila-Cohen & Quellier, 2012, p. 15), but also to amuse the reader who always expects the culinary script to switch to the sexual script at any moment. In 1622, in *Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques* [*The parnassus of satirical poets*], two poems form a dialogue between a mother and her daughters. What may first seem like a mere didactic speech turns into an invitation to embrace sexual pleasure:

« Une Dame à ses filles »

La chair se nourrist de la chair,  
Il faut avoir soin de la vie :  
N’attendez pas que l’on vous prie,  
L’apetit convie à manger.

[“A Lady to her daughters”: Flesh feeds on flesh, / One must take care of life; / Don’t wait to be asked: / Appetite calls for eating.]

« Responce des filles »

Madame si nous osions,  
Comme l’apetit nous convie,  
De très-bon cœur nous gousterions,  
Du doux fruict de l’arbre de vie.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1620, in the *Cabinet satyrique ou recueil parfait des vers piquants et gaillards de ce temps* [Satirical cabinet or perfect collection of spicy and lusty verses of the time], the refrain of a poem attributed to Pierre Motin plays precisely with the peril of the arrival of Lent: “Voicy le Caresme approcher / Belle, n’espargnez pas la chair [Here comes Lent! / Fair one, do not spare the flesh!]” (*Cabinet satyrique*, 1620, p. 469). The poem obviously suggests that the terrible imminence of Lent should justify indulging in good food but also in enjoying sexual pleasure while there is still time.

["Daughters' Reply": Madam, if we dared, / As appetite calls us, / Wholeheartedly we would taste,  
/ The sweet fruit of the tree of life.]

(*Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques*, 1622, p. 27)

Appetite is ambiguous here, and the reader is encouraged to listen closely: the play on words is not translatable as such in English since the word "convie" (*invite*) is the reunion of two obscene words: the cunt (*le con*) and the dick (*le vit*). Behind the invitation to eat, "cons" and "vits" are brought together in the same gesture of appetizing conviviality. Since in French a homophony exists between "life" (*la vie*) and "dick" (*le vit*), the last line of the daughters' response is clearly lewd even though *in absentia*. The act of decoding what is at stake here explains the comic dimension of these verses. In line with Victor Raskin's work, the poem can indeed be read in terms of "script overlap" (Raskin, 1985, p. 104). More specifically, the culinary script deployed within a serious mother-daughters conversation appears incompatible with the sexual script. Sexual and non-sexual scripts overlap all the more readily here as the conversation manages to maintain a semblance of decency, even though the subject matter is indecent.

In other cases, the link between sex and appetite is openly claimed in some poems discussing food. In the *Cabinet satyrique* of 1620, an anonymous epigram entitled "Sur le différent appetit de quelques Dames [On the unequal appetites of some Ladies]" evokes a discussion among "friandes [greedy]" women about the meats they prefer. The discussion starts very literally: one prefers "les petits pieds d'oye [little goose feet]" (*Cabinet satyrique*, 1620, p. 33), another loves "un pied de bœuf [...] / Ensaucé d'un peu de moustarde [a beef foot [...] / in a mustard sauce]", another one enjoys pig's feet "avec une sauce à l'oygnon [with an onion sauce]", while the fourth relishes "un pied de mouton au vinaigre [a sheep's foot in vinegar]". In accordance with the art of the epigram, the last stanza takes a whole other turn and creates a surprise regarding to the culinary discussion:

Mais Charlotte ses mots rehausse,  
J'ayme mieux un bon pied de V[it].  
Il n'y faut point chercher de sauce.

[But Charlotte raises her words, / I prefer a good foot of D[ick]. / No need to look for sauce.]

(*Cabinet satyrique*, 1620, p. 34)

Masked and revealed by the typography which only gives a capital V and a dot to speak of the male sex, the final obscenity guarantees the poem's comic dimension and confirms the shift from the realm of gluttony to that of lust. This slippage betrays a carnivalesque humour, which celebrates sexual appetite through a decidedly audacious feminine speech. The funny dimension of this bold speech is also linked to the fact that since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the French translations of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the term "sauce" can metaphorically refer to male semen (Bidler, 2003, p. 572-573), placing the obscene poems of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century within the tradition of licentious tales.

The connection between humour, sex, and appetite is not only a satirical theme. It even appears as an essential component of texts conceived in an appetizing mode. The culinary discourse turns out to be a way to highlight how the poems are able to stimulate sexual appetites. In 1617, even before the royal privilege that is found at the beginning of the *Recueil des plus excellans vers satyriques de ce temps* [*Collection of the most excellent satirical verses of this time*], the anonymous quatrain serving as an opening poem relies on this link between food and sexuality:

“Sur le present livre”

Vous autres que l’Amour regarde de travers:  
N’ayans rien que de flasque au-dedans de vos chausses,  
Pour vous remettre en goust venez lire ces vers:  
Car c’est un pot-pourry, qui a de bonnes sausses.

[“On this book”: You all whom Love looks askance at: / Having nothing but flabbiness within your breeches, / To regain your taste, come read these verses: / For it’s a pot-pourri, which has good sauces.]

(*Recueil des plus excellens vers*, 1617, f. 5r)

The poem returns to the culinary and etymological roots of satire, with the Latin term “*satura*” referring to a dish of mixed foods (Jeanneret, 1987, p. 124). Thus, the introductory piece can be read both like an appetizer and a poem about poetic art. Not only does the book appear as a mix of various ingredients likened to a potpourri with flavourful liquids. But, being addressed, the poem also reveals its intended effect: *satyrique* poetry indeed aims to be aphrodisiac, presenting itself as an “immediate effect remedy” (Peureux, 2012, p. 129), capable of restoring sexual vigour to a male reader who might have lost it. In this system, taste spans food, sexuality, and aesthetics, by playfully celebrating the impactful nature of these nourishing texts.

The use of an extensive array of culinary images in the realm of *satyrique* poems can now be understood in a more profound way. It serves a purposeful advocacy for the naturalness of appetites and positions itself in opposition to those who detract from sensual pleasures. The book introduces itself as a stimulant that invigorates both the stomach and the libido. It is a tonic whose playful elements seem to have a direct impact on the reader’s physiological and psychological state. In such a framework, humour and food are intertwined, facilitating the creation of a situation where the concept of appetite extends beyond mere sustenance to embrace its carnal dimensions. Moreover, in the realm of early 17<sup>th</sup>-century pornographic poetry, the focus on sauces is the sign that the traditional literary use of culinary metaphors undergoes a provocative transformation. In the erotic verses of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, positive images of nectar and honey were often used to evoke the experience of reading poetry<sup>2</sup>. These metaphors were symbols of the sensual delight in reading and consuming poems, akin to the pleasure derived from sweet delights (Jeanneret, 1989, p. 79). With the *satyrique* poetry, a different type of metaphorical consumption is suggested, which relies on seminal sauces rather than on sweet words.

However, it appears that the invigorating power attributed to the text is predominantly tailored for a male readership whose breeches may hide a flaccid penis. Such a perspective is rooted in the contemporaneous stereotypes portraying women as having an insatiable sexual appetite. Given that these works emerge from an exclusively male environment, the jokes on culinary imagery are situated within a distinctly gendered division of humour.

### 3. A masculine *point of taste*

The title of this section, deliberately chosen for its wordplay, serves as a prelude to one essential characteristic of *satyrique* poetry: its articulation of desires emblematic of a raw and lustful form of masculinity. Within these poetic collections, there is a prevailing phallogocentric perspective,

---

<sup>2</sup> In the pornographic verses of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the divine nectar is reused for lascivious ends, as one can read the following exclamation in a sonnet attributed to Mathurin Régnier: “*Le doux nectar que le [fou]tre liquide !*” [The sweet nectar that is liquid c[um]!] (*Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques*, 1622, p. 72).

which not only dominates the narrative of sexual encounters but also builds a strong male community among writers and readers (Peureux, 2015b, p. 41).

More precisely, men use jokes about the proximities between food and sexuality to assert their superiority. This dynamic is particularly evident in the way many jokes are made at the expense of female characters. For instance, in an anonymous epigram that can be found in *Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques* [*The parnassus of satirical poets*] of 1622, a husband interrupts his wife to make a sexually suggestive comment:

Philis dit l'autre jour à une bonne bande,  
Je n'ay point un mary difficile au repas  
Il mange comme moy toute sorte de viande:  
Mais comme il l'entendit il arresta ses pas,  
Et dit en souriant, ceste belle friande  
Se sert bien d'une chair dont je ne gouste pas.

[Philis said the other day to a good crowd, / I don't have a fussy husband at meals, / He eats just like me all sorts of meat; / But as he heard it, he stopped in his tracks, / And smilingly said, this greedy beauty / Helps herself to a flesh I don't have a taste for.]

(*Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques*, 1622, f. ã5v)

The husband's smile suggests that the real topic does not concern the food register. His wife takes in her mouth a "flesh" that the husband doesn't. This veiled reference to oral sex not only exposes the comical skill with which the poet manages to suggest obscenity without naming it, through what almost appears as a riddle. It also serves to align humour with the reaffirmation of masculine superiority. The male voice puts an end to the equality of appetite underlined by Philis in order to highlight a gendered division of tastes. The woman is, as often, characterized by her appetite and her penetrability, contrary to the husband. The superiority he gains through his joke not only puts her wife in an awkward or ridiculous position, but it also exemplifies the gendered power dynamics that permeate these verses.

Portraying women as insatiable beings also allows poets to complain that female desire could have its own autonomy. Food imagery reemerges, especially when discrediting female masturbation. In the *Recueil des plus excellans vers satyriques de ce temps* [Collection of the most excellent satirical verses of this time] published in 1617, Norman poet Charles-Timoléon de Sigogne disapproves of the use of dildos. The poet thus criticizes female autoeroticism since the woman he talks to refuses to "pratiquer / L'amour mesme [practice / True love]" (*Recueil des plus excellans vers*, 1617, f. 5v) and prefers to "[se] jouer de quelque naveau / Ou d'un avorton de concombre [play with some turnip or a runt of a cucumber]" (*Recueil des plus excellans vers*, 1617, f. 6r). The vegetables chosen by Sigogne are primarily for their oblong shape, as the "naveau" at the time referred to larger turnips with a more yellowish tint than regular white turnips. However, these vegetables might have been chosen for other reasons: in his *Histoire des plantes* [History of plants], Flemish botanist Rembert Dodoens notes that cucumber "est de nature froide et humide [is of a cold and moist nature]" and that it "nourrit fort peu et mal [nourishes very little and poorly]" (Dodoens, 1557, p. 405), while Renaissance dietetics considers that, even though they "nourrissent peu [nourish little]", turnips possess the "grande vertu d'esmouvoir le desir de Venus [powerful ability to stimulate venereal desire]" (La Framboisière, 1608, p. 55). The choice of vegetables thus vacillates between insufficient and stimulating nourishment. In both cases, the comparison is burlesque and dismissive as the vegetable-dildo seems inadequate in the eyes of the poet who does not hesitate to tell the self-sufficient lady that "ce n'est pas ainsi qu'il vous faut / Contenter vostre endroit si chaut, / Qui d'une feinte ne s'abuse [it is not in this way that you must / Satisfy your so hot place / Which is

not deceived by a fake]” (*Recueil des plus excellans vers*, 1617, f. 6r). The encounter between a woman and a vegetable appears devoid of what constitutes the *raison d’être* of intercourse according to these poets: “un gros V[it] [...] / bien roide, bien fourny de la sauce d’amour [a thick D[ick] [...] / very stiff, amply supplied with the sauce of love]”, and able to “remplir d’un C[on] le gosier chaleureux [fill the warm throat of a c[unt]]”. Only heterosexual coitus, metaphorically likened to the act of feeding a hungry mouth with cooked meat and sauce, deserves to constitute “le vrai jeu d’amour [the real game of love]” (*Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques*, 1622, p. 207), as mentioned in another anonymous sonnet against dildos. Autoeroticism appears then as a scarcely nourishing practice, unable to satiate the female sex with raw vegetables.

By employing ridicule aimed at women, particularly in the context of their sexual independence, *satyrique* poets manage to focus the narrative on their own tastes, fantasies, and repulsions. This derision tends to intensify when they depict bodies that they consider as unattractive. In an anonymous poem entitled “Contre une vieille sempiternelle [Against an Everlasting Old Woman]”, the speaker vehemently disparages an elderly woman. By employing a series of insulting comparisons, the poet not only subverts the traditional codes of love poetry, which typically celebrate the beauty of the female body, but he also severely disqualifies his target. Creating some confusion between content and container, the poem at times likens the old woman to a “vieux baril de harengs saurets [old barrel of pickled herrings]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, p. 52), at other times to a “vieille morüe de dix ans [a ten-year-old codfish]”, before describing her as a “vieille crouste de biscuit noir [old crust of black biscuit]” (*Satyres bastardes*, 1615, p. 53). These food metaphors serve to convey decay or undesirability and they also align with the foods traditionally consumed during Lent. The reference to herrings, which undergo salting for a longer conservation, is very much representative of this unappetizing portrayal of an old lady and since herrings are a staple of lean days, their limited appeal to poets who prefer enjoying intemperate feasts is unsurprising. The deliberate absence of the meat eaten during the Fat Days of Carnival in the poem’s imagery underscores the depiction of the elderly woman as an antithesis to young, tasty, and desirable femininity. The insistent and out-of-date desires of the target elicit both the speaker’s and the reader’s disgust. By calling upon repugnant images and blame, the poem adopts a parodic stance and presents itself as a counter-emblem of beauty. The humour created through these vulgar depictions facilitates the dynamics of abjection, using repelling images.

The use of food metaphors can even escalate from mere ridicule to outright disgust. This tendency is exemplified in the *Recueil des plus excellans vers satyriques de ce temps* [Collection of the most excellent satirical verses of this time] of 1617. The collection begins with a first poem following the royal privilege and entitled “Satyre contre une Dame [Satire against a Lady]”. Attributed to Pierre Motin, this piece employs the same technique of invective and the same parody of the usual codes of love poetry as in the poem cited just above. The poem’s depiction of a woman accused of “porter le cul au visage [carrying her buttocks on her face]” (*Recueil des plus excellans vers*, 1617, f. 1r) relies again on a stark inversion of the noble parts and ignoble parts of the body, clearly setting the tone for the satire. While the previously analysed poem draws comparison between the elderly woman and unappetizing foods, Motin’s verses venture further into the realm of repugnance in assimilating the woman to food, as she is indeed eaten in front of the reader:

Ainsi que rats en pleine grange,  
Un regiment de poux vous mange,  
Gros comme grives et pinsons,  
Et les puces en abondance  
Vont dessus vous en la cadence,  
Grasses autant que des Oysons.

[Like rats in a full barn, / A regiment of lice eats you up, / Big as thrushes and finches, / And fleas in abundance / Dance upon you in rhythm, / Fat as goslings.]

*(Recueil des plus excellans vers, 1617, f. 2r)*

This extreme assimilation of woman to fodder eaten by vermin underscores a more profound level of contempt and objectification within the satirical discourse since it relies on a deliberate blurring of boundaries between the woman's identity and food. The female body transforms into a mere object of consumption fattening parasites, which are themselves compared to edible animals like thrushes or goslings, further entrenching the metaphor. This transformation of the body into a feast for insects might initially be interpreted as a form of *memento mori* or even an unconventional seduction strategy. On the contrary, these hordes of animals eating the feminine body aim to elicit "disgust", which Aurel Kolnai particularly associates with the decomposition of organic matter. Among the phenomena the philosopher identifies as repugnant, the swarming and proliferation of insects hold a prominent place (Kolnai, 1997 [1929], p. 60). By transforming the living woman in this poem into meat offered as prey to beasts, the poet disrupts the boundaries between human and animal and gives his target almost the contours of a corpse. The male speaker deliberately degrades the female body through the extensive use of tropes and his hostile humour serves to dehumanize the subject of the poem. These Arcimboldeque images of bodies as waste thus reinforce the idea that the use of food imagery is closely tied to "les délices de la médisance [the delights of slander]" (*Les Délices satyriques*, 1620, p. 1), used by poets to produce an aggressive and antifeminine laughter, benefiting a male group. These poets aim to establish themselves as the arbiters of tastes and distastes, which becomes all the easier since food comparisons deprive women of any agency. The feast the reader attends to marks the triumph of masculine humour over a female body reduced to the status of flesh for satire.

#### **4. Conclusion: on disgust**

As we delve deeper into the complex interplay of gender, humour, and disgust in the obscene poems of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes evident that these elements form a nuanced and often contradictory relationship. These works, ostensibly aimed at kindling a sexual interest in their (mostly male) readers, are also entangled with the presence of disgust, that ostensibly conflicts with their declared pornographic intentions. This dichotomy raises questions about the true nature of these texts and the sentiments they aim to evoke.

At the heart of this discourse is the gendered division of humour. By employing an aggressive comic tone and vivid food metaphors, these poets often portray women in a repugnant light, effectively excluding them from the erotic realm. This portrayal is not just a mere reflection of societal norms but serves a deeper purpose, as it reinforces the masculine perspective, positioning it as dominant and unchallenged at a time where salons and civility gave more place to women (Merlin-Kajman, 1998, p. 27).

This gendered division of humour overlaps a double standard surrounding the concept of disgust itself. When disgust is instigated by the male poet, it paradoxically becomes a source of empowerment. Rather than undermining the poet's stature, it allows the poet to assert a form of grandeur, setting him apart from the other subjects of his satire. An example of this dynamic can be found in the "*Testament du vérolé*" [Testament of the Pox-Ridden] by Sigogne. The poet, suffering from severe syphilis, orchestrates a macabre scene that parodies Christ's Last Supper. He assembles an unconventional group, including prostitutes, barbers, and lackeys, inviting them to what is essentially a farewell meal. The gathering is far from being a benign event since



the poet calls upon his followers to spread his infections. In an act of defiance against the traditional burial rites, the ailing man beckons his audience to partake in a cannibalistic feast:

Si tost que la chaleur se poussera dehors [du corps du poète], [...]  
J’entens que dedans vous je trouve mon tombeau,  
Que vous l’alliez mangeant d’un gosier de corbeau,  
Et beuvez à longs traits tout le fiel qu’il enserre.

Vous fronchez le sourcil et feignez ne m’ouyr,  
À manger ce morceau qui vous doit vous esjouyr,  
Tost tost chacun s’avance à dresser son potage.

[As soon as the warmth pushes itself out [of the poet’s body], [...] / I intend to find my grave inside of you, / That you’d go eating it with a crow’s throat, / And drinking in large gulps all the bile it contains. // You frown and pretend not to hear me, / To eat this morsel that should delight you, / Hurry, hurry, everyone rush to prepare their soup.]

*(Cabinet satyrique, 162, p. 647)*

The macabre transformation of a parodic testament into a cannibalistic banquet induces a palpable sense of disgust, evidenced by the guests’ reluctance to heed the call to dine. More precisely, the corpse turned into food goes so far as to arouse “abjection”, which Julia Kristeva is careful to define not as a “lack of cleanliness or health” but as that “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 12). In this case, the dying poet envisions himself as already dead and pushes the poetic fiction to the point of describing himself as pieces of meat that his audience should consume. Still alive but nearly dead, offered as sustenance once he has passed, the poetic voice deliberately blurs the boundaries between the “animate and the inorganic” and transforms into “excretion”, that is, into “pollution” according to Kristeva (1980, p. 127). Yet, the contrast between this ghastly feast and the antifeminine texts is striking. The poet’s sacrilegious attitude towards both the traditional form of the testament and the Last Supper confers upon him a subversive form of grandeur. Despite his ugliness, due to numerous venereal symptoms, the poet’s self-mockery and unusual pride manage to elicit a complicit form of humour, mitigating the disgust his moral and physical state might otherwise inspire. This piece exemplifies the aforementioned double standard: while women depicted as physically repellent are likened to rotten food, fit only for vermin, men like Sigogne capitalize on the disgust they generate because they turn it into a source of boastful self-aggrandizement. Such an asymmetry should not come as a surprise, as the denunciation of ugliness in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries is almost exclusively a masculine gesture directed at female targets (Robin, 2021, p. 82). Any woman seeking to overturn power relations or to assert her sexual desire beyond the framework imposed by men risks being attacked and thus being assimilated to vile elements within a logic of humiliation.

These unequal situations illustrate the multifaceted nature of culinary humour in these pornographic collections. On the one hand, the jokes and wordplay reinforcing the proximity between food and sex create a sense of complicity between readers and poets, construction a world of abundance in which bodily pleasures tolerate no restraint. On the other hand, these poems reinforce a world dominated by male voices and desires, reasserting masculine hegemony through food-related imagery. The salty – and saucy – nature of *satyriques* poems highlights the extent to which these poems are not concerned with didacticism, as is often the case in the traditional genre of satire. Far from modestly reproaching human vices while assuming a form of ethical authority to improve society, obscene poets give free rein to their thirst for humiliation, blame and provocation. Food thus serves as a tool to degrade female body and render women unfit for what they perceive as sexual consumption. Evoking disgust and abjection through

culinary humour serves to uphold power structures within an early modern society where agency is determined by who dictates the terms of consumption – who eats what and who is eaten by whom.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. (1970). *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen âge et sous la Renaissance* (A. Robel, Trans.). Gallimard. (Original work published in 1965).
- Bidler, R. M. (2003). *Dictionnaire érotique. Ancien français, moyen français, Renaissance*. Cérès.
- Le Cabinet satyrique ou recueil parfait des vers piquants et gaillards de ce temps* [Satirical cabinet or perfect collection of spicy and lusty verses of the time]. (1620). P. Billaine.
- Debailly, P. (2003). L'ethos du poète satirique. *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la Renaissance*, 57, 71-91.
- Debailly, P. (2015). Sigogne et la poétique de la satire grotesque. In J.-F. Castille & M.-G. Lallemand, *Les poètes satiriques normands du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle* (pp. 13-34). Presses Universitaires de Caen.
- Les Delices satyriques ou suite du cabinet des vers satyriques de ce temps* [The satirical delights or continuation of the cabinet of satirical verses of this time]. (1620). A. Estoc.
- Dodoens, R. (1557). *Histoire des plantes, en laquelle est contenue la description entière des herbes* (C. de l'Ecluse, Trans.). J. Loe. (Original work published in 1554)
- Elias, N. (1939). *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*. Haus zum Falken.
- Jeanneret, M. (1987). *Des mets et des mots. Banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance*. J. Corti.
- Jeanneret, M. (1989). Banquets poétiques et métaphores alimentaires. In Y. Bellenger, J. Céard, D. Ménager & M. Simonin (Eds.), *Ronsard en son quatrième centenaire. L'Art de la poésie* (pp. 73-80). Droz.
- Jeanneret, M. (2003). *Éros rebelle. Littérature et dissidence à l'âge classique*. Seuil.
- Karila-Cohen K., & Quellier, F. (2012). Introduction. In K. Karila-Cohen & F. Quellier (Eds.), *Le corps du gourmand. D'Héraclès à Alexandre le Bienheureux* (pp. 9-19). Presses universitaires de Rennes / Presses universitaires François-Rabelais de Tours.
- Kolnai, A. (1997). *Le dégoût* (O. Cossé, Trans.). Agalma. (Original work published in 1929).
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection*. Seuil.
- La Framboisière, N.-A. de. (1608). *Le Gouvernement nécessaire à chacun pour vivre longuement en santé*. C. Chastellain.
- Lavocat, F. (2005). *La syrinx au bûcher. Pan et les satyres à la Renaissance et à l'âge baroque*. Droz.
- Mainard, F. (2018). *Priapées* (G. Peureux, Ed.). Classiques Garnier. (Original manuscript from the 17<sup>th</sup> century)
- Merlin-Kajman, H. (1998). Les troubles du masculin en France au 17<sup>e</sup> siècle. In H. Amigorena & F. Monneyron (Eds.), *Le masculin. Identité, fictions, dissémination* (pp. 11-57). L'Harmattan.
- Merlin-Kajman, H. (2003). *La langue est-elle fasciste ? Langue, pouvoir, enseignement*. Seuil.
- Le Parnasse des poètes satyriques* [The parnassus of satirical poets]. (1622). A. Estoc.
- Peureux, G. (2009). L'érotisme satyrique, entre libertinage et redéfinition des Belles-lettres (1615-1622). *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance*, 68, 53-61.
- Peureux, G. (2012). "L'on f... en ce livre partout" (*Parnasse des poètes satyriques*, 1622): expériences érotiques et expériences de lecture dans les recueils de poésie satyrique. In

- C. Thouret & L. Wajeman (Eds.), *Corps et interprétation (16<sup>e</sup>-18<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (pp. 121-131). Rodopi.
- Peureux, G. (2015a). *La muse satyrique (1620-1622)*. Droz.
- Peureux, G. (2015b). Les obsessions du poète satyrique: violence et identité masculines. In J.-F. Castille & M-G. Lallemand, *Les poètes satiriques normands du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle* (pp. 35-46). Presses Universitaires de Caen.
- Pocquet, T. (2014). Les figures de l'oubli. De l'assoupissement aux plaies saignantes. *Écrire l'histoire, 13-14*, 203-210.
- Raskin, V. (1985) *Semantic mechanisms of humor*. Reidel.
- Recueil des plus excellans vers satyriques de ce temps* [Collection of the most excellent satirical verses of this time]. (1617). A. Estoc.
- Robin, D. (2021). *Aux origines de l'esthétique. Le goût de la laideur au seuil de la modernité*. Classiques Garnier.
- Roche, B. (2011). *Le Rire des libertins dans la première moitié du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Champion.
- Les Satyres bastardes, et autres œuvres folastres du Cadet Angoulevant* [The bastard satires and other fanciful works of Cadet Angoulevant]. (1615). A. Estoc.