

The Travels of Master Pasquino:

Official and Unofficial Satire in Sixteenth Century England and Italy

In 1589 an English satirical pamphlet declared that the “renowned Cavaliero” Pasquil had left his native Rome for London to discover more about the religious ‘Marprelate’ controversy that had captured the public imagination. Pasquil, known in Italian as Pasquino, was (and still is) an ancient Roman statue which stood in the Piazza Parione, and was known as the satirical mouthpiece of the people against the policies of the papal court. Since 1501, satirical verses or 'pasquinades' would be attached to Pasquino's mangled stone body, a tradition which continued in Rome and Venice alike when more speaking statues appeared throughout the mid sixteenth century. However, it was the original speaking statue, Pasquino, the embodiment of the popular voice, whose role in both Italian and English culture raises questions about the form of satirical discourse in the sixteenth century.

Pasquino is a slippery character, moving not only between national borders but also between generic and material boundaries. In both Italian and the English satirical discourses, Pasquino moved from his original urban surrounding, into the world of manuscript and printed ephemera. Pasquino and his newest English adversary Marprelate, became satirical personas who moved between elite and popular genres, appearing in satires written for literary salons, in the songs of cantimbanchi in Italian piazzas, and even ‘anatomised’ as an entertainment on the London public stage. Pasquino was both an anticlerical figure and a central element of sanctioned religious festivals. This paper will explore Pasquino as a satirical figure crossing multiple borders in 16th Century Europe, and ask what the combination of these cultural crossings can tell us about official and unofficial forms of satire in Italy and England.