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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to introduce our spring 2014 issue on the theme, “Enemies in the Middle Ages.”

This issue features articles by Candace A. Reilly and Petya Ivanova. In her article, Candace A. Reilly examines a demon who appears in the York Minster St. William window, situating the demon within a previously unexplored context. Reilly describes the way that an Ethiopian, disguised as a demon, is shown as an Other, an enemy, in St. William’s vita and connects this miracle story with the much-discussed window. In our second article, Petya Ivanova’s reading of Le Bone Florence of Rome destabilizes archetypal readings of different types of bodies in medieval texts. Ivanova illustrates how the author of Le Bone Florence of Rome engages in narrative play in order to set up and then surpass traditional figurations of the body in medieval romance.

For the first time, we have a Conference Proceedings Section, which grew out of our Kalamazoo sponsored session on the theme. In May, Hortulus sponsored a panel at Kalamazoo for the second time, on the theme “Of Whom Shall I Be Afraid: Enemies in Middle Ages.” This section includes short contributions from Daniel F. Melleno and Edward Mead Bowen, two of the four presenters in our session, as well as a special response from Emerson Storm Fillman Richards, who organized the panel and without whom this section would not have been possible.

We are also happy to share two book reviews in this issue. Sean Tandy reviews Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips’s A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages. Victoria Shirley reviews a book particularly fitting for our Enemies theme, Neil Cartlidge’s Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance. Please also remember to visit our rolling reviews section on our website regularly to read the latest book reviews, thanks to the hard work of Reviews Editor Paul A. Brazinski.

We have some exciting job opportunities and events coming up in the following year. We are currently accepting applications for junior co-editor, Kalamazoo organizer, and a new position—
assistant reviews editor. We will sponsor our third panel at Kalamazoo in 2015, which will correspond to the theme for the fall 2015 issue (“Pilgrimage, Travel, and Exploration”). Look for the Call for Papers for Kalamazoo 2015 soon. The fall 2014 themed issue will focus on “Emotions and Affect,” and the Call for Papers is available now. Submissions are due in August, and more details can be found at www.hortulus-journal.com.

Jenny C. Bledsoe

Hortulus co-editor
Abstract

In this article Reilly identifies the demon in panel 12a of the St. William window in the York Minster and associate it with a miracle about a demon under the guise of an Ethiopian from the Vita Sancti Willelmi. Panel 12a has been unattached to any miracle despite the overwhelming amount of scholarship concerning the window and the miracles of St. William; it has been simply identified as a panel of a devil chasing a man. The article correlates imagery and texts concerning Ethiopians as enemies and demons with the Vita Sancti Willelmi and panel 12a’s iconography. The article also compares Panel 12a and this miracle text to stereotypes of Ethiopians in the Middle Ages as the greatest supernatural enemies of man—the disciples of Satan—and how they were typically fashioned in the guise of demonic iconography.

The St. William window in the York Minster, dated 1414, is a prominent topic of scholarly debate and analysis (Figure 1). Many panels are identified as scenes from the life of St. William and his miracles; however, panel 12a has been overlooked consistently because no one has found a direct liturgical or hagiographic source relating to St. William. Thomas French, Ben Nilson, and Fenna Visser have all stated that the panel is an image of a man or a scholar being seized by a devil.¹ They have not, however, questioned how the panel relates to the rest of the window and have not attached it to any hagiographic or liturgical texts related to St. William.² I propose that panel 12a is a representation of miracle sixteen from the Vita Sancti Willelmi, or possibly an unknown contemporary source closely related to the Vita, in which an Ethiopian tormenter and a demon are the same entity. In this analysis, I place panel 12a in the context of the surrounding panels that represent the posthumous miracles of St. William. In addition, I examine the tradition of depicting Ethiopians as demonic supernatural beings and vice versa in medieval art and texts.
Figure 1. St. William Window, York Minster. Photograph © Candace A. Reilly.
The Context and Position of the St. William Window

The St. William window is in the center of the eastern arm of the north wall of the York Minster. The window has five lights divided by three transoms, which apportion the window into four sections. There are ninety-five narrative panels, above the donor panels, which are all organized in twenty-four rows, designed to be read from bottom to top and left to right. The window depicts, in extensive detail, the pictorial cycle of St. William from scenes of his life to the translation of his body in 1284 and many of his posthumous miracles. Many of the panels in the St. William window have been interpreted as primarily decorative, because the stonework between the transoms hinders visibility of the top rows of panels, especially above row ten. Panel 12a is concealed when standing at the base; it is, however, visible if one views the St. William window from the south side of the choir in the Lady Chapel (Figure 2). Therefore, medieval viewers would have been able to contemplate the meaning behind the demon chasing the man in the blue robes in their patron saint’s window during mass. Since the panel is positioned with other panels which depict posthumous miracles at the tomb of St. William, the viewer would have likely assumed that St. William somehow stopped the man from being chased and tortured by a demon. Most of the panels are connected to hagiographic and liturgical sources, which relate closely to the text.3 The bottom row of panels is not part of the St. William narrative; rather, it exhibits the donors, the family of Ros of Helmsley, dressed in heraldic garb.4 This window was a gift from the Dowager Lady Beatrice before the passing of her eldest son William in 1414; and the St. William window was completed by that time.5 The St. William window was commissioned ten years after John Thornton and his workshop began working on the East Window, and no documentary evidence has survived of the commission related to the hired glaziers. Despite the lack of documents concerning the glazing of the St. William window, evidence based on the styling, technique, and cartoons from the East window suggests that John Thornton’s workshop was responsible for the glazing.6
Figure 2. View of the St. William widow from the south side of the choir in the eastern arm of the York Minster. Photograph © Candace Reilly.
Panel 12a: The Demon-Ethiopian Panel
Panel 12a is the first panel in the third section above the second transom (Figure 3). My analysis examines the post-restoration panel, which markedly reduced the lead and enhanced the details of the figures. The intention of the restoration was to re-make the glass closer to the original conception of 1414.

Figure 3. Ethiopian/Demon chasing a man, panel 12a, St. William Window, York Minster, York. Image via BBC.

The panel depicts a demon chasing a bearded man, his right arm positioned just behind the man’s back. The hairy brown demon has an upturned nose, pig-like ears, curved horns, bat-like wings, a tail, hooves, and claws. The bearded man, who is dressed in blue robes lined with fur, has his right arm raised and his left arm in front of his body, emphasizing the motion of running. Both
figures are set against a red background and are standing on a grassy hill, with a tree on the right side of the panel.

The conclusion of this dramatic panel is not expressed in the window. However, I believe that the visual evidence allows us to conclude that this panel depicts one specific miracle from the *Vita*, the main account of St. William interacting, albeit post-mortem, with a demon. This would fit better with the depiction of other posthumous miracles represented in the panels than an odd, unknown story of a demon chasing a man.

**The Textual Source: The *Vita* of St. William**

The *Vita* of St. William only survives in one manuscript, London, British Library MS Harley 2. The manuscript is dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, around the time St. William was canonized, on 18 March 1226. Miracle sixteen occurs in the second half of the *Vita*, which focuses solely on the saint’s posthumous miracles. Christopher Norton notes that the *Vita* has some “novel elements”, components of wonder, such as miracle sixteen, which he describes as an event of demonic possession in which there is a vision of an Ethiopian, which can be considered a type of demon. The miracle is certainly distinctive, and no similar miracle or story relating to St. William survives in a liturgical or hagiographic context. The *Miracula*, which details St. William’s miracles up to 1177, makes no mention of a demon chasing a man, which suggests that this miracle occurred after the *Miracula* was written.

The *Vita*: Miracle 16 reads:

> Also these things of wonder should be inserted in the page. While a fuller was reclining in bed in silence in the dead of night, and was going through domestic activities in his mind, behold! An Ethiopian appeared to him, of giant stature, miserable in his thinness, full of all deformity, with fiery eyes, gnashing wolffish ravenous teeth, and with hands like the claws of an eagle. The wretched man hid under the bed, since no escape was available, he was seized by claw like hook hands of the Ethiopian who whirled him round so that the vertigo of the height would take away his strengths, one moment he crushed him against a wall and he provoked him to tears, another moment he tickled and drew out laughter unwillingly. In this way he spent a frightful night, and, while the family was buried in sleep, he alone was scourged and weeping and shaking. At daybreak, the tortuous torturer disappears. At the sight of his wife, the wretched man with his mouth gaping open; bloody drops pouring out, hurried with a fast run to the precipice. But the wife, whom emboldened by her husband’s plight, forgets
feminine weakness, she restricted the enraged madman, and she commanded the household near to restrain him. When the members of the household arrived, they restrained his demonic violence with iron gauntlets and knots. With his eyes inflamed, his limbs trembling with insanity, his teeth grinding, his spirit rebelling, he is dragged unwillingly for his life and left with the relics of the saint, having lost his senses. Then like someone ‘wrapped up’ he writhes on the floor, now lying on his back, now rending the air with his hair, his hands and shoulders. Finally God having compassion for the suffering woman, who was sending her tears to heaven, liberates the husband from the teeth of the demon and the wife from such great sorrow. Thus the demon being expelled, the people who were gathered around show their astonishment, and give great praise to God the giver of such a miraculous recovery saying that; the grace of the Holy Father William is more powerful than all the medicine of the most attentive doctors.¹⁶

The text describes a fuller, or wool cleaner, who, reclining in his bed at night, is suddenly attacked and tormented by a monstrous Ethiopian. After an entire night of odd tortures including tickling and thrashing the man’s body against walls, the Ethiopian disappears but the man remains demonically possessed. Seeing this, the household restrains him and brings him to the tomb of St. William. There, with the grace of St. William, God releases the man from his demonic possession. The text describes the creature that attacks the man as an Ethiopian who is “of giant stature, miserable in his thinness, full of all deformity, with fiery eyes, gnashing wolfish ravenous teeth, and with hands like the claws of an eagle.”¹⁷ In the later part of the miracle, the text refers to the same creature as a demon. Therefore, the Vita presents the creature as a deformed Ethiopian who is actually a demon.

The Panel as a Representation of Miracle Sixteen
The other panels in the window emphasize the healing powers of the relics of St. William. In the story from the Vita, the possessed man is forced to the tomb for healing. At the tomb he is healed mentally, physically, and spiritually from the possession. While the other posthumous miracle panels in the window focus on healings of injury and sickness, this panel does not display the moment of healing, the tomb, or the allusion to healing by St. William. Instead, it shows the reason why the healing must transpire. Including this panel in the St. William window gives greater healing efficacy to St. William and the York Minster: not only was St. William able to cure people from injuries and save lives, but he also exorcised demons. So, while this panel belongs to the window’s themes, it is unusual as a representation of the hagiographic text.
Panel 12a could be a direct depiction of miracle sixteen from the *Vita*; or it could be based on a contemporary source, now lost, that told the same story. In panel 12a, the demon is presented as a typical demon chasing a man outside; however, in the *Vita*, neither the demon nor the man ever leave his bedchamber. The sentence, “At the sight of his wife, the wretched man with his mouth gaping open; bloody drops pouring out, hurried with a fast run to the precipice,”18 explains that the man is driven mad and runs to throw himself off a high structure, which could be a balcony in his bedroom. If one translates “praecipitum” as “cliff,” however, then the panel can be interpreted as combining two moments of heightened drama in miracle sixteen: the demonic tortures inside the bedchamber and the man’s attempt to run off a cliff.19 This coalesces the two main parts of the miracle, which allows the dramatic story to be told using only one panel in the window.

Another possibility is that the panel is based on a contemporary hagiographic text, now lost, that used content of miracle sixteen while changing the tale to show the demon tormenting the man outside his house. That text may have been orally transmitted and may have been more familiar. Either way, miracle sixteen from the *Vita* and the panel are still intertwined with the image as an understanding of the text. The connection to miracle sixteen is further acknowledged, when regarding the long history of showing Ethiopians and demons in this fashion.

**Medieval Demon Imagery**

The demon in panel 12a is an archetypal representation of chaotic demon iconography of the high and late Middle Ages, rather than a representation of a human Ethiopian attacker. Demons are typically represented with dark skin/hair/fur, wings, a tail, hooves, horns, a long hooked nose, and claws.20 They are an amalgamation of animal characteristics that form a misshapen, terrifying being. Demons are usually represented with tools for torturing their victims, often common instruments used in agriculture or cooking, like pitchforks, flesh-hooks, tridents, and spears. Such a tool was likely held by the demon in panel 12a originally. The demon’s claw is clenched as if he should be holding something, and two lead lines descend from his claw to the bottom of the panel (Figure 4). I suggest that the lead lines are the remnants of the glazier’s design of the demon holding some sort of torture device such as a spear or hook. A similar image is found in London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero C.IV, fol. 39r (Figure 5).
Figure 4. (Detail) Ethiopian/Demon chasing a man, panel 12a, St. William Window, York Minster, York. Image via BBC.
Figure 5. The Mouth of Hell, Winchester Psalter, The British Library Board, London, British Library Cotton MS Nero C.IV, fol. 39r.
Since this panel, like the East Window, was created by John Thornton’s workshop, we can compare the demons in the East window with the demon in panel 12a: the artists have made the demon in Panel 12a unique, giving it features that relate it more closely to the specific story.

First, it is important to notice the differences and similarities in iconography between the St. William window as a whole and the East window, as Thomas French has analyzed, because the iconography is very different, in regards to the demons, even though they were made by the same workshop of glaziers and the windows share similarities in organization and style. Like the East window, many scenes are detailed representations of hagiographic and biblical texts. Additionally, the St. William window also follows the East window in representing one story over many continuous panels such as the miracle of the Ouse Bridge and the story of Ralph and Besing. The heads of figures demonstrate similarities in style; for example, one of the four glaziers working on the St. William window gives figures a round head and bulbous tipped nose, a type that appears in the East window in panel 2h of the New Jerusalem.

However, it seems that Thornton’s workshop designed the demon in panel 12a to be strikingly different from the demons in the East window. In comparison to the demons in the East window panel 2e, the demon in panel 12a is more detailed and is a unique amalgamation of many different creatures. The demons in the East window appear impish rather than malevolent and are not the focus in the panels where they appear. Greater attention was given to the design of the demon in panel 12a, which suggests that the glazier intended the figure to be noticed particularly, and to distinguish this demon from the typical creatures of hell. This demon is possibly distinctive to alert the medieval viewer of the importance of this panel representing St. William’s power of exorcising demons post-mortem.

Ethiopians as Demons in Art

The text shows that the demon and the Ethiopian in the Vita are the same entity, but the glaziers seem to have only depicted a demon and left all the characteristics of an Ethiopian out of panel 12a. However, archetypal images of Ethiopians associated them with demons. This association suggests that the panel represents the demon without the disguise in which he first appears to the man. Debra Strickland’s in-depth analysis in Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art details the derogatory representations of Ethiopians in the Middle Ages.
ancient Greeks and Romans categorized all people with dark skin under the classification of Ethiopians, and with the combination of the continued influence of Classical mythology and the study of physiognomy, this stereotype continued into the Middle Ages. Ethiopians in medieval art are classified in three different categories: black imps, derogatory black men with deformed features, and demons. Images of Ethiopians as stereotypical black humans often appear in manuscripts where they are portrayed with an indirect connection to the devil and demons; for example, by placing them near hellmouth imagery. The typical features of a non-demonic Ethiopian in medieval art are large lips, tightly coiled thick hair, very dark skin, large eyes, and a flat/wide nose. Emblematic images of Ethiopians are found in manuscripts such as the Luttrell Psalter (London, British Library, Luttrell Psalter, MS 42130, fol.157, c.1325-35, Figure 6), in which the Ethiopians are human and are presented in a derogatory fashion. They are juxtaposed with demons and depictions of hell yet they are not illustrated as actual demons. There are also direct depictions of Ethiopians as demons who are the disciples of Satan, which is seen in the following texts. In addition to the demon in the Vita, Jacobus de Voragine incorporates tales into The Golden Legend in which saints are attacked by demons that have shaped themselves to look like Ethiopians. The dichotomy of Ethiopians being both earthly and supernatural illustrates the array of options that medieval artists could have used to depict this race of man while maintaining associations with demons.

Figure 6. Detail, Luttrell Psalter, The British Library Board, London, British Library, Luttrell Psalter, MS 42130, fol.157, c.1325-35.

Ethiopians were associated with demons in art, but also in texts, which suggests that this comparison was prominent in text and imagery traditions. I will give examples of three texts that precede the Vita that also present Ethiopians as demons; Liber de Miraculis and two accounts from The Dialogue of Miracles, Book V: Of Demons by Caesarius of Heisterbach. Liber de Miraculis, written by Johannes Monachus in the eleventh century, is a collection of miracles and tales. In one miracle, a magician named Mesita and his devout Christian
notary come upon a kingdom where a dark Ethiopian sits on the throne. Many other Ethiopians are by his side. When the enthroned Ethiopian, described as an abominable creature, asks the notary if he is his master, the notary replies that he is the servant of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In hearing the words spoken, the enthroned Ethiopian collapses and the others in the throne room flee howling. Everything and everyone in the throne room disappears except for the notary. In this account, the Ethiopians are described as looking like earthly Ethiopians; however, they also possess demonic traits. Like the demon in the Vita, the Ethiopians are actually demons and are only wearing the guise of Ethiopians.

Caesarius of Heisterbach, a German monk writing in the early thirteenth century, wrote an array of demon accounts in The Dialogue of Miracles, Book V: Of Demons. These focus on active demons, demons who cause harm and mischief. One account in chapter five mentions the abbot of Marienstatt, who was walking around the church late at night when before him appeared “a demon like an Ethiopian, of huge size, and as black as if he had that moment been drawn of out of hell fire.” The demon disappeared soon after passing by him. Another account of a demon Ethiopian appears in chapter seven, where demons “black as Ethiopians” torment a woman attending church because she is dressed haughtily. This small sample of texts shows that the construct of demons as Ethiopians was common in texts concerning demons and possession. On occasion, demons would choose to disguise themselves as Ethiopians when tormenting and teasing humans. In the Vita this common paradigm is depicted of the demon tormenting the man in his bedchamber at night in miracle sixteen; however, it was not translated into panel 12a, where the emphasis is only of the demonic qualities. However, knowledge of the miracle in the Vita and the common fusing of demons and Ethiopians would have made it possible for viewers to identify the figures from St. William’s miracle.

In this paper, I have argued that miracle sixteen from the Vita, in particular, and possibly an unknown contemporary source were the texts used to construct panel 12a in the St. William window. I believe this miracle has not been connected to panel 12a because it was not understood that the Ethiopian in miracle sixteen is fully a demon disguised as an Ethiopian with monstrous attributes, including “fiery eyes, gnashing wolfish ravenous teeth, and with hands like the claws of an eagle.” This demonic trickery was popular in other texts concerning demons and demonic possessions. Since Ethiopians were often described as disguised demons, and
demons described as having “Ethiopian” characteristics, a depiction of either could represent a
demon, as seen in the *Vita*. Therefore, panel 12a is a representation of a demon chasing a man
based upon miracle sixteen from the *Vita*; however, the overt monstrous Ethiopian depiction was
not translated into the image. Yet, in knowing that Ethiopians and demons are interchangeable in
art and in text, one can then additionally interpret that the demon in panel 12a is also a
derogatory depiction of an Ethiopian.

*Candace A. Reilly*

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at the Centre of Medieval Studies. As a continuation of her previous research on death, dying,
and monsters in the High Middle Ages, her MA dissertation is an interdisciplinary study about
revenants in texts and the void of malign undead imagery in England in the twelfth and thirteenth
centuries.*

*Appendix: Miracle 16 from *De paralyticis curatis* from the *Vita*:*

*Istud etiam stuporis inseratur in pagina. Dum fullo quidam intempestae noctis silentio in lecto
recubans vigilanti studio domestica negotia mentaliter pertractasset, ecce! Quidam AEthyopis
praesentans imaginem, statura gigas, macie squalens, et omni deformitate plenus, oculos igneos,
dentes voracitate lupina stridentes, manus habens ut unguet aquilarum, miserum sub lectica
latitantem, cui fuga non subfuit, uncinis manibus, apprehendit; quem nunc rotat in gyrum ut
vires verticis auferat vertigo, nunc allisum muro provocat ad lacrymas, nunc titillationibus tangit
et risum elicit ab invito. Sic inter manus horridissimi noctis pernoctat, et, familia in somnis
sepulta, flagellis et fletibus solus agitatur. Die autem data, disparuit tortor tortuosus. Sed miser
arrepticius uxore visa, faucibus inhians apertis, guttis infusus sanguineis, rapidissimo cursu ad
praecipitium festinavit. Sed mulier, quam vir suus faciebat audacem, debilitatem obliviscens
muliebrem, retinuit furia debacchantem, et famulos ad retentionem excitavit. Accitis igitur
familiaribus violentiam daemonis passo manicae ferreae et nodosi nexus adnectuntur. Oculis
itaque accensis, artubus insania trementibus, dentibus stridore quassatis, hostili spiritu*
rebellante, trahitur invitus ad vitam et sanctis relinquitur reliquis, a sensibus relictus universis. Ad modum igitur cujusdam involuti se volvit in pavimento, nunc resupinus, nunc aera lanians crinibus, manibus et lacertis. Miseratus tandem Deus miseriam mulieris, lacrymas in caelum mittentis, maritum a daemonis dentibus, et illum liberat a moerore. Expulso itaque daemone, stupore redduntur attoniti circumstantes, et tantarum sanitatum largitori laudes referunt immensas; dicentes sancti patris Willelmi gratiam omnem officiosissimorum medicorum superare medicinam

1 Benjamin John Nilson, “A Reinterpretation of the St. William Window in York Minster”, *Ibid*, 74-77. In Visser’s article, “The Commemoration of Saints at Late Medieval York Minster”, she lists all the panels in the St. William window and created a table outlining the theories of the panels’ connections to the *Miracula* and the *Vita* based upon Thomas French and Ben Nilson’s research. She determined that there is no connection between this panel and any surviving text relating to St. William.

2 *Ibid*, 70-71. Fenna Visser has suggested that the panels not yet identified could be from an unknown contemporary source. Additionally, she suggests that all the panels in the St. William window are representations of many different texts, Fenna Visser, “The Commemoration of Saints at Late Medieval York Minster” (Universiteit Utrecht, 2008)72-73.

3 *Ibid*, 70-71. Fenna Visser has suggested that the panels not yet identified could be from an unknown contemporary source. Additionally, she suggests that all the panels in the St. William window are representations of many different texts, Fenna Visser, “The Commemoration of Saints at Late Medieval York Minster” (Universiteit Utrecht, 2008)72-73.


7 *Ibid*. Thomas French refers to panel 12a as panel 15a, because the book was written before the window’s restoration.

8 The conservation of the St. William window was completed in 2008.


12 Miracle seventeen in the *Vita* also involves demonic possession, however it is a short and general description, which I believe has no connection to panel 12a. If miracle 16 from the *Vita* was not the exact text used by the glaziers, then I believe a similar contemporary text related to the *Vita* was used.


14 I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Christopher Norton, Professor Michele Campopiano, and my peer Joseph Shack of the University of York for their detailed help and training through the process of translating this text from medieval Latin to English.

15 Could be translated as a steep cliff, or high up structure. The fuller could be running towards a window, balcony, or off a cliff.


18 *Sed miser arrepticius uxore visa, faucibus inhians apertis, guttis infusus sanguineis, rapidissimo cursu ad praecipitium festinavit.*

19 Fenna Visser, “The Commemoration of Saints at Late Medieval York Minster” (Universiteit Utrecht, 2008), 61. Visser translated the meaning of *praecipitium* as “cliff”.


22 Ibid, 12.

23 Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*,. In addition to these derogatory representations, there were also positive imagery of Ethiopians such as the Queen of Sheba and Saint Maurice, which Strickland touches on briefly.

24 Ibid, 79.

25 Ibid, 80-81.


27 Ibid, 80.


30 Ibid, 327.

Le Bone Florence of Rome: The Profaned Body in Use and in Language

By Petya Ivanova

Abstract

The body as an object of representation in late medieval literary texts gestures towards a number of cultural paradigms defining and orienting the figures and norms of corporeity. This article seeks to show how the literary treatment of such paradigms contributes to question and destabilize topical images of late medieval literary culture by exposing them to creative reconfiguration. This narrative treatment exposes the body as the product as much as the agent of the cultural norms organizing its use and representation. The text discussed here—the Middle English popular romance Le Bone Florence of Rome—stages the tropes of the senile fabliau body, the virgin, the persecuted wife, the damsel in distress, the sublime body of the martyr and re-invests them with traits that exceed and subvert the type, thus exposing it as the object of narrative play and re-appropriation. Further, these paradigmatic shifts are accompanied by a reflection on language and its enunciative agency. In this text both the body and the language acts it gives rise to are profaned. No longer assigned to a delimited sphere of representation, they become available to the play of narrative use.

The body as an object of representation in late medieval literary texts gestures towards a number of cultural paradigms defining and orienting the figures and norms of corporeity. This article seeks to show how the literary treatment of such paradigms contributes to question and destabilize topical images of late medieval literary culture by exposing them to creative reconfiguration.

The text under consideration represents a “popular” literary mode which evokes and breaks away from the sacred registers of the theological paradigm of the glorious body1: here the body is profaned, misappropriated and cast as a singular agency in language. “Reasoning is the operation of language, but pantomime is the operation of the body. … The body seals and conceals a hidden language, and language forms a glorious body”, writes Deleuze2. The Middle English
romance Le Bone Florence of Rome stages a grasp of language over the body in a mutually elusive touch, where the body emerges as multiple and language reflects on its own powers.

This tail-rhyme romance written in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century thematizes a body that engages with and resists successively imposed topical and iconic frameworks, enacting a pre-established narrative plot while reconfiguring tropes of representation in a manner verging on the burlesque. The text intrigues on one hand by its heightened attention to corporeal signifiers and on the other hand by its reshuffling of narrative forms and tropes.

If the textual heritage from the last centuries of the medieval period witnesses an increased attention to the body, expressed in the abundance of corporeal signifiers in stark contrast with the literature of the early Middle Ages, this text reflects a process of re-writing and re-investment of iconic images related to the body, inherited from the literary tradition of French romance, as well as from the religious and hagiographical regimes of representation. Here the body is multiple rather than static, and is articulated as a number of possible and cohabiting features drawn out in interaction. As a consequence, the topoi of the senile fabliau body, the virgin, the persecuted wife, the damsel in distress and the sublime body of the martyr are re-invested with traits that exceed and subvert the type, thus exposing it as the object of narrative play and re-appropriation. Further, these paradigmatic shifts are accompanied by a reflection on language and its enunciative agency.

The interest the text manifests in the body is multi-faceted: it meditates upon perspectives of sexual regulation and virginity, aging, eroticization, mutilation, recovery, healing, rest and ultimately death: “Sick, deformed and wounded; needing to be fed, clothed, kept warm and given rest; eroticized, tormented and vulnerable; the corpse—all these varieties of the body in time are accommodated by the poem, and not as animal but as human”. The latter part of the critic’s remark points to a fruitful path of exploration: the biological predestination of the human body is placed at the center of the poem not as a predicament but as the premise to complex cultural structures. In all these aspects the body is not stripped of its discursive potential for signification; it is rather transposed to a region that makes accessible for observation and re-iteration states and features consigned to the margins of representation or distributed along the dialectical lines of the sublime/abject body. A distinctive element of this popular romance is the articulation of
derivative, parodic elements of other generic forms and a largely employed corporeal resource, a multi-faceted presentation and figuration of the body with all of the aspects belonging to it. The variety of represented corporeal states and images points here to the absence of content, or even an absence of property to the body—following Derrida’s idea—in the sense of the initial, untamed resource the living body presents. This body is fundamentally human, precisely because of its lack of specification and possible attribution to a multitude of uses and understandings.

This perspective allows us to consider a discursive presentation of corporeity which abstains from the polarity of exaltation/mutilation of the body inherent to hagiographical discourse. At the same time the text eschews the trope of abjection, as developed for instance in devotional texts of earlier periods such as *Hali Meidohad*. Here the states of sickness, deformation, loss and death do not participate in a religious economy of denigration of the body as impediment to the soul. Instead, the conceptual frame of the “everyday body” proposed by Riddy opens a perspective relating the text to the mindset and preoccupations of its potential readership constructed around the “bourgeois home”. My reading will focus on the articulation of corporeity in this text to display a body that unfolds not only outside of organic functionality, but also outside of iconic images, including those involved in a didactic reading in the context of late medieval bourgeois self-making. For my purposes the concept opens a perspective on the malleability and resilience of the body with respect to discursive regimes, and allows its possible consideration in terms of use rather than containment. Here I understand “use” in the sense evinced by Agamben: “use is always a relationship with something that cannot be appropriated; it refers to things insofar as they cannot become objects of possession”. Further, I suggest that the body in this text is not just presented under its everyday aspects but is thereby profaned: it is displaced from topical or ideological spheres and modes of representation and shown in its representational potential from other possible angles. Showing the body in use is a gesture of desecration of its representational status; as Agamben writes, “use does not appear … as something natural: rather, one arrives at it only by means of profanation”.

The problematic of use foregrounds and reshapes the issue of representation by shifting its object—in this case the body—outside not only of discursive appropriation but also outside of a possible economy of possession as the embodied aspect of a self. In this sense, the usage of a body, in contrast with a relation of ownership or essence, transforms the notion of its
representation into a call for accountability at a given present moment. In this poem representation is actively teased out and shunned: it is evoked, played with and transgressed. The body is shown not as single but as open and malleable, and potentially liable to any content in representation. At the same time, the concreteness of the body anchors these representational potentialities to a present-moment situation, a presentifying position whence the issue of the communicability of this present-ness of the body arises. This is where the paradigmatic representation of bodies is profaned: the body is snatched out of its spheres of codification and is revealed as something that exposes discursive control to the challenge of unknowingness. In this position of reversal, it is not just discourse that shapes the body, but the body in its turn that shapes discourse, and this latter action involves the dimensions of the present moment and its epistemic nudity.

Florence is constantly staged in situations that mimic the types of the martyr and the virgin, yet their ideological stakes are continuously disabled. The specific ways in which corporeity is present in the text offer a vision which does not appropriate the body but instead allows it to incite enunciation—both in the sense of language acts occurring on the level of the plot and in the sense of the linguistic tropes used throughout the text—while escaping its measurable, rationalizing and controlling aspects. The body is shown such as it is—not in any referential or pre-discursive sense—but rather as an agency which escapes being reduced while being by discursive models. Here the body is profaned: it is no longer the object of discursive appropriation in the form of a prototype, and thus no longer unattainable by being cast in the delimiting representational spheres of exaltation or repugnancy. I will argue that Le Bone Florence of Rome not only shows the body from multifaceted perspectives of malleability and resilience, but also enacts larger narrative strategies geared to evoke a multiplicity and inherent instability of theological concepts and social roles.

The plot line of the poem is assimilated by critics to the Constance-Griselda type of narrative, with the remarkable exception that its heroine, Florence, remains a virgin until the last scene of the text, despite being married and therefore fitting the narrative type of the persecuted wife. The specific type of virginity presented here is seen as a temporary state of the body rather than as a spiritual end. The concept of virginity put forth in the text places the young woman’s body under a specific regime of bodily wholeness and preservation, which motivates the plot as a series of
male-orchestrated tests and attempts to encroach on this aspect of Florence’s personal integrity.
At the same time the provisional nature of this virginity, presented as a phase that the female
body in particular is expected to reach and outgrow, opens a view of the body in terms of
temporality and use, organized but not exhausted by biological, social and religious frames.
These two aspects of bodily representation—geared on one hand towards stasis and preservation
and on the other hand towards desacralization, survival and everyday use—orient the narrative
plot and its esthetic dynamics.

Raised by her widowed father Sir Otes, the emperor of Rome, Florence is sought in marriage by
Sir Garcy, the emperor of Constantinople, a repulsive old man of “a hundred years of age or
more” (l. 83-4)\(^1\), who wagers war on her father as a result of Florence’s rejection. The father is
killed on the battlefield at the very instant when Florence proclaims Sir Emere, who is the
younger son of the king of Hungary, as her husband and her father’s successor (l. 762-65). Upon
Florence’s request Emere leaves Rome before the consummation of their marriage to revenge her
father’s death on Garcy. This triggers a series of perils and tribulations which expose Florence’s
corporeal integrity and life to risk. First, her brother-in-law Miles tries to marry her by force.
When this does not succeed he abducts her, tries to rape her and subjects her to a series of
maltreatments ranging from beating her naked with a sword to hanging her up by her hair.
Florence is rescued by Sir Tyrry who offers her shelter, and she subsequently has to defend
herself against an attempted rape by a knight of the household. The rebuffed knight cuts the
throat of Sir Tyrry’s daughter, with whom Florence shares the same bed, and imputes the murder
to the heroine, who is condemned to the stake and rescued at the last moment by Tyrry’s
magnanimity. Set off to follow the path of her adventures, Florence rescues a convict just about
to be hanged and requests him to serve as her knave, only to see him conspire with a friend and
sell her treacherously to a sea captain. When the latter together with a group of mariners attempts
to rape her, her prayers produce a miraculous storm, as a result of which Florence floats off to
the shore, arrives at a nunnery and becomes a noted healer. In the meantime Emere and all the
persons who have wronged Florence have been afflicted with various illnesses and bodily
sufferings. They all arrive at the nunnery in search of healing and, without recognizing her,
publicly confess their misdeeds, thus bringing her story to a resolution. Florence is reunited with
Emere and they finally consummate their marriage.
Before being associated with any specific image, Florence’s body emerges as relational and marked by a certain degree of indeterminacy. At the outset of the story it is presented at the crossing point of divergent economies of use: first evoked as a counterpart to the old body of her would-be suitor, Florence is then, and consistently throughout the text, referred to by the indeterminate “the feyrest thynge” (l. 307)\textsuperscript{16}. The tensions and counter-reactions which focus around her person focalize in a series of images which construct the body on one hand as the converging point of various interactions, and on the other hand as a narrative agency which questions and subverts these images.

The Old Body
This multiplicity emerges initially in the treatment of the old body, which plays on the registers of the abject and the grotesque. Garcy, with whose unsuccessful suit the poem opens and who is said to be a hundred years old or possibly more (l. 83-4), is described in the following vivid manner:

\begin{verbatim}
Hys flesche trembylde for grete elde,
Hys blode colde hys body unwelde,
Hys lyppes blo forthy;
He had more mystyr of a gode fyre,
Of bryght brondys brennyng schyre,
To beyke hys bones by,
A softe bath a warme bedd,
Then any maydyn for to wedd,
And gode encheson why,
For he was bresyd and all tobrokyn,
Ferre travelde in harnes and of warre wrokyn. (l. 94-104)
\end{verbatim}

The condition of his body is evoked in terms of feebleness and senility, which on one hand open a risible discrepancy with desire, while on the other hand point at the traces of experience and use. Here the controversial vectors of the body’s history and its desire solicit gestures amalgamating protection and care with sexuality expected on Florence’s part:

\begin{verbatim}
Sche schall lygg be my syde,
And taste my flankys wyth hur honde,
That ys so feyre, Y undurstonde,
Yn bedde be me to byde.
Sche schall me bothe hodur and happe,
\end{verbatim}
And in hur lovely armes me lappe,
Bothe evyn and mornetyde. (l. 108-114)

The verbs that describe Garcy’s vision of marital intercourse—“taste”, “hodur” (“to cuddle”, MED a), “happe” (“to embrace, wrap up” MED 1c, 2), and “lappe” (“to clasp, embrace, envelop”, MED 2a, 4a) (l. 109-13) convey a sense of envelopment and protection rather than sexual penetration. Garcy’s vision of marital intercourse not only denotes his senility but casts Florence’s body in terms of an impenetrability that anticipates her ensuing verbal and supernatural protection from rape. At the same time his image resonates with the old man’s body depicted in fabliau narratives:

Sche seyde, ‘Be God, that boght me dere,
Me had levyr the warste bachylere
In all my fadurs thede,
Then for to lye be hys bresyd boones,
When he coghyth and oldely grones,
I can not on hys lede’. (l. 244-49)

Florence rejects Garcy’s “lede”: “direction, guidance”, but also “manner, fashion” (MED, n.1: 1b, 2), converging with the homonymous “lede”—“person, man” (MED, n. 2: 1a). Here Garcy’s corporeal description accretes perception and potential for action, while the body’s state and manner orient narrative events.

The character of Garcy is instrumental to the triggering of all of Florence’s misfortunes, yet the text places emphasis on the fact that Florence never sees this major antagonist. He dies soon after Emere conquers Constantinople and brings him vanquished to Rome, whence Florence has already been abducted: “Sche sawe hym nevyr wyth hur eye, / That cawsyd hur all that sorowe to drye, / Of hur have we to sayne” (l. 1588-90). The syntax of the last phrase casts Florence as both the subject and the agent of this particular image of Garcy, which emerges in view of her experiences. The text singles out Garcy as the key engine of the entire story, in which his fate is relevant only in as much as it affects Florence. His body operates an agency and impact over her life initially only through its discursive presence and the narrative possibilities its desire outlines. At the same time this presence is by no means abstract or disincarnated. Although senile and impotent, Garcy’s body is nevertheless powerful through the actions it can originate and also perform. The senile body here is given narrative agency as a converging site of different
temporal experiences, desires and intentions, which build a multi-faceted rather than a stable and uniform image.

The narrativization of Garcy’s body is not restricted to the fabliau type; it is also figured in terms of use and its life experiences of military prowess: “For he was bresyd and all tobrokyn, / Ferre travelde in harnes and of warre wrokyn” (l. 103-4). The adjective “bresyd” used in his description and echoed in Florence’s rejection (l. 103, 247) evokes meanings at once of “exhausted”, “decrepit” (MED, “brisen” v. 6) and “shattered”, “damaged” or “injured” (MED “brisen” v. 1, 2, 4, 5), thus supplementing the connotations of elderliness with those of military experience. This evocation of Garcy’s body in terms of use and experience resonates with the narration of the single combat encounter between him and the emperor of Rome, Florence’s father:

When Garcy sye that hyt was hee,
He seyde, ‘Syrrys, also mote Y the,
We two muste do owre dede.
Thou art wele strekyn in age, Y trowe,
But Y am ferre elder then thou,
We two muste juste in werre;
Hyt ys sethyn Y armyd ware
Sevyn yere and somedele mare;’
And eyther toke a spere.
So harde togedur can they ryde,
Owt of ther sadyls they felle besyde,
And graspyd to odur gere;
Wyth scharpe swyrdys faght they then,
They had be two full doghty men,
Gode olde fyghtyng was there. (l. 667-81)

Garcy’s body here is evoked both in terms of history and actualization. His old and “bresyd” body bears the traces of past use and is employed yet again in an encounter which brings about the actualization of its capacity and history in a present gesture. The effect of the narrative convergence of these multi-faceted elements constituting Garcy’s body is that it emerges as multiple, articulating time planes and narrative clues together with present-moment actions and emotions. This convergence of temporal planes articulates the actualization with reference to a past state not only of the fighting bodies, but also of the trope of chivalric battle itself: “Gode olde fyghtyng was there” (l. 681). This use of the image between antiquation and actualization
effects a displacement or a gap in the seemingly smooth narrative surface, where the flexibility of the body in and out of use mirrors the narrative flexibility of a humorous activation of a *topos*. The body’s temporality conveyed in terms of age is also presented as multiple. Age articulates numerous corporeal planes and facets which converge in this scene, presenting Garcy’s aged body as a bundle of co-existing features: impotency and skill, ridiculously misplaced desire and physical force, resoluteness and revolved capaciousness\(^\text{19}\). All of these facets emerge in the rendering of Garcy’s body in terms of use and the traces—corporeal and linguistic—use leaves behind.

The articulations of this multi-faceted rendering of the body ring with comical overtones in the warrior and linguistic gestures the two old generals exchange:

Garcy hyt Otes on the helme  
That upon hys hedd hyt can whelme,  
Hyt sate hym wander sare.  
‘Syr, wyth thys dynte Y chalenge Rome,  
And thy doghtur bright as blome,  
That brewyd hath all thys care  
When that Y have leyn hur by,  
And done hur scheme and vylenye,  
Then wyll Y of hur no mare,  
But geve hur to my chaumburlayne’.  
Tho wordys made Otes unfayne,  
And tyte he gaf an answare:

…  
Owre fyghtyng ys not endyd yyt’  
On the helme Garcy he hyt  
That he felle to the grownde. (l. 682-99)

The solemn enunciation following the comic image of Otes’s helmet being turned upside down on his head has the effect of disfiguring his appearance and conflating dignity and absurdity, intensified by Garcy’s threat to rape and subsequently dismiss Otes’s daughter. His speech pretending to the potency and brutal behavior of the soldier is countered by Otes’s reminder that their fighting is “not endyd yyt”, accompanied by a blow on his adversary’s helmet which tears him to the ground. The mixture of physical stamina and precariously held dignity, of combat defeat and topical verbal sexual aggressiveness evince both parodical gestures of the *fabliau* genre\(^\text{20}\) and a larger, more comprehensive view of the body figured simultaneously in all of its
controversial states of failure and resource, which the “popular romance” genre seems to accrete.

The body is thus refracted through the lens of multiple narrative situations, where each time it emerges as a different set of features and capacities spurred by an interaction, whether inflected in language through another character’s imagination or in the body-to-body encounter of the duel. The body as presented here is not only multiple with respect to its own experience and history; it is also multiple in the fleshing out of the interpersonal relations and interactions in which it is involved. A character’s body and face figures the summed reflection of events, experiences, exchanges, actions or desires triggered by or converging in it.

Garcy’s portrayal delineates in parallel a possible employment of Florence’s youthful body in terms of care, which she, given the agency to choose, energetically rejects. The articulation of potentially instrumentalized corporeity on one hand and autonomous agency on the other is a salient element of the heroine’s description: she is said to be “the feyrest thynge, / That evyr was seen wolde or yynge, / Made of flesche and felle” (l. 307). The word “thinge” spans a linguistic range connecting the idea of inanimation to increasing degrees of vitality, the actions and events ensuing from these and finally their linguistic transformation. The meanings of “thinge” cover a vast array ranging in degrees of animation from “substance” to “concrete, inanimate object” and “attribute to a person” to “living, corporeal being” and “action”, “event” and the subsequent “object of knowledge or thought, idea”, “matter of interest or concern” (MED 1-9). Here this wide span does refer to Florence in terms of personhood and its unfolding in time on one hand (“wolde or yynge”, l. 308) and corporeal articulation on the other (“Made of flesche and felle”, l. 309). Further, the temporal inscription of the flesh activates both the objectifying and relational connotations of the word “thinge”. “Felle” (MED n.1, “the skin as covering for the flesh of man or beast”) appearing in collocation with “flesche” suggests the idea of experiential density and shape, the skin being the exterior contour conferring shape to the body but also the permeable surface relating it to the passage of time, allowing and inscribing agency and potential vulnerability, interaction and the regulation of interpersonal distance. While inscribing the heroine’s body in an ambivalent economy, this semantic network also points at the potential tensions related to the coming alive of her representation in terms of an image, whose apparent
stasis of a trope is refracted in powerful and unusual descriptions that break with narrative typology, as will be discussed below.

The multiple aspects of Florence’s body emerge in reference to and resonance with Garcy’s body, and the two are bound to overlap. Attributes of the two characters are superposed in the description of Florence’s dress and visual appearance at the moment when she, together with her father, receives the soliciting messengers:

Hys doghtur sate hym bye
In a robe ryght ryall bowne
Of a redd syclatowne
Be hur fadur syde;
A coronell on hur hedd sett,
Hur clothyss wyth bestys and byrdys were bete
All abowte for pryde.
The lyghtnes of hur ryche perre
And the bryghtnes of hur blee
Schone full wondur wyde. (l. 177-86)

The references to red and gold in the fabric of which Florence’s dress is woven (“redd syclatowne”) and the ornamental “bestys and byrdys” plaited in it (“beten”, MED 4, 6) are paired with the idea of brightness and emanation of light. A similar lexical structure evokes the vision of Garcy’s camp spread in the field of “Narumpy” at the outset of his military attack. The images of red, gold, animal ornament and widely emanating light reappear:

The brode felde waxe all redd,
So glemed golde on the grownde.
...
There Garcyes pavylon stode.
All the clothys were of sylke,
The ryche ropys were ryght swylke,
The boosys were redd as blode.
Ther was no beest that yede on fote
But hyt was portreeyed there, Y wote,
Nor fysches swymmyng in flode.
Fyftene pomels of golde there schoon,
...
Wyde the lyghtnes yode. (l. 380-93)
The language depicting Florence’s royal attire, complexion and the impact of their light-quality is transposed here to depict similar qualities, converted from the woman’s face to the attacking soldiers’ armor and adverse military deployment.

**The Imagery of Romance**

The attribute of brightness or light is a central feature of Florence’s portrayal, which creates a link with the romance background of the poem. She is repeatedly described as “fayre and bryght” (l. 79), “clere” (l. 78), “whyte as flowre” (l. 194). The light quality of skin here is a factor regulating interaction in terms of attraction and distance, which, more than just a trope for beauty, involves personal power and has political and violent consequences. The network of brightness and light works on a double articulation of objectified image and stasis on one hand and interaction on the other, involving both the potential peril of injury by malevolent characters and rescue by attracting the supportive response of benefactors. When Florence requests the convict who is about to be hanged from his executioners as her servant, they are unable to refuse her: “They were lothe to seye hur nay, / Sche was so feyre a thynge” (l. 1727-28). Being a “feyre thynge” in this romance is not a conventional (and potentially restrictive) signifier of feminine beauty, but involves a large range of complex interactions, evincing power of influence but also potential violence; distance and stasis on one hand and abysmal exposure on the other. When Sir Tyrry and his suite find Florence in the forest, left hanging up by her hair by the malicious Myles, they are attracted by the beauty and light emanating from her face, added to the brightness of the precious stones of her horse’s trappings:

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And hurselfe hangyd be the heere  
And hur ryche wede;               
Hur sadull and hur brydull schone,  
Set wyth mony a precyus stone,    
The feyrest in that thede.     
Sche was the feyrest creature,  
And therto whyte as lylly flowre, 
In romance as we rede;       
Hur feyre face hyt schone full bryght;  
To se hyt was a semely syght;  
Tyll hur full faste they yede. (l. 1532-42)
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The self-conscious reference to “romance” here (l. 1539) harkens back possibly to the French source of the poem as well as to the *topos* of brightness, light and crystalline appearance in the
description of the Roman emperor’s palace (l. 326-44) evoking connotations of the world of fairy and other-worldly transformation present in the romance background. The palace oddly conflates elements of romance with the description of a Christian kingdom:

The pyllers that stonde in the halle
Are dentyd wyth golde and clere crystalle
And therto feyre and evyn.
They are fyllyd wyth sylvyr as Cryste me cover,
And ther ys peyntyd wythynne and over
The dedly synnes sevyn;
There was peyntyd wyth thyngys sere
That men myght mewse on many a yere,
Or he hyt scryed wyth stevyn. (l. 325-33)

The crystal and gold-dented pillars, reminding of the description of the other-worldly palace in the Breton lay Sir Orfeo, adjoin painted representations of the deadly sins, and the occupatio topos conveying the ineffability of the sight opens a gap between exaggeratedly bemused silence and vocal description. The measure of the wonders is strikingly corporeal: the pillars are “fyllyd wyth sylvyr as Cryste me cover” (l. 328), deflating the religious reference and reorienting it to a corporeal concentration verging on the burlesque; the running fountain in the middle of the royal hall is seen as a converging space of numerous washing courtly bodies: “A hundurd knyghtys and ladyes smalle / Myght wasche there and they wolde / All at ones on that stone” (l. 338-40). This intertwining of variegated tropes and discourses is refracted through the lens of the body, which alters and distorts their topical evocative effect.

This effect is further explored through Florence’s description made by one of her rejected wrong-doers, conflating romance “fairy” and Christian “fende”, the idea of her beauty grotesquely slipping into the uncanny “grete feyre hede”:

Ye myght see be hur feyre clothyng,
That sche was no erthely thynge,
And be hur grete feyre hede.
But some false fende of helle. (l. 1666-69)

This superposition of referential frames through which Florence’s embodied agency slips unharnessed presents her bodily appearance and impact as something that escapes reading—soliciting and overriding both interpretative and intentional frames. In this episode she is convicted upon false evidence for the murder of Sir Tyrry’s daughter and saved at the last
moment from execution by reversal of the bereft father’s decision, who, no more than the audience, can stand the sight of her corporeal destruction: “The lorde that had the doghtur dedd, / Hys herte turned in that stedd, / To wepe he can begynne” (l. 1684-86). At the same time, the striking collocation “hur grete feyre hede” (l. 1668) makes converge several narrative strands and major aspects of the story. The possible reference to the abundance and fairness of Florence’s hair which would make the line read “her great (abundant, thick MED 1a,c; intense in color MED 6) blond hair” evokes the image of her near-martyring by being hanged on a tree by “the tresse of the heere” (l. 1513) and subsequent release: “Then they lowsyd hur feyre faxe, / That was yelowe as the waxe, / And schone also as golde redd” (l. 1543-45)—a scene which I discuss in detail below. At the same time, the word used—“hede” refers to the entirety of this bodily part, including the face—which in Florence is usually described as “feyre”. The face is also the place of expressivity and interaction: Florence’s face darkens when she realizes how many lives are getting lost in her defense and proposes to be “put out” (l. 580) to Garcy in order to stop the massacre: “The terys on hur chekys ranne, / Hur ble beganne to blake” (l. 578-79). It is notably the bodily place on which the unfortunate interaction between Florence and her accuser is inscribed. When he tries to rape her during her stay in Tyrry’s house, alone in her room and without succor, Florence defends herself by grabbing a stone and hitting the attacker, thus disfiguring him:

He leyde hur downe on hur bedd,  
The lady wepyd sore for dredd,  
Sche had no socowre thare.  
Before hur hedd lay a stone,  
The lady toke hyt up anon,  
And toke hyt yn a gethe;  
On the mowthe sche hym hyt,  
That hys for tethe owte he spytt,  
Above and also benethe.  
Hys mowthe, hys nose braste owt on blood. (l. 1600-09)

The injury is so damaging that the deviant knight remains in his chamber for a fortnight, and covering up the reason for his injury by a lie states “that he was schent, / / ‘The tethe be smetyn owt of my mowthe, / Therfore my sorowe ys full cowthe, / Me had levyr to be slayne’” (l. 1615-20). The disfigurement and loss of his teeth is an affliction to which death is preferable, and the extreme action to which he recurs in his revenge on Florence—cutting the throat of her
bedmate Beatrice, Sir Tyrry’s daughter, and imputing the murder to her—reflects the measure of the knight’s “loss of face”. This loss of face is accompanied by a double lie: first stating that “he was schent, / Evyll betyn in a turnement, / The sothe ys not to layne” (l. 1615-17) and second, deflecting the blame for the murder to Florence: “He put the hafte in Florence neeve, / For sche schulde have the wyte” (l. 1634-35). At the same time these deviant linguistic gestures are part of a larger network of lie and deceit running through the poem and are significantly made possible by Florence’s silence—unwillingness, inability or impossibility to speak, to which I shall return later.

Further, the description resonates with Florence’s prayer a few lines below, invoking an almost similar collocation with a slight difference: “That sche was no erthely thynge, / And be hur grete feyre hede / … / Brynge me to thy bygly blys, / For thy grete godhede”’ (l. 1668, 1680, emphasis added). The multiple resonances of the odd phrase describing Florence outlined here evince a cluster uniting the figuration of the face, images of otherworldliness contrasting fiendishness and divinity, and language acts conflating grotesqueness with prayer. The identical lexical constructions appearing in contexts of abuse and superstition on one hand and prayer on the other hand evoke a linguistic terrain where the poles of the sacred and profane are very easily and rapidly reversed. The distortion of iconic images and their displacement is here a quality in language, where deviant gestures question the referentiality and performativity of language acts.

**Iconic Images and Language Acts**

The image evoked above of Florence suspended by her hair evokes resonances of the narrative type of the damsel-in-distress from French Arthurian romance on one hand and of the sublime body of the martyr in hagiographical texts on the other. It follows a scene in which Florence rebuffs her rapist brother-in-law Myles, inflicting on him a temporary impotence through prayer. The image of a damsel suspended by her tresses appears in the thirteenth-century prose romance *Lancelot* where it resonates with overtones of sexual vulnerability and violence, while preserving the body intact. The cut tresses in this text equal dishonor and a degree of sexual violence: the motif appears in a first instance where the damsel is said to be “deshonnérée” (dishonored) and “honnie” (shamed) by the cutting of her plaits, even if the aggression goes no further. Later in the text, Yvain rescues a damsel whom he sees suspended by her hair. Yvain refuses to cut the tresses in spite of her insistent cries urging him to do so, thus creating an image of idealized
preservation of the body akin to that of the invulnerability of the eroticized female martyr, suspended in infinitely prolonged physical torture. Here, the image is enhanced with iconic resonances of martyrdom and sanctification:

He bonde hur be the tresse of the heere,
And hangyd hur on a tre there,
That ylke feyre bodye;
He bete hur wyth a yerde of byrke,
Hyr nakyd flesche tyll he was yrke,
sche gaf many a rewfull crye.

...The feyrest palfrey lefte he there,
And hur selfe hangyd be the heere
And hur ryche wede;

...Sche was the feyrest creature,
And therto whyte as lylly flowre,
Hyr feyre face hyt schone full bryght;
To se hyt was a semely syght;
Tyll hur full faste they yede. (l. 1513-42)

This iconic mapping induces an overlap of eroticism on one hand and physical preservation combined with torture on the other—a cluster evoked in Sarah Kay’s concept of the sublime body of the martyr. The line “That ylke feyre bodye” (l. 1515) marks the transformation of Myles’s sexual frustration into violence and resonates with devotional elocutions related to the adoration of Christ’s passion. The description of Florence’s face evoking the topos of her fairness is striking in this scene and hovers between the eroticized esthetic appeal of the martyred female body and the interpersonal impact related to light effects discussed above. At the same time, the scene harks back to Myles’s earlier abuse of Florence’s body:

Tho the lady syghed wondur sare,
And felle of on hur palfray.
He bete hur wyth hys nakyd swyrde,
And sche caste up many a rewfull rerde,
And seyde ofte, ‘Weleawaye!
Schall Y nevyr my lorde see?’
‘No, be God that dyed on tre’,
The false traytur can saye.
Up he hur caste, and forthe they rode. (1424-32)
Physical violence is articulated with the evocation of Christ’s passion (l. 1430) under the modality of the oath in its inflection of swearword and related to the idea of Myles’s falseness (l. 1431). In the quote above, it is the image of Florence’s mistreated body that is brought in juxtaposition with the idea of the crucifixion. However, the phrase she uses in response to Myles’s aggression curiously, and perhaps comically, conflates the referential evocation of divine power with the intentional registers of the swearword: “Thorow grace of hym that dyed on rode, / False traytur, thou schalt lye” (l. 1511-12).

Myles, who is frustrated in his sexual projects, associates Florence’s prayer, which helps her preserve her virginity, with witchcraft: “He seyde, ‘Thou haste wychyd me, / I may not have to do wyth the, / Undo or thou schalt abye'” (l. 1507-09). His accusation places the agency over the events entirely in Florence’s control, which she at once reclaims and defers: “Sche answeryd hym wyth mylde mode, / ‘Thorow grace of hym that dyed on rode, / False traytur, thou schalt lye’” (l. 1510-12). Florence’s “mylde” manner refers back to her prayer, yet the wording and orientation of the speech act denote its congruity with the colloquial use of the oath as a verbal gesture emphasizing the validity of utterance, and in itself asserts Florence’s verbal agency in the face of her aggressor. Thus in the parallel structure “thou schalt abye / … / thou schalt lye” (l. 1509-12), the verb “lye” weakens both the validity of Myles’s utterance and that of his actions, mapping together the meanings of “lie” and “lose” (MED, “lesen” v. 2, 4).

The circumstances and the protagonist’s use of the collocation “[t]horow grace of hym that dyed on rode” (l. 1511) have the double effect of enhancing a swear word or phrase with a referential validity which curtails the blasphemy inherent in Myles’s use of similar phrases (e.g. l. 1430). On the other hand, however, the effect is that of including and mapping the idea of divine agency onto this type of banal and possibly transgressive utterance. This type of phrase is predominantly used in the poem as an oath in the sense evinced by Agamben\(^3\): a speech act doubling an utterance in a self-reflexive confirmation of validity, which does not effectively rely on the involvement of extraneous reference (the agency of god/s or a guarantee for the fulfillment of action). It is found in this usage for instance in the lines: “Schall Y nevyr my lorde see?’ / No, be God that dyed on tre’, / The false traytur can saye” (l. 1429-31); or the hermit’s “‘Be God’, he seyde, ‘that boght me dere, / I had no bettur thys sevyn yere’” (l. 1477-78). In this case, however, it keeps this self-referential status, while being infused with effective power, which is itself
shored up in elocution (Florence’s prayer). Partaking of the oath, the magical conjuration and the prayer, Florence’s linguistic act is as effective as it is indescribable. While activating all of these connotations and circumferences of verbal action, it performs and exceeds any single one of them, reorienting the impact of the utterance in terms not of truth-value but of interpersonal use and impact.

The entire sequence staging the violent interactions between Myles and Florence articulates ideas of linguistic agency with images of Florence’s near-martyring. Florence’s power to act and survive is tightly related to her use of language: as an important element of her education she is said to be able to read, “And all thynge dyscrye” (l. 60). “Dyscrye” here could possibly mean “to write” (MED, 3), yet the reading the text seems to privilege is “to characterize or define”, “to interpret or explain” (MED 2 a, b)34. At the same time, this mention is situated next to the occupatio topos conveying her beauty as indescribable and escaping language: “All hur bewteys forto nevyn / Myght no man undur hevyn, / Forsothe no more may l” (l. 64-6). Potency in language is relativized here in reference to a corporeal dimension exceeding linguistic skill, thus introducing a major aspect of the poem concerned with the use and control over language as an agency circumscribing the body. When threatened with rape by Myles, Florence invokes divine protection over her body:

There he wolde have leyn hur by,
And sche made hur preyer specyally,
To God and Mary feyre and free:
‘Let nevyr thys false fende
My body nodur schame nor schende,
Myghtfull in mageste!’
Hys lykyng vanysched all away. (l. 1438-44)

The effect of her prayer is not a miraculous sequestration of her body, even when she prays “God to be hur schylde” (l. 1497), but rather a modification of Myles’s reactions, capacities and desires. The same detumescent effect is produced on the following evening, when “ryght as he was at assaye / Hys lykyng vanyscht all awaye” (l. 1498-99). Florence’s tribulations necessitate the invocation of divine help on more than one occasion, and each time the effect is expressed as an alteration of the antagonist’s intentions or capacity for action. For instance, Tyrry’s foregoing his decision to punish Florence is narrated as the converging effect of the sight of the young woman and her prayer35:
They dyght hur on the morne in sympull atyre,  
And led hur forthe un to the fyre,  

...  
Sche seyde, ‘God of myghtys moost,  
Fadur and Sone and Holy Goost,  
As Y dud nevyr thys dede,  
Yf Y gyltles be of thys,  
Brynge me to thy bygly blys,  
For thy grete godhede’.  
All that evyr on hur can see,  
Wrange ther hondys for grete pyte  
And farde as they wolde wede. (l. 1672-83)

Here Florence’s positioning in enunciation is remarkable, evincing a relation to her own agency which articulates full awareness of her actions with the possibility of an aspect which escapes her control: “As Y dud nevyr thys dede, / Yf Y gyltles be of thys” (l. 1677-78). This enunciation seems particularly fitting given the circumstances of her plight; the murder is fully incongruous with her intentions, yet she wakes up with a knife in her hand to see the throat of her bedfellow lying next to her bleeding and cut in sunder (l. 1632). At the same time, Florence does not exactly pray for the saving of her life here: her demand is “Brynge me to thy bygly blys” (l. 1679), and elsewhere she is clearly shown to be ready to forgo her life for the sake of her integrity (“Sche had levyr to have be dedd, / Then there to have loste hur maydynhedd / Or he had hur by layne”, l. 1867-69). Besides its open wording, the prayer strikingly resonates with the grotesque image of “hur grete feyre hede” (l. 1669) discussed above, thus associating images of overflowing, striking or even uncanny corporeity with powerful yet slippery linguistic gestures.

These particular language acts are manifested in counter-relief to situations of deprivation or impairment of the capacity for speech. Florence is herself placed under a verbal taboo or in the impossibility of speaking. Myles makes her swear an oath under duress that she will not reveal her identity or his misdeeds:

He made the lady to swere an othe,  
That sche schulde not telle for lefe nor lothe,  
Nevyr in no cuntre,  
‘Fro whens thou came nor what thou ys,  
Nor what man broght the fro thy blysses,  
Or here Y schall brenne the’. (l. 1489-94)
After she has been left hanging up by her hair Florence is physically unable to speak and close to death: “Sche myght not speke, the romance sayde; / On a lyter they hur leyde, / … / For almoste was sche dedd” (l. 1546-51). This instance is congruent with the analogous episode in the French Lancelot, while omitting the rationalization of the incapacity for speech provided in the latter text: “ne ne parole mais gaires, car tant avoit crié ke la vois avoit toute fallie” (“she was hardly capable of speech, for she had lost her voice crying”) and shifting it to the narrative authority of the source text, “the romance sayde” (l. 1551). While the damsel in Lancelot bursts out in resounding cries and lamentations as soon as she recovers her voice, here silence is extended and exploited as a means for a new narrative shift, casting the character in a successive alternative role and series of tribulations. Sir Tyrry further forbids any inquiries on the part of his household over her identity: “The lorde comawndyd hys men everychon / That tythyngys of hur they shulde sper noon, / Nor ones aske of whens sche were” (l. 1555-57). This marks the beginning of an adventure depending on the incognito of her noble status. The withholding of Florence’s identity furthers her calamitous adventures. At the same time, it suspends the stabilizing roles—that of a daughter, wife and mother—which the narrative typology has assigned for her, thus playing on a destabilization of identitary concepts. Silence is generated and explored as a narrative tool structuring the plot, yet it is also significant as a part of a dynamics of language acts including lie, delusion, twisted truth, perjury, promise, oath and prayer.

The oath has a strong prohibitive power in this text. When for instance in an earlier episode one of the barons, who remains loyal to Florence is made upon threat of death to swear an oath of complicity to Myles unlawfully usurping his brother’s place, he seeks the pope’s absolution of the oath before he can act against it:

‘And certys Y am sworne them too.  
Holy Fadur, what schall Y do,  
That turned were all thys stryfe?’

Then the pope was not lothe  
To assoyle hym of hys othe,  
For hyt to falsehed can clyne;  
‘Syr, Y schall telle the a sekyr tale,  
Hyt ys bettur brokyn then hale,  
I set my sowle for thyne’. (l. 1123-31)
The oath here has in itself absolute prohibitive power with regard to the sworn person’s actions, at the same time it is evaluated and proclaimed as invalid by the pope with regard to its compromised truth conditions: “hyt to falsehed can clyne” (l. 1128). The pope has the capacity to evaluate the relative validity of the oath and eventually warrant and even encourage its “breaking” (l. 1130), dissolving and overriding its binding power by his own verbal act: “Y schall telle the a sekyr tale” (l. 1129). The pope’s “sekyr tale” hinges on the guarantee of a subsequent verbal act of pledging “my sowle for thyne” (l. 1131).

The binding power of these speech acts points to a specific understanding of the agency of language in this text. The images used to evoke them witness a self-reflexive attention to language, whose power is staged as both effective and possibly destructive, exceeding the control of the uttering subject and of the poem itself. At the beginning of the poem enunciation seems to precipitate the misfortunate killing of Florence’s father. When Florence sees Emere acting bravely on the battlefield, she cries out to him in a spontaneous gesture of desire and encouragement:

Sche cryed to hym wyth grete sowne,
‘Thou be my fadurs belde,
And thou schalt have all thy desyre,
Me and all thys ryche empyre,
Aftur my fadur to welde’.

When he harde the maydyn bryght,
Hys hedd he lyfte upon hyght,
The wedur waxe full hate.
Hur fadur nerehande can talme;
Soche a sweme hys harte can swalme,
For hete he waxe nere mate.
When that they had so done,
A quarell came fleyng soone,
And thorow the hed hym smate. (l. 761-74)

Florence’s outcry makes Emere look up at her, and the encounter is concomitant with a sudden rising up in heat of the weather, which seems to induce such faintness in her father that he nearly swoons (l. 768-69). At the same time, this chain of events is conveyed in terms of actions which seem to be under the protagonists’ control, and these events coordinate with the misfortunate accident that succeeds them: “When that they had so done, / A quarell came fleyng soone” (l.
This extremely curious scene conveys a multiple and elusive agency in language, whereby enunciation emerges as corporeal spontaneity which in turn impacts and orients the body. Here, the grasp of language seems to entail loss of control over a dimension of corporeal knowledge, which at once motivates enunciation and exceeds it.

The paradigms structuring the body in a similar way fail to operate unequivocally and tend towards their own destabilization. The tortures the protagonist endures do cast her in the types of the virgin/martyr/exemplary wife, but in a way that emphatically avoids full engagement with the trope. In the first torture scene discussed above, Florence’s hanging by the hair comes close to the iconicity of martyrdom without fully exploiting it. Florence’s body is neither destroyed, nor miraculously preserved or exalted. It is simply rescued by another protagonist, taken care of and allowed to restore, entering the economy of the everyday body and its vital needs:

They bathyd hur in erbys ofte,
And made hur sore sydes softe,
...
They fed hur wyth full ryche fode,
And all thyng that hur nede stode,
They servyd hur in that stedd. (l. 1549-54)

This oblique strategy of evoking and actively shunning the martyr typology is deployed in the immediately preceding episode, when Myles first verbally abuses and finally kills the hermit who has offered him and his abducted victim food and shelter:

The wykkyd man tho made hym bowne,
In at the dore he hym bete,
And sethyn fyre upon hym sete,
Ferre fro every towne.

The holy armyte brente he thare,
And lefte that bygly hows full bare,
That semely was to see.
The lady beganne to crye and yelle,
And seyde, ‘Traytur thou schalt be in helle,
There evyr thou schalt bee’. (l. 1479-88)

Although Florence’s cries resonate in the scene, it is not she who is tortured and burned. The image looms large and affects her, yet remains in parallel, possible but not fully activated.
This is not the only way in which the character of Florence in its corporeal agency slips through both topical and physical appropriation. When sold to a mariner by the wily convict whom she saves and engages as her servant, her fairness is evaluated in terms of gold equaling or surpassing the weight of her body:

‘On covenawnt sche ys the feyrest thynge,  
That evyr ye sye olde or yynge’,  
And he at them can smyle.  
So mekyll golde for hur he hyght,  
That hyt passyd almoost hur weyght. (l. 1786-90)

The deal is guileful and the bag of gold turns out to contain lead (l. 1816-18). The transaction is summed up in reproachful terms by the accomplice burgess: “For certenly wythowten wene / Thou haste begyled a lady schene, / And made hur evyll of redd’” (l. 1822-24). The adjective “schene” (“luminous, glorious, fair”, MED 1,2) resonates with Florence’s descriptions in terms of brightness and light on one hand and with the idea of the gold equivalent of her bodily weight on the other. Cast in quantifiable terms, her body remains nevertheless elusive by the transformation of gold into lead. The attribution of value-worth to her body is further figured in the mariner’s claim to ownership: “Damysell, Y have the boght, / For thou art so worthely wroght” (l. 1843-44). The mariner’s attempt at rape narrows down the claim in threateningly constrictive gestures: “In hys armes he can hur folde, / Hur rybbes crakyd as they breke wolde” (l. 1849-50). The mariner’s locution pretending at possession over Florence’s body and person echoes the stock phrase “Be God, that boght me dere” (l. 244, passim) repeated many times in the text in the common usage of the oath discussed above. It acquires varying degrees of literalness in the course of the narrative: here Florence is literally bought by the mariner, but the invocation “Sche preyed to God, that boght hur dere, / To sende hur sownde to Syr Emere, / That hur full dere had boght” (l. 1573-75) also recalls the conditions of revenge on Garcy that she had set for her husband as a price for her virginity (l. 1000-03). This attribution of value to Florence—whether in terms of monetary exchange, a matrimonial reward or object of desire—is continuously elided and subverted. Her living body escapes from underpinning value in these various contexts. Florence’s everyday body is never an object of possession; she finally reunites with her husband not as a reward for his military exploits but through her own healing powers.
This multi-directional displacement of topical images employs the lexical network of face, skin and bread to extend over the figure of the Eucharist. The curious use of the image of the Eucharist destabilizes even the commonsensical stock phrases literally evoking the redemption of the body in the resurrection. Florence evokes the host in a locution which suggests an overlap and displacement of her husband’s figure by the divine image, thus inaugurating a new stage in her state of “temporary virginity”40, that between marriage and its consummation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yyt schall ye nevyr in bedde me by,} \\
\text{Tyl ye have broght me Syr Garcy,} \\
\text{For no maner of thynge,} \\
\text{Or lefte hym in the felde for dedd;} \\
\text{Be hym Y sawe in forme of bredd,} \\
\text{When the preest can synge’. (l. 1000-05)}
\end{align*}
\]

She evokes the image again when Myles tries to delude her into marrying him, falsely claiming that his brother is dead: “Y wyll weddyd bee / To a lorde that nevyr schall dye, / That preestys schewe in forme of bredd” (l. 1099-1101). A pun on “bredd” appears at the end of the poem when Myles’s leprosy is conveyed in the following terms: “Mylys that hur a weye ledd / He was the fowlest mesell bredd / Of pokkys and bleynes bloo” (l. 2020-22). The homonymy between “bread” and the past form of “breden”—“to breed” (MED v.3), “to spread, disseminate” (MED v. 2)—is coupled with a pun on “mesell” (“leprosy”, MED n.2) and “missal” (“of the mass” [MED, adj]). “Bread” has particular resonances with the character of Myles, who kills a hermit by burning him alive because he dislikes the barley bread the hermit has to offer: “Chorle, … / Brynge us of thy bettur bredd” (l. 1474-75). The episode is evoked again in Myles’s confession at the end of the story: “And sythyn he tolde them of the barley bredd, / And how he brent the armyte to dedd” (l. 2056-57). Further, this evocation resonates with the medieval method of trial by ordeal, considered to be reserved for the clergy, known in the Anglo-Saxon period as corsnaed (or corsned) and possibly popular over an extended time span throughout European cultures, which consisted in swallowing a morsel of barley bread—successful for the innocent or provoking choking for the guilty41. In the mapping of all these connotations on the word “bread” the image of divinity appears at once as a point of suspension of earthly tribulations and instability in Florence’s invocation, warranting her temporary virginity. At the same time the image remains just a face she has seen “in forme of bredd” (l. 1004), in the same way in which a
villain’s face acquires visibility through its resemblance to and distortion of the images of holiness pertaining to bread.

A contextual resonance of this literary treatment of overlapping layers of images of sanctity and profanation can be found in the late medieval experience of the Mass. Michael Mullett draws attention to the heterogeneous temporal and esthetic structures inherent to the different phases of the liturgical service. In particular, a time division punctuated the different parts of the liturgy during which different types of behavior on the part of the public were allowed:

The less formal phases were those parts of the service which belonged especially to the congregation as a human society. If ribald remarks were made when the notices, and especially the bans of marriage, were announced, that was, so to speak, where such remarks belonged. ... Not all the Mass was equally holy, nor was the whole church equally 'sacred space'. ... These demarcations, together with lay veneration of the Host, point to popular understanding of the 'eucharistic mystery' that was the Mass.

Beyond the clearly structured “popular understanding” of the liturgical ritual evoked by Mullett, the text ventures into a displacement and reversal of the spheres of the sacred and the profane. The image of the Eucharist is mapped onto a villain’s face decayed by leprosy and liberated to partake in a profane epiphany in the sense elaborated centuries later by Joyce—the sudden revelation of a character or the gist of a situation. The ideas of form, visibility and readability of skin reverberate with the earlier evocations of Florence’s face, “flesche and felle” (307), troubling the seemingly disciplined surface of the images. This profaning gesture in language does not maintain but instead blurs the demarcations between the spheres of the religious and the everyday.

If Florence’s body eschews appropriation, her own agency also seems to operate outside both of her intentional control, and of divine intervention—when she suddenly discovers that she is able to heal, “Sche wolde ther had wytten therof none” (l. 1923). The phrase implies both Florence’s modesty and a very specific attitude to her gift as a capacity she uses without casting it in any discursive assignation. Her gift is not specifically attributed to divine grace—while “God” and “Mary” are clearly evoked as her protectors both in sparing her from rape and in bringing her safe and sound out of the shipwreck to the monastery (l. 1914-17), it is her presence (l. 1921-22) and “hande” (l. 2110) that operate the healing. At the same time, here, as well as throughout the
numerous escapes out of her tribulations, at issue is not astuteness, agility or performative powers. The successful gestures and actions of both villains and positive (male) characters are evoked in terms of “maystrie” and vigorous force: when Florence’s defenders at court initially release her from Myles, they overcome him “smartly”: “But smartely was he tane, / And put in an hye towre” (l. 1143-44). On the battlefield, Egravayne employs an astute gesture to avoid the treacherous stroke intended by Myles—he throws a mantel which folds around the villain’s arm, thus preventing injury (l. 1321-26). The end of the poem condemns Florence’s wrongdoers associating ideas of falsity, slyness and control through the social mechanism of shame: “Them bethynke or they be false, / … / Be hyt nevyr so slylye caste, / Yyt hyt schamyth the maystyr at the laste” (l. 2177-80).

Florence uses no skill of this type, yet neither her actions, nor her salvation, are wholly accountable for in terms of divine intervention—the villains’ confessions at the end of the story explicitly attribute the agency to “hur wylle” (l. 2109): the mariner claims that “Sche brake my schypp wyth a tempeste” (l. 2101), and Myles accounts for his thwarted intentions at rape: “I had nevyr wyth hur to doo, / For Y myght not wynne hur to” (l. 2053-54). As we have seen above, the protagonist’s capacity to act is located in a form of availability situated between address in speech and effective action. Florence’s multi-faceted character and the unfolding of the actions and events focused on her evoke a use of the body situated in-between the control of agency—discursive and interactional—and its suspension.

Deleuze uses the term “solecism” to evoke the controversial meanings the body and its gestures can give rise to: “the body is capable of gestures which prompt an understanding contrary to what they indicate. … For example, one arm may be used to hold off an aggressor while the other is held open to him, in seeming welcome.”46 This equivocal perception, possible in the isolated visual moment of a still, contains a multiplicity of active and latent significances. Deleuze sees in the potential of such “suspended gesture” the evocation of a power inherent in language: “But what, precisely, is the positivity of the hand, its ambiguous gesture, or its ‘suspended gesture’? Such a gesture is the incarnation of a power which is also internal to language: dilemma, disjunction, and disjunctive syllogism.”47 I propose that this poem employs its imagistic resources in a play with this double potential of the relation body/language: the potential multiplicity of the body’s figuration in language in inextricable relation with the
multiple layering of meaning, registers and interaction in linguistic gestures. While the protagonist’s female body emerges as undetermined otherwise than relationally, and emphatically fails to coincide with each successive topical image, the enactment troubles the iconicity of these images and posits this trouble as a phenomenon in language. The disquieting proximity of the prayer and the oath, as that of the joyous exclamation and the curse, is interwoven with the profanation of religious symbols and the exaltation of pragmatic gestures of empathy. Agamben points out that the sacred constitutes a sphere placed outside of human use, and profanation is a gesture of returning the sacred thing into availability to human commerce: “if ‘to consecrate’ (sacrare) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, ‘to profane’ meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men”48. The religious attitude (relegere) consists in observing this separation between the sacred and the profane49—here, instead, language plays on blurring the separation, mapping the domains of the sacred and the everyday in contiguity, and reshuffling their territories: “To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use”50. Play is an essential element of profanation, as it is of the sacred: “play not only derives from the sphere of the sacred but also in some ways represents its overturning”51. At issue is not abolishing or secularizing the sphere of the sacred, but instead reinvesting, neutralizing what is profaned, making it available under a different aspect of relation: “Just as the religio that is played with but no longer observed opens the gate to use, so the powers of economics, law, and politics, deactivated in play, can become the gateways to a new happiness”52. Profanation, according to Agamben, is a political operation: it “deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power has seized”53. In this sense, the profaning play of language with categories and paradigms of the body, reaching out to the sacred images of liturgy and the forms of prayer is symptomatic of a cultural, social and political permeability of registers characteristic of the late medieval and early modern period. This text is a witness of a process in the late-medieval appropriation of literary, social, religious tropes and definitions and their dynamization, which heralds the emergence of a “popular culture” open on the advening modernity.

Michael Mullett has emphasized the double mobility of cultural ideas between social strata in this period—not only from the social elites to lower social groups but also in the opposite direction—from the popular to the aristocratic milieux54. This cultural permeability accounts for
many of the features of the production, readership and circulation context of the poem and the manuscript containing it. As Riddy has shown, at issue is a readership category that has access to and knowledge of both Chaucerian and non-canonical modes of literary production and appreciates the social, cultural and tropological mobility and syncretism of texts such as *Le Bone Florence of Rome*.

In this text the body emerges not as a discreet unit, but as the intersection of multiple discursive and interactional attitudes—it is not monolithic, either in old age, care or mis-use, but emerges as the crossing point of narrative configurations and solicitations. It appears as both the object and effect of the experiences narrated and the intentionalities and concepts activated. Its enunciation articulates specific physical characteristics of mode, state and appearance which are simultaneously extremely precise and underdetermined—these evocations delineate narrative possibilities which are then activated, foregone or performed according to unforeseen configurations of the body’s capacity in the event. The series of tribulations evince a body’s capability to determine itself and its course of action which is balanced between agency and uncontrollability. This indeterminacy of the body focalizes a disruptive power in language where the agency of a linguistic gesture on one level espouses the body’s intentionality, but on another level multiplies and refracts the possibilities of this intentionality. While events and trials come up unpredictably, and Florence is ultimately pre-destined to the general narrative outlines of control over certain aspects of her life (choice of husband) and lack thereof over others (the inescapable roles of wife and mother), there is a resurgent capacity of the body to face and reconfigure these constraints and challenges.

Florence’s narrative measure of corporeity shows her eliding the paradigms that cast her in an economy of iconic and/or patriarchal exemplarity, and thus enhances the representational scope of the body while shifting the focus from typology to the pantomime of bodies in language. The staging of this relation taps with and exhibits the resources of language while anchoring them fundamentally in a body. “Such is the positive power of a superior ‘solecism’”, writes Deleuze, or the force of poetry constituted in the clash and copulation of words. If language *imitates* bodies, it is not through onomatopoeia, but through flexion. And if bodies imitate language, it is not through organs, but through flexion. There is an entire pantomime, internal to language, as a discourse or a story within the body. If gestures speak, it is first of all because words mimic gestures.
The relation between corporeity and language staged in this poem works on unsettling models of representation and pointing at their origin in an expressive resource in the actualization of the body.

If the concepts of maidenhood and glorious body are cognate\textsuperscript{57}, the figuration of Florence’s body as enclosed in the discursive sphere of inoperativity and preservation is attenuated and its paradigmatic stakes are as it were diminished: the defense of her virginity is not a goal in itself but an aspect of her personal integrity including basic physical survival and relations with other characters. Her relation to her own body is deprived of the ferociousness of defense of a particular permanent characteristic/property while at the same time it involves aspects of exposure to risk and care—whether for her own body or for those of others\textsuperscript{58}. This care is constantly reconfigured in terms of use: the articulation of Florence’s body continuously escapes a final discursive grasp—be it religious, interactional, typological—and persists through being multiple, at once engaging and elusive. Florence escapes the containment of the very parameters she effectively uses with regard to her bodily preservation—hers is a slippery body which operates in discourse without ever being caught up in it. This attitude is by no means masterful or deliberately playful, it is not that of the trickster, but rather exposes an interstice between intentionality and unawareness, determinacy and possibility insistently explored in the agency of language in this text. The body is shown as multiple in the textual play on several paradigms and through their enactment, deferral or dismissal an agency of creative play in language is brought to the fore. The literary qualities of this “unpretentious”\textsuperscript{59} text resonate with the bourgeois readership context envisaged by Riddy, but rather than being restrained to a didactic function, they point to a cultural (mis-)appropriation and democratization of the imaginary and expressive resources of literature into a project of self-definition of an emerging middle-class. Language appears as an agency that creates and undoes reality, yet whose power escapes control.

The problematic of use as a philosophical idea is developed by Agamben in the historical context of consolidation of the Franciscan order: this is where he detects an ontology of use conceived for the first time in Western thought\textsuperscript{60}. According to the results of Agamben’s investigation, this enunciation remains a \textit{hapax} in the history of Western thought, which seems to lack the very basis for such an ontology of use\textsuperscript{61}. If we can detect the traces or intuition of this idea in an unpretentious literary text like \textit{Le Bone Florence of Rome}, what are the implications about the
context or development of such an idea in its cultural, literary-historical context? The topical attention to the body, in particular in registers of reversal and profanation in the sense discussed here, lapsing into the burlesque and the parodic, is characteristic of the late medieval and early modern literary production in English\(^{62}\). In French with the development of the fabliau genre to which these texts seem to be responding either as direct adaptations or in more syncretic forms as in the text studied here, this kind of poetic gesture predates significantly. If it fits the ideological colors we associate with modernity, a text that is bent on the refusal to control its enunciation still presents radically the question of use as an ontological problem, entailing the reversal of both medieval and modern paradigms of representation.

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1. The concept as used here refers to the glorious or resurrected body, characterized by images of stasis, immutability and preservation, see Caroline Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
It is considered under an exclusively philological perspective in Nicolas Jacobs’s study “Some Creative Misreadings in Le Bone Florence of Rome: An Experiment in Textual Criticism”, in Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Wolfeboro N.H.; Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988). My analysis builds on Riddy’s heretofore single extensive literary study of the text. I explore further some of the central images highlighted by Riddy, while focusing on the ways in which they play on and depart from pre-existing literary tradition.

For this observation see Barbara Rosenwein, “Les communautés émotionnelles et le corps”, Médiévales 61 (2011): 55-76, who discusses further the increased attention to the corporeal rendering of emotional expression over the span of the medieval period, in a number of “emotional communities” ranging from the early to the late Middle Ages.


Riddy, p. 207.

For a comment on the attitude of “inclusion by exclusion” of the everyday body in medieval “high” culture, see Riddy, p. 209. The general logic of this observation is Foucauldian and is developed as a major argument in Agamben’s Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Acknowledging pain and discomfort caused by the body did not fit the hagiographical mode—for instance the complaint uttered by Bernard of Clairvaux in a letter to his friend Arnold of Bonnevaux about his insomnia, stomach pains and swollen feet: “I must say that nothing can give me pleasure now when all has turned into bitterness” is edited out from the description of the last days of Bernard provided in the Vita by Geoffrey of Clairvaux (Bernard of Clairvaux, Epistola 310, PL CLXXXII, col. 514 and Vita prima auctore Gaufrido, PL CLXXXV, lib. 5, c. 2, col. 357, quoted in Shulamith Shahar, “The old body in medieval culture”, in Framing Medieval Bodies, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 176).

Jacques Derrida, The Animal that Therefore I Am, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2008). Derrida evokes the human consciousness of nudity with respect to the animal as the consciousness of a lack of propriété: an absence of a definite, biologically predestined property, which is also lack of propriety, in the sense that it is liable to generate shame in a social context.

“The body] is multivalent: sometimes funny; at others appalling; at others no more than matter-of-factly there to be contended with: fed, rested, clothed. It is what the poem understands humans to be: what I call the everyday body. The everyday body is the body at home; it is the product of the peculiar perspectives of close-quarters domestic living, of its intimacies and knowledge” (Riddy, p. 208). Riddy’s concept foregrounds the multiple enunciative and transformative possibilities this type of attention to the body allows: “the everyday body is not a thing but a bundle of attitudes, a way of thinking about the body that makes it possible to get through the day, by turning distaste into a joke and awe into pity, or allowing all these perspectives to coexist” (p. 210).

Riddy defines the term “bourgeoisie” in the fifteenth-century context as “the families of the people who owned their own businesses, were members of the franchise and of the leading fraternities, and participated in town government”. From this perspective, “[o]ne of the
ideological tasks of bourgeois women, unlike their aristocratic counterparts, must have been the
unmediated and intimate management of … the ‘everyday body’ in the home” (p. 201).
12 Agamben, Profanations, p. 73-4.
13 The “everyday body” is not an a-historical perspective: “To use the everyday body as a tool of
analysis, we need to specify it, to locate it in particular social contexts, and on grids of gender,
class and age” (Riddy, p. 209). One could evoke here the closely resembling perspective of “bare
life” as biological life outside cultural structures as evinced by Agamben in Homo Sacer, yet the
pragmatic and dynamic cast of tropological mobility displayed in this text makes the body
observable in the interstices of passage between various discursive casts rather than as clearly
suspended from dominant structures as it can be seen for instance in Sir Orfeo and Havelok. For
the concept of “bare life” in the latter text see Robert Mills, “Havelok’s Bare Life and the
Significance of Skin”, in Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture, ed. Katie L. Walter
(New York: Palgrave, 2013), 57-80.
15 I have used Viętor’s edition of the text: Wilhelm Vietor, ed., Le Bone Florence of Rome,
(Marburg, 1893). All references are to line numbers. I have systematically emended v to u and
conversely for easier understanding; replaced thorn by th; and yogh by y. 16 For an analysis of
the vast array of meanings the word “thing” is called upon to endorse in literary texts from
Gower to Fitzgerald, see Ad Putter, “The Poetry of ‘Things’”, in The Construction of Textual
Identity in Medieval and Early Modern Literature, ed. Indira Ghose and Denis Renevey, Swiss
Papers in English Language and Literature 22 (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, 2009).
17 “Taste”, as Riddy points out, is a word that “hovers between the medical, the erotic and the
maternal: part caress, part healing touch” (p. 205; MED 2 a, b, c).
18 A widely known intertextual example of the fabliau version of the old man’s body is
Chaucer’s “Merchant’s Tale”. Another example is Dunbar’s “The Two Married Women and the
Widow”, see also Riddy, p. 215, n. 28.
19 The argument of this multi-faceted presentation of the embodied features of Garcy’s character
is extended to the representation of old age in Riddy’s analysis: “The poem’s treatment of Garcy
suggests that there is not a single fix on old age or a single way of talking about it: it is a mixture
of energy and decay; of autonomy and dependence; of sexual impotence and a kind of Yeatsian
desire for desire; simultaneously pathetic, contemptible, terrifying and absurd” (Riddy, p. 207).
20 For a discussion of the fabliau genre and its representatives in Middle English see John Hines,
The Fabliau in English (London; New York: Longman, 1993), who highlights recurrent features
of “deception”, “irony” and the types of the “trickster” and the “deceived husband” (p. 10-11);
he also highlights the use of “the sexual and the scatological” in the Middle English adaptations
of the genre (p. 276).
21 Originally based on a distinction between “popular” and “elite” culture “and the hierarchy of
taste they assume” (Riddy, p. 199), the term is increasingly recognized as inadequate to account
for these texts from a literary perspective or even in terms of audiences concerned, see Jane
Gilbert and Ad Putter, eds., The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance (Harlow:
Longman, 2000).
22 Garcy also sends off the verbal threat of rape—one in a series—here warded off by her
father’s intermediary but anticipating what is to come. The protection Florence elaborates for
herself in the later episodes of real and imminent physical threat is verbal. Her prayers operate
not so much through a protective circle of inviolability, but rather through a modification in the counterpart’s reaction. See discussion below.

23 Isabel Davis, “Cutaneous Time in the Late Medieval Literary Imagination”, in Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture, ed. Katie L. Walter (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 99-118, discusses the importance of skin to time perception and its literary figurations as a space of temporality and interaction. All of the abovementioned aspects are discussed in the volume Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture, ed. Katie L. Walter (2013).

24 Patricia Harris Stablein Gillies, “L’Art de la métamorphose: Lancelot et les effets de lumière”, in Lancelot-Lanzelet: Hier et aujourd’hui, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Michel Zink, (Greifswald: Reineke, 1995), p. 207-17, discusses light effects in the prose Lancelot as evincing a rationale of transformation and interaction closely related to the notion of “manner”. Her discussion foregrounds the articulation of enunciative power and corporeity enhanced in a visual space of transformation and allows us to relate the trope as used here to its complex background in romance.


27 Occupatio is a rhetorical term designating the trope whereby the author claims not being able to express or describe something while actually doing it.


29 Ibid., p. 152.

30 “Et la damoisielle li crie ke il les trence pour Dieu, mais il en a si grant pitié, pour chou ke trop estoient bieles, k’il nes endure a trenchier. … Et celle ki n’est pas asseure li prie toute voies del trenchier et il dist ke, se Dieu plaist, elle sera si bien delivree ke ja si biau trezor n’i pierdera comme ses treces”, Le Val des amants infidèles, p. 194.


32 For instance Christ’s face is systematically referred to as “fair” in Ancrene Wisse, Part VII, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).


35 At the end of the poem Tyrry explicitly singles out the visual impact of her appearance and the brightness of her face as the reason for his forgiveness: “For sche was so bryght of blee / And so semely on to see / Therfore let y hur goo” (l. 2068-70).

36 Le val des amants infidèles, p. 188.
Le val des amants infidèles, p. 188.

Jamie A. Friedman, *Dispersed selves, excessive flesh: Embodied identity flows in three Middle English narratives* (ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2010), discusses the fluidity and malleability of identity in medieval romance, foregrounding its narrative unfolding in ways which disallow the stabilization of identitary concepts.


RIDDY, p. 204.


Leprosy in the Middle Ages was considered as a disease affecting with corruption and disintegration the human form—both the face and the entire frame of the body: “*Forma, figura, compositio*, and bodily *continuitas* are all prey to leprosy’s ‘devouring’. … Medical treatises, exemplary tales, saints’ lives, and romances all characterize the disease by its power to unmake the human figure” (Julie Orlemanski, “Desire and Defacement in The Testament of Cresseid”, in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, p. 161-62). The skin surface of the body as a decisive place of readability and transformation of “body and mind” is discussed in Susan Small, “The Medieval Werewolf Model of Reading Skin”, in *Reading Skin*, 81-98. It is significant that all the antagonists are afflicted by impaired mobility and bodily shape.


*Agamben, Profanations*, p. 73.


*Idem.*

*Idem.*


In this sense Agamben distinguishes between secularization and profanation: “Secularization is a form of repression. It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another.

“Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second
deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized” (p. 77).


55 Riddy, p. 200.

56 Deleuze, *Logic*, p. 286.


58 Besides the actions of healing Florence has to deal with three corpses in the course of the story—her father’s, a killed baron’s who is falsely presented as being that of her husband, and that of the treacherously murdered daughter of Sir Tyrre.

59 Riddy, p. 200.

60 See Giorgio Agamben, *De la très haute pauvreté: règles et forme de vie*, tr. Joël Gayraud, (Paris: Rivages, 2011), and *Profanations*, p. 82-3.

61 Agamben, *De la très haute pauvreté*.

Conference Proceedings — Note from the Editors

As part of our first Conference Proceedings Section, we present contributions from two of the four panelists who presented in our sponsored session, “Of Whom Shall I Be Afraid: Enemies in the Middle Ages.” Our 2014 Kalamazoo organizer also contributes a response to the session.

Daniel F. Melleno (University of California, Berkeley) provides an expanded abstract of his paper, “Scandinavians and Franks: Good Neighbors–Bad Neighbors.”

Edward Mead Bowen (Aberystwyth University) presents a modified version of the full paper he presented at Kalamazoo, entitled “(Former) Enemies at the Gate: Insinuations of Betrayal in Pa gur yv y porthaur.”

The other two papers presented in the Hortulus session were “‘Ni e yo amigo, ni enemigo’: Enmity, Trust, and Betrayal in Thirteenth-Century Iberia” by Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo (University of Lincoln) and “‘Into that vile countreye’: Figuring Ethnic Enmity with Gog and Magog in Kyng Alisaundar” by Josephine Livingstone (New York University)

Emerson Storm Fillman Richards (Indiana University, Bloomington), Hortulus’s 2014 Kalamazoo organizer, provides a response to each of the four papers and considers the scholarly implications of the session as a whole.

Jenny C. Bledsoe
Hortulus co-editor
Scandinavians and Franks: Good Neighbors-Bad Neighbors

By Daniel F. Melleno

This is an abstract of Dr. Melleno’s paper, which he presented in the Hortulus-sponsored session at the 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on Saturday, May 10, 2014.

In Frankish accounts of encounters with Scandinavians the prevailing imagery is savage and brutal. In sources such as The Annals of Saint-Bertin, the Miracula Sancti Martini, and Regino of Prüm’s Chronicle, Frankish authors report attacks on trading ports, monasteries, and towns. A common vocabulary of violence emerges from these sources: Northmen devastate (vastare), pillage (praedare), and burn (incendere).

With these contemporary sources as our guide, it is little wonder that the common conception of the relationship between Scandinavians and Franks in academic and popular culture remains one of fierce hatred and enmity. The Northman appears as an alien other, striking without warning, driven by a lust for blood and a hatred for the Christian Franks. Over the last three decades, however, scholars have come more and more to question this uncomplicated picture of the relationship between two peoples. Instead of focusing exclusively on moments of conflict, we have become more aware of the ability of Carolingian kings and Viking invaders to form productive relationships. More recent research has begun to reveal the long standing connections that existed between Franks and Scandinavians well before the mid-ninth century.

But if we can’t regard Franks and Scandinavians solely as enemies, is there a better way to understand their interactions? This paper examines exchanges between the Franks and three different Danish kings in the period from c. 750 to c. 840 and discusses another possible context within which to frame their relationships: that of neighbors.

Neighbors meet and exchange pleasantries; they form relationships based on familiarity and ongoing contact, sometimes friendly, other times not; they bicker and argue over boundaries and minor transgressions, conflicts which sometimes lead to violence. The conception of neighbor
allows for an understanding of the complicated ongoing relationship between Danes and Franks that goes beyond the othering so often present in Frankish sources. It allows for a spectrum of possible interactions, from the exchange of envoys, to the posturing of armies, to the giving of gifts. Neighbors need not always be friends, but they are always something more than enemies.

Daniel F. Melleno

Daniel F. Melleno earned his PhD in medieval history from the University of California, Berkeley in 2014. His dissertation, titled “Before They Were Vikings: Scandinavia and the Franks up to the Death of Louis the Pious,” examines political, social, and economic relationships and interactions between the Carolingian Empire and Scandinavia in the period before the major Viking attacks of the ninth century.
(Former) Enemies at the Gate: Insinuations of Betrayal in *Pa gur yv y porthaur*

By Edward Mead Bowen

*This is a modified version of the paper Mr. Bowen presented in the Hortulus-sponsored session at the 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on Saturday, May 10, 2014.*

The incomplete early Welsh poem *Pa gur yv y porthaur*, “What man is the gatekeeper,” continues to defy interpretation, yet remains one of the principal sources for early Welsh Arthurian material. The only version of this text appears in the manuscript known as the Black Book of Carmarthen (National Library of Wales Peniarth Manuscript 1). The provenance of the manuscript containing this poem, linked to Carmarthen in the south of Wales and dated to the mid-thirteenth century, is little in dispute.¹ The date for the composition of *Pa gur* has occasioned more debate. While some scholars have dated certain Welsh traditional narrative poems in the Black Book to before 1100 C.E., *Pa gur* is generally attributed to the beginning of the twelfth century C.E.² While one cannot be certain that the composition of the poem predates the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain)* in 1138,³ the poem betrays no obvious influences from Geoffrey’s *Historia* and the French romances of Chrétien de Troyes.⁴ As such, scholarly consensus deems the poem an invaluable source of pre-Galfridian Arthurian material, particularly important for those seeking to sketch a portrait of early Welsh Arthurian legend.⁵ Yet aside from the poem’s usefulness as a font from which scholars can collect a staggering number of references to Arthurian characters and narratives, *Pa gur* has garnered little critical attention save for a few notable exceptions. Deeper scrutiny of the poem’s content and stylistic features allows us to construct a cogent narrative of betrayal that places two major personages within the Welsh Arthurian canon first in conflict and finally, in reconciliation. In this way, *Pa gur* emerges as a powerful treatment of the consequences of feuds between friends—an account that as much informs our understanding of conflicting Welsh attitudes toward battle as it offers far-reaching implications for our understanding of early Welsh Arthurian tradition.
As the title of the poem indicates, the narrative of *Pa gur yv y porthaur* takes place within the framework of the Celtic literary motif known as the porter scene, a stock episode appearing in such texts as the Welsh *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Irish tale of the Second Battle of Moytura. This motif typically serves to allow the hero to prove himself to an uncooperative porter as well as to the audience through a catalogue of his abilities and deeds. In keeping with this tradition, *Pa gur* places Arthur and Cei before the gates of an unnamed fortress, where they enumerate their exploits and those of their war-band to convince a stubborn gatekeeper that they are indeed “the best men in the world.”6 As the dialogue continues, however, two peculiarities emerge that set *Pa gur* apart from other instantiations of the porter scene. Firstly, if one takes a step back to examine the poem as a whole, he or she realizes that it is, save for a few interruptions, a dialogue focusing exclusively on Arthur and Cei, with each man reciting the feats of the other. This emphasis on Arthur and Cei to the near exclusion of the rest of their war-band is not in and of itself extraordinary; a survey of the early Welsh Arthurian corpus firmly establishes the two men as the foremost figures in this body of literature as well as the most talented and accomplished members of Arthur’s company. Yet what at first seems to be simply a narrowed focus on Arthur and Cei begins to resemble something else when considered alongside *Pa gur*’s other notable peculiarity: its abrupt adoption and consistent use of the imperfect tense at line 17 and following. From this point onward, Arthur and Cei use the imperfect to describe their deeds and those of their men, narrating these exploits as if they have happened in the distant past. In cases where the pair recite the feats of their fellow warriors, the use of the imperfect makes this list sound more like an obituary or elegy as opposed to a list of living men’s credentials.7 While it is possible that the other warriors whom Arthur and Cei praise are silently accompanying the two men when they approach the fortress’s gates, it is equally possible that Arthur is reflecting on warriors who have long since met their end.8 Evidence for this interpretation becomes nearly ironclad at points, such as in lines 25-30, in which Arthur speaks of avenging two of his warriors who fought in the defense of Edinburgh, and in lines 62-63, in which Arthur states that it was better when his servants were alive, a term he uses to refer to his warriors earlier in the poem. These sentiments prompt us to imagine an Arthur whose career has reached a low point, and if the loss of Celli mentioned at line 33 corresponds to Arthur’s court of Celli Wig in Cornwall, this reference paints a yet bleaker portrait of an Arthur who has lost most of his warriors as well as his court.9 If so, the Arthur at the gates in *Pa gur* is not so much boasting of his war-band as he is reflecting
on his former glory. Such wistful reminiscence is absent from other instantiations of the porter scene and points to another purpose at work in Pa gur. Furthermore, if Arthur’s once-mighty war-band has dwindled from the host of luminaries Arthur names to a meager handful of men, the poem’s focus on Arthur and Cei, the two best of the few who remain, throws Arthur’s loss of status into even sharper relief. Yet what further deepens this sense of loss is the poem’s insinuation that Cei may himself bear some of the responsibility for Arthur’s fall—indeed, that he may have slain several of Arthur’s men. Let us return to the aforementioned account of the fall of Celli, presumably Celli Wig, at lines 31-36:

Kei ae heiriolei.  Cei would entreat them
Trae llathei pop tri.  when he struck them three at a time.
Pan colled kelli.  When Celli was lost,
Caffad cuelli.  there was fury.
Aseirolei Kei  Cei would entreat them
hid trae kymynhei.  as he cut them down.10

As these references to Cei pleading with his enemies bracket the description of the loss of Celli, we can assume that Cei fought with these foes in the same battle in which Arthur lost his court. The identity of Cei’s foes here, however, is uncertain. As the poem provides no intervening plural noun or group of obvious enemies between Arthur’s mention of his servants and his mention of the loss of Celli, we may assume that Arthur’s servants at line 17 are the foes in question. If so, we have to imagine that, in a narrative account known to the author of the poem, Cei turned against Arthur and Arthur’s men. This shift in loyalty would explain why Cei pleads with his enemies even as he strikes them—they were once his comrades-in-arms.11 A reason for this temporary defection does not immediately present itself. Yet, if one again steps back from the poem to examine it as a whole, its overall focus on Arthur and Cei may provide some insight, especially when one considers how the lion’s share of the glory in the deeds presented belongs to Cei. The poem devotes 31 of its 90 lines to Cei’s feats of arms, whereas Arthur’s achievements occupy a mere nine by comparison. As such, Pa gur presents a catalog of deeds in which Cei’s personal prestige threatens to overshadow the fame of not just Arthur, but the rest of Arthur’s war-band in its entirety. In the warrior culture of early Wales, competition for glory would surely have produced tensions between skilled comrades-in-arms as they rose to prominence within their war-band. This friction would have been especially pronounced if one of the members of
the war-band was thought to be a more talented, more accomplished, and worthier warrior than the war-band’s own leader.

With this aspect of martial competition in mind, Pa gur’s reduction in scope to Arthur and Cei takes on a further dynamic of tension when one realizes that Cei’s accomplishments mentioned in the poem have clearly outstripped those of his leader. A similar situation arises in the early-twelfth-century Welsh Arthurian prose tale Culhwch ac Olwen, in which Cei is responsible for completing nearly half of the so-called impossible tasks that Arthur’s war-band must perform to win the hand of Olwen for Arthur’s cousin. Upon Cei’s victorious return home after completing a particularly dangerous quest, Arthur targets him with a satirical englyn, thereby delivering one of the most powerful insults one could deliver in medieval Welsh society. Why Arthur would deliver such a devastating blow to Cei’s pride is unclear. Linda Gowans suggests in her monograph Cei and the Arthurian Legend that Arthur’s englyn is simply a convenient device for removing Cei from the narrative so as to allow Arthur to take the spotlight for the latter half of the story.¹² The insult indeed serves this narrative purpose, but it is also not too farfetched to imagine a chieftain driving his greatest warrior away out of fear that the reputation of this warrior may overtake his own. Yet if renewing his primacy at the head of his war-band was Arthur’s reason for humiliating Cei into leaving, the price for this opportunity is steep. This stain on Cei’s honor creates a seemingly irreparable rift between him and Arthur, so incensing Cei that he resolves to never have anything to do with Arthur in his hour of need from then on—no matter the depth of Arthur’s misfortune nor the number of the casualties on his side.¹³ As Pa gur contains several names and places omitted from Culhwch ac Olwen and various inconsistencies exist between the texts, it is unlikely that either drew upon each other as a written source.¹⁴ What is far more likely is that both texts owe their common episode of a rift between Arthur and Cei to a shared narrative tradition of such a period of animosity.

If Pa gur does contain traces of a narrative tradition in which Cei turned against Arthur, that the two once again stand together at the castle gates indicates a reconciliation—perhaps one in progress even during the events of this poem. Arthur and Cei’s recitation of their war-band’s deeds, then, is not to persuade the gatekeeper that they had “the best men in the world,” but to remind each other that these men were the cost of their feud. Bearing this idea in mind, Arthur and Cei’s praise of each other shifts dramatically in tone; their boasts are suddenly commingled
with remorse, and their enumeration of each other’s deeds becomes as much a rapprochement and mutual reckoning of accounts as it is a recitation of martial exploits. If in this way *Pa gur* explores the conflicting emotions associated with battle, the poem is in good company and properly belongs to a robust Welsh tradition of martial poetry that highlights the inherent tension of a warrior dying in the pursuit of glory and the mourners he leaves behind—a situation that comrades-in-arms and close relations would have experienced often in the warrior culture of early Wales. In *Y Gododdin*, perhaps the greatest example of this tradition, the narrator presents the saga of a war-band of at least three hundred men slain nearly wholesale in a battle at Catraeth; the narrator, who claims to be the sole survivor of this ill-fated campaign, honors these men’s legacy, but also depicts the sorrow of their grieving mothers, wives, and kinsmen while simultaneously giving himself space to lament that so great a company of warriors has perished:

*Cwywrain cedwyr, cyfarfuant,*
The warriors arose, they assembled,

*I gyd yn un fryd yd gyrchasant.*
Together with one accord they attacked.

*Byr eu hoedl, hir eu hoed ar eu carant,*
Short were their lives, long their kinsmen’s grief for them.

*Saith gymaint o Loegrwys a laddasant.*
They slew seven times their number of the English.

*O gyfrysedd gwragedd gwyddw a wnaethant,*
By fighting they made women widows,

*Llawer mam a’i deiger ar ei hamrant.*
Many a mother with her tear on her eyelid.

...

*O winfaeth a meddfaeth yd grisiasant,*
After wine-feast and mead-feast they attacked,

*Gwyr yn rhaid, molaid, enaid ddichwant.*
Men in battle, renowned, heedless of their lives.

*Gloyw ddull i am drull yd gydfaethant,*
In bright array around the bowl they fed together,
Gwen vordwyt tylluras. a wylyas neihwy.
Gwên of the mighty thighs kept watch last night

ygoror ryt uorlas.
by the side of Rhyd Forlas.

a chan bu mab ymi ny thechas.
Since he was my son he did not retreat.

Gwen gwydwn dy eissillut.
Gwên, I knew your nature:

ruthyr eryr yn ebyr oedut.
you were of the rush of an eagle in the estuaries.

betwn dedwyd dianghut.
If I were wise you would have escaped....
Pedwar meib ar hugeint am bwyat.
I had twenty-four sons,

eurdorchawc tywyssawc cat.
a gold-wearing, princely troop.

oed gwen goreu mab oe dat.
Gwên was the best of his father’s sons.

...

Pedwar meib ar hugeint yn kenuelint lywarch
There were twenty-four sons in the family of Llywarch,

o wyr glew galwytheint.
brave, fierce warriors;

[cwl] eu dyuot clot trameint.
the coming of too great fame is a fault.

Pedwar meib ar hugeint a ueithyeint byg knawt
Twenty-four sons of the nurture of my body—

drwy vyn tauawt lle<de>sseint
through my tongue they have been killed.

da dyuot [bychot] colledeint.
The coming of a little is good—they have been lost.  

If one considers these two examples of this tradition and their themes alongside the reading of Pa gur that this paper has sought to establish, the similarities between these texts at once become quite evident. If tensions between Arthur and Cei did boil over into animosity, they, like the bereaved Llywarch Hen, must suffer the knowledge that they bear some responsibility for their men’s deaths. Like the lone survivor of Y Gododdin, Arthur and Cei must live on to tell the story of their once-great company, lest their war-band’s legacy be forgotten, yet must all the while endure the loneliness and shame of being two of the handful who survived. Yet what distinguishes Pa gur from other bittersweet treatments of battle in Welsh tradition is not only the added tragedy of such internecine war between friends, but also its emphasis on the need to reconcile, lest there be no one left to tell the tale.
As this paper has endeavored to show, *Pa gur* is far more than a simple instance of the porter scene and far more than a quarry of allusions and references from which scholars can mine information about pre-Galfridian Arthurian tradition in Wales. The poem’s tone, language, and references allow us to situate *Pa gur* within the context of an Arthur and Cei who have lost their war-band and their place of primacy, perhaps at their own hands. Hardly the only medieval Welsh treatment of the emotions associated with battle, *Pa gur* thus emerges as a poignant reminder of the tragedy of warfare between friends—one that would have been as palpable to medieval audiences as it is to us today.

*Edward Mead Bowen*

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3 The reasons for this difficulty in dating are manifold. For a detailed discussion, see Sims-Williams, 35-38.
4 Sims-Williams, 38.
5 *Idem*, 36.
6 *Idem*, 40.
7 *Idem*, 38.
8 *Ibid*.
9 *Idem*, 41.
10 The transcription of the text of *Pa gur* comes from the World Digital Library’s *facsimile of the Black Book of Carmarthen*; the translation comes from Sims-Williams’ “The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems.”
11 Patrick Sims-Williams, 41.
14 Sims-Williams, 39.
A Response to *Hortulus’* 2014 Sponsored Session at Kalamazoo

*By Emerson Storm Fillman Richards*

“Of whom shall I be afraid?” asked the *Hortulus* panel at the 2014 International Congress on Medieval Studies, and "enemies" was the answer. It does not seem too general to claim that history and modernity are often understood through conflict. In grade school I was taught the dates of wars, but the dates of peace were just incidental—a momentary respite from conflict and enmity. In literature, conflict drives plot. Nations and cultures were built on, and thus, built up, some of the most famous conflict-driven plots, such as the *Táin*, the *Mabinogion*, *La Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenleid*, which, of course, has lead to more conflict outside of the literary world. History and literature are entwined—we are always trying to suss out, catalogue, or explain the search for the Other and whether or not we need to menace this Other before it menaces us. By discerning how enemies were understood, we can begin to see how a culture views itself or at least how it is perceived by an author with a perhaps unique, perhaps universal, perhaps coerced opinion.

The Douay-Rheims version of Psalm 26:1 from which our titular question was drawn reads: “The psalm of David before he was anointed. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?” This psalm seeks to offer the comfort of protection and salvation from the Christian God against all enemies—personal or national—to such an extent that these enemies need not be named because though “the wicked draw near, to eat [the] flesh [, the] enemies … have themselves been weakened, and have fallen” (Psalm 26:2). This sentiment must be very comforting, indeed, for Christians of past and present. But we, as scholars of the Middle Ages, must still ask earnestly, “Of whom were our subjects, be they real peoples or people or literary invention, afraid?” Further, we must consider, "Why?" To that end, *Hortulus* drew together four young scholars from various fields and backgrounds to consider specific representations of enmity from the 9th-century border between Denmark and Frankish territory, to 10th-century mythical Wales, to the courts of 13th-century Iberia, and finally to ancient Greece by way of 14th-century England.
“‘Into that vile countreye’: Figuring Ethnic Enmity with Gog and Magog in Kyng Alisaunde,” by Josephine Livingstone (New York University), and “Franks and Scandinavians: Good Neighbors–Bad Neighbors” by Daniel Melleno (U.C. Berkeley) pair to formulate a nuanced consideration of the role of nations (as a political entity), spaces, and geography in forming and understanding enemies. Meanwhile, Edward Mead Bowen (Aberystwyth University), who presented “(Former) Enemies at the Gate: Insinuations of Betrayal in Pa gur yv y porthaur;” and Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo (University of Lincoln), author of “‘Ni e yo amigo, ni enemigo’: Enmity, Trust, and Betrayal in Thirteenth-Century Iberia,” both explore a more individual reaction to a breach of trust resulting in friends or councilmen becoming enemies. Scorpo’s work on Llibre dels fets, which is perhaps the first royal autobiography, written by and about Jaume, Count of Barcelona, King of Aragon (from 1213), King of Valencia (1238), King of Majorca (1231) and Lord of Montpellier (dates and titles enumerated by Scorpo), illustrates the interplay between personal enemies and enemies of the state. As Ernst Kantorowicz theorizes in The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Thought (1957), the king represents both his individual identity and the state; therefore, an enemy of the king is inherently an enemy of the state. Scorpo’s approach transitions to Bowen’s analysis of the Middle Welsh poem treating Arthur and Cei’s post-battle parley with a gatekeeper. Bowen addresses the issue of Cei’s betrayal of Arthur, who is yet to be a king at this point in the evolution of Arthurian material. Bowen argues that although the political implication is certainly present, Cei is presented as a lost friend and unfortunate or reluctant enemy of Arthur more than he is depicted as an enemy of Arthur’s domain.

Each of these four papers suggests that the (complicated, perhaps misapplied) status of enemy derives from some manner of proximity. Livingstone’s paper provides an interesting lens through which to look at the other papers. Her argument, based on the representation of Gog and Magog in the Middle English Kyng Alisaunde, claims that the foreignness of the geography is just as important as the foreignness of the people. In fact, the location is what makes the Other foreign. This radicalized Other from another land—if it should encroach—threatens to interrupt the safety of homogeneity. Alisaunde cannot destroy Gog and Magog because they will have a part to play in the Apocalypse, so he erects an edifice to keep them in their "correct" sphere. The implications here are interesting: Gog and Magog, though they are "enemies," have not yet served their part in God’s apocalyptic plan, and therefore Alisaunde must merely contain them,
not eliminate them. I see a connection with Judas, who in most traditional Christian perspectives is Christ’s enemy although he is part of the ultimate plan and could not be omitted from the narrative. He is an enemy, but an enemy with a function and a higher purpose. Livingstone’s point, however, is geographically grounded and she cites Syed Manzoorul Islam’s *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (1996), in which he claims that people find their enemies to be those who are in different locations than they are, and it is the space that creates the enemy. With a newfound interest in the marvelous, perhaps there is a new and further comparison to be made between *Kyng Alisaunder* and the almost-contemporaneous *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Both narratives present Othered spaces, but Mandeville seems to be more interested in the marvelous aspects, rather than the malice, of the foreign spaces.

So, if we take *space* as the creator of enemies, we can form a coherent dialogue between the four papers. I must mention, however, that spatial difference is not the only thing that creates enemies. Could we have had a paper claiming Lancelot as an enemy of himself in *Le chevalier de la charrette* when he either gets into the cart or hesitates to get into the cart? Or is Lancelot innocent of self-sabotage because it all works out for him in the end when he rescues the queen and regains his status? What about Malory’s Arthur? Is he an enemy of himself and his own soul because he tries to kill all children born on a certain day in an attempt to rid himself of proof of his incest? In these examples, it is easy to claim that it is not *space* creating the enemy, but the self creating its own the enemy. Our four papers, however, focus on an enemy that is beyond the self.

Melleno argued that the relationship between the Franks and Scandinavians was not quite as inimical as historical records and narratives suggest. He suggests that, in lieu of accepting the rather negative portrayals of the Vikings by the Frankish annalists, perhaps modern scholars should reconsider the relationship between Franks and Danes as similar to that of modern neighbors. In the early 8th century, the Frankish kingdom established a border with Scandinavia; this geographic proximity did not surmount their cultural differences, however. Too great a proximity to the Other created the tension between the two groups. When viewed through the lens Livingstone established about *space* creating enemies, Melleno’s argument shows what can happen when *space* between two nations becomes uncomfortably close. Melleno’s assessment of the Frankish historical records shows something akin to Frankish national pride. The Frankish
annalists rejected the (albeit sometimes forced, as in the case of Viking raids) incorporation of the Vikings because their presence disrupted the homogeneity of Frankish culture, even if it was their culture that encroached on the borders of Denmark.

Scorpo’s paper provides a transition from purely political animosity to a grey area between political and personal enmity: what happens when a king is betrayed? Is the betrayal different if it comes from a councilman or a national ally? Is it a betrayal purely of the nation, or is the sting of personal betrayal an additional barb? Since various betrayals are documented in Jaume’s autobiography, and Scorpo mentions his need to justify enmities, perhaps it is not too far afield to suggest that Jaume felt a bit of personal betrayal rather than merely a king’s impersonal acceptance of the wrongs done to him as wrongs done to the country. A facet of Scorpo’s argument included a consideration that there was no one, single definition of enemy in 13th-century Iberia. Enemies could be Iberian or foreign, individuals or groups, but each enemy, whether directed at Jaume himself or the state, antagonized both the king and the nation. If the king’s body is a representation of the state, then those who are not the king are not the state. Therefore, an enemy of the king, Iberian or not, is inherently foreign, and since he or she occupies a body that is not the king’s and is not invested with this dual significance, the enemy of the king is similar to Livingstone’s Othered space. The king should trust no one.

Bowen’s paper on the future king, Arthur, shifts us almost entirely into the realm of individuals as enemies of individuals. Bowen’s reading of *Pai gur yv y porthaur* suggests that rather than fighting alongside Arthur, Cei fought against Arthur and his men. The poem is fragmentary and does not explain the reason for the battle, nor does it make explicit for whom Cei fought. Bowen suggests, through close reading, that the tone of the poem is that of a eulogy and that the dialogue between Cei and Arthur is as much an enumeration of wrongs done to one other as it is a demonstration of martial prowess to the gatekeeper to prove that they are the best men in the world. Unlike the foci of the other three papers that emphasize politics and national and geographic boundaries, Bowen’s example of enemies meditates upon Arthur and Cei’s explanation of themselves and their deeds, rather than the political mechanisms leading up to the battle (as far as we know from the fragment). Thus we see a kind of enemy that is on the other side of the spectrum from the national enemies of the Frankish and Vikings. Bowen’s examination of *Pai gur yv y porthaur* narrates a vexed relationship between two individuals. The
tension-filled relationship between Cei and Arthur appears in many different nations’ and eras’ various retellings of the Arthurian legend. Their dynamic is similar to the one between Jaume and his advisors; however, in this source, Arthur is not mentioned as a king. Cei has not betrayed the state, only his companion.

So, the obvious “take-away message” from the 2014 Hortulus panel is that we should reevaluate our enemies (personal and national), that people have been fighting and feuding since even well before the Middle Ages, and that perhaps with introspection and retrospection we can create a more peaceful, more tolerant, more loving world. But, I think that this panel accomplished more than that clichéd set of platitudes. Despite what post-modern literary theory claims, contemporary scholars should avoid psychologizing individuals represented in medieval texts and historical records. We can start picking apart archetypes and trends in order to show that to some extent medieval people were afraid of the same things that we currently fear, such as the big-O Other, separation itself, and the notion that relationships are never quite simply good or evil as they appear. When we try to understand responsibly the fears of the subjects of our unique fields of medieval interest and when we nuance and critique some views of the Middle Ages that the Romantic movement gave us (some of which cling to life via contemporary popular culture, cf. films such as Kingdom of Heaven [2005], Robin Hood [2010], Arthur [2011] or programs such as Merlin), then we may begin to illuminate the quotidian lives of medieval peoples, although separated from us by a millennium or more. The session inspires us to continue the effort to smash what remains of the overly simplistic view of a one-dimensional, ill-defined epoch and to discover the dynamic truth about particular parts of, and spaces in, the Middle Ages.

Emerson Storm Fillman Richards

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Book Review: *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips)

Review by Sean Tandy


As one volume in a series dedicated to “the intellectual and religious life of Europe, 500-1800,” Brill’s new *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* is an attempt to describe the influence of one of the most significant figures in shaping that tradition: Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480-524/5 AD). Kaylor’s and Phillips’ volume includes essays by leading scholars on a wide range of topics that focus on the literary, philosophic, and scientific influence Boethius had upon a millennium of European intellectual activity. Followed by a thorough annotated bibliography, *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* is clearly meant to serve both as a reference work and a supplement to earlier collections of essays on Boethius and Boethian reception, as the essays that make up the volume strive to both summarize earlier scholarship and offer new contributions to ongoing scholarly debates.

The articles in this volume are divided into roughly three different segments along thematic lines. After an introduction that situates Boethius in his historical context in Late Antiquity, the next five essays all cover technical aspects of Boethius’ legacy focusing on mathematics, science, and philosophy. Contributions include Stephen C. McCluskey’s reconstruction of Boethius’ views on the nature of the heavenly spheres and the reception of these ideas in medieval astrology. Jean-Yves Guillaumin’s article treats Boethius’ mathematical works and the influence that they had in the Medieval West through the preservation of Greek mathematic knowledge and the spread of the key concept of the *quadrivium*. Both of these essays elucidate, for the non-specialist, the details of their technical and difficult subject matters in a remarkably lucid manner and are aided to this end by the use of some well-designed diagrams. In a different vein, Siobhan Nash-Marshall’s and John Patrick Casey’s contributions explore Boethian influence on theology and metaphysics while tackling the thorny issues as to Boethius’
‘originality’ as a thinker. One particularly standout article in this portion is Rosalind C. Love’s very thorough analysis of the commentary and gloss tradition of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Love’s chapter is essential for understanding the second segment of the companion, dedicated to Boethian reception in several vernacular literatures, since many of these vernacular translations and adaptations of Boethius utilize, or even incorporate, much of the explanatory material found in these glosses. The subsequent five articles focus on translations of the *Consolation of Philosophy* into Old and Middle English, as well as medieval French, Italian and German. These essays do not merely function as ‘literary histories,’ cataloging authors, texts, dates, and the scholarship, but also offer new arguments about Boethian influence in each respective tradition. For example, Paul E. Szarmach’s contribution investigates the Alfredian translation of Boethius’ seminal work, describing the Alfredian program of translation, the possibility of the direct involvement of King Alfred, the nature of translation, the influence of glosses and other early exegesis upon the shape of the translation, and the various omissions and additions utilized to translate the *Consolation* for an Anglo-Saxon audience. Szarmach is careful throughout to note the opinions of important scholars about each of these issues under discussion. In addition, Szarmach also adds his own contribution to the debate about the possible influence of the Old English *Consolation* on other pieces of Old English literature such as *Deor* and *Beowulf*.

The next two essays of the companion discuss the decline of Boethius’ influence in the later medieval and early modern period. Mark T. Rimple’s essay, “The Enduring Legacy of Boethian Harmony,” explores the decline of Boethian influence vis-à-vis late medieval and early modern concepts of music while Ann E. Moyer’s contribution explores ways in which different, and more specialized, branches of mathematical study eventually wore down Boethius’ tidy concepts about mathematics and its role in relation to art and philosophy leading to a decline in the use of Boethian texts in the schools of Europe. The final essay, an ‘afterword,’ by Fabio Troncarelli is a passionate and rather poetic tribute to Boethius the man and to his intellectual achievements, which led so many medieval authors to admire and imitate him. It is an inspiring essay that is both informative and a delight to read.

The final element of the *Companion* is the “Chronology and Selected Annotated Bibliography” that “is intended to be a general guide for graduate students and seasoned scholars alike” (551).
The bibliography is well laid out, succinctly annotated, and covers a suitably wide range of publications including critical editions and translations of Boethian texts as well as monographs and articles about Boethius and his influence. Though the selections largely focus on English materials, an appropriate amount of scholarship in other languages is also included. Although some entries are a bit outdated, the bibliography mostly represents current and significant contributions to the scholarship of Boethius in the middle ages. It should serve its target audience well as a guide for commencing research.

Kaylor and Philips’ collection serves its basic function as a companion and bibliography admirably though it is not without its drawbacks. Minor blemishes include typos and some odd formatting. Additionally, there are inconsistencies regarding the translation of terms or passages from other languages, Greek and Middle English for example. Such terms and passages were translated for the reader in some essays, but not others. This irregularity is likely to obfuscate the author’s argument for many readers, depending on their individual backgrounds and facility in the various languages represented in the volume. Overall, however, such deficiencies are very minor in a collection of such good essays.

A more serious charge could be leveled against the volume, that of incompleteness. As the volume is clearly intended to be an alternative to two items cited in the bibliography, The Cambridge Companion to Boethius (edited by John Marenbon, Cambridge, 2009) and Kaylor and Philips’ own New Directions in Boethian Studies (Kalamazoo, 2007), it is worth noting how this volume differs from those previous collections. The Cambridge edition was compiled for undergraduates and therefore focuses upon the Consolation and the theological works without paying mind to Boethius’ influence in the areas of arithmetic or music, two areas in which the Companion excels. The Cambridge volume similarly focuses more on Boethius in a late-ancient context and largely bypasses his reception in the medieval world. Along these lines, only one chapter of the Cambridge Companion deals with the reception of Boethius, whereas the Brill Companion has several chapters dedicated to that very theme. Yet this is also true of New Directions in Boethian Studies, which also has chapters dealing with Medieval Italian, French, and English reception as well as one on Medieval Spain, which the Brill volume is lacking. Neither volume deals explicitly with the literary reception of Boethius in the two non-vernacular languages of Medieval Europe: Latin and Byzantine Greek (the later is a subject treated by no
book or article cited in the bibliography) which are traditions that would likely appeal to a broad range of medievalists. Furthermore, *New Directions* includes essays about Boethian themes in the visual culture of Western Europe, a topic that would hardly be out of place in a volume dedicated to the religious and intellectual life of Medieval Europe.

But even if *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* treats many of the same subjects as those earlier collections and has some regrettable omissions, this barely detracts from the overall quality of the volume. After all, to compile, in one volume, essays covering all of the various areas over which Boethius asserted a significant influence would be a nearly impossible task. The essays in Brill’s *Companion* touch on a great many topics important to Boethian studies and not only give a succinct overview of the various issues in each field of inquiry, but also supply new contributions to many of these on-going debates. The *Companion* provides essential reading for those interested in Boethian Studies, the History and Philosophy of Science, and Translation Studies. Additionally, individual essays also prove useful to scholars and students in a variety of other disciplines such as theology, music theory, or French literature.

Sean Tandy

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**Book Review: Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance (Neil Cartlidge)**

Review by Victoria Shirley

Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance (2012) is the second collection of essays that Neil Cartlidge has edited for D. S. Brewer. It is the sixteenth volume in their ‘Medieval Romance’ series, which has published several critical studies on the romance genre in recent years, including A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance (2009), The Exploitations of Medieval Romance (2010), and Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts (2011). The selected volume originates from the 8th Biennial Conference on Medieval Romance held at Durham University in 2002, and its contributions seek to challenge the perceptions of romance as an idealistic genre based on the adventures of an individual knight who must live up the heroic chivalric ideal based on class, loyalty, masculinity, and military honour.

In his editorial introduction, Cartlidge outlines the rationale behind the collection, writing that ‘[m]edieval romances so insistently celebrate the triumphs of heroes and the discomfiture of villains that they discourage recognition of just how morally ambiguous, antisocial or even downright sinister their protagonists can be, and, correspondingly, of just how admirable or impressive their defeated opponents often are’ (1). The consistent focus on the romance hero at the expense of the romance anti-hero means that some of the ambivalences and contradictions of the genre have been overlooked – it is this gap in the critical field that Heroes and Anti-Heroes attempts to redress.

The collection features essays from both recognized and emerging scholars of medieval romance, and the contributions are divided into two parts: the first ten essays concentrate on a variety of ‘individual characters’, while the final four essays look more broadly at recurring ‘character types’ across a selection of texts. The contents indicate that both well-established romance heroes (Hengist, Mordred, Merlin, Gawain), as well as lesser-known characters (Gamelyn and Ralph the Collier), are discussed in the current volume, and the essays aim to demonstrate the complex nature of these romance characters who are never exactly the same from text to text.

The first two essays in part one concentrate on how writers from the Christian Middle Ages reinterpreted historical figures from the classical past. Penny Eley’s essay focuses on the transformation of Rutulian general Turnus, the antagonist of Aeneas, in the Roman d’Eneas, a twelfth-century Old French translation of Virgil’s Aeneid. She illustrates how the French poet
changed Turnus from a patriotic war hero into a character driven by greed and ambition who must be eliminated because he prevents the union of true love between Eneas and his beloved, Lavine. Meanwhile, David Ashurst’s essay on the legend of Alexander the Great shows how authors in medieval England interpreted the roles of another pagan general. He explores how Alexander’s reputation as an exceptional military leader, conqueror, campaigner, and explorer were either disapproved of or endorsed by various writers who reconfigured the pagan general as either an arrogant, bloodthirsty warmonger or a chivalric hero known for his generosity and courtesy.

The following essays address the changing representations of two historical English heroes: Margaret Lamont’s contribution focuses on the Saxon invader Hengist, while Laura Ashe’s chapter concentrates on Harold Godwineson, the last king of the England prior to the Norman Conquest. First, Lamont considers whether Hengist’s reputation as a sympathetic rather than villainous figure in post-medieval literature had its origins in the early Middle Ages. Focusing on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae* and Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, she asserts that Hengist, the conqueror of the Britons and the founder of England, functioned as a hybrid figure who connected twelfth-century readers to their mixed ethnic roots, encouraging a culture based on racial inclusion rather than exclusion. In her essay, Ashe examines how writers attempted to fashion an identity for Harold Godwineson, who is an exceptionally ambiguous figure in English history. She asks whether Harold was ‘a national, an English hero, whose tragic defeat brought all of England’s defeat? Or contrarily, might it even make him a national scapegoat, an English anti-hero, who shaped and carried the people’s dreadful fate in his own moral failings and corruption?’ (70). Her discussion reveals that Harold was presented negatively – or excluded entirely – in post-Conquest English historiography; she then shows that it was only Anglo-Danish or Anglo-Welsh literature that Harold was remembered, before his reputation was eventually restored in the *Vita Haroldi*, a Latin hagiography which transformed him into a servant of God.

The next set of essays concentrate on a selection of Arthurian (anti-)heroes – Mordred, Merlin, and Gawain – who have particularly complex character histories. Judith Weiss’ essay on Mordred seeks to explain his motivations for treachery, and to show how he became a villainous archetype in other non-Arthurian works. Weiss identifies Mordred’s passionate love for
Guinevere and his incestuous origins, which developed in Wace and the French prose romances, as his reasons for rebellion and betrayal, and her discussion of Mordred’s associations with Cornwall and references to him in insular romances show how his reputation as a traitor became more widespread. In his essay on Merlin, Gareth Griffith explores how the figure of Merlin was consistently reinterpreted by medieval writers, explaining how Geoffrey of Monmouth and Robert de Boron developed the character as an advisor and a prophet who functioned in the political, theological, and sometimes supernatural, worlds of romance. Finally, Kate McClune traces the changing nature of Gawain’s reputation in both French and English romance. She proposes that the authors of these works rely on a ‘Gawain-effect’ (p. 128) which plays on established assumptions about the character, including his reputation as a noble, loyal, and brave warrior, as well as a model of masculinity and courtesy. While there are several casebooks and essays already published on the character development of these Arthurian heroes, these essays consider a wider range of texts, especially the popular romances which are often overlooked, and so they offer some new insights into the intricate textual makeup of these familiar figures.

The final three essays in the first section of the collection focus on quasi-romance texts and their less conventional protagonists. Nancy Mason Bradbury’s welcome contribution on The Tale of Gamelyn reassesses the nature of violence in this much understudied text. Romance, of course, legitimates the use (and abuse) of strength and force through the figure of the knight-errant, but Bradbury argues that the episodes of violence in the text – which are carried out by a ‘hero’ from the middle-class gentry – are essentially non-chivalric in nature; indeed, she sees the violence in Gamelyn as parodic of the chivalric violence of the upper classes who, in this romance, are inefficient at maintaining law and order. Ad Putter’s essay also centres on a character of low status who imitates the chivalric classes: he demonstrates how, in the Middle-English Charlemagne romance, the peasant known as Ralph the Collier performs acts of hospitality, welcoming a king and his knights into his home, as well as keeping promises and upholding his word. Ralph, Putter concludes, is ‘neither a peasant not a knight but an irresistible blend of both’ (158). Putter’s essay is followed by Stephanie Viereck Gibbs Kamath’s chapter on the Anti-Heroic Heart, who features in the French romance Livre du Cuer d’Amours Espris (Book of the Love-smitten Heart). She considers how the author uses an allegorical hero – Heart – to question the nature of the romance narrative since the text focuses more on the internal experience and
desires of the protagonist rather than on his quest and his chivalric achievements; this is a
distinctive change which could, as she points out, be considered ‘anti-heroic’ (167).

The section of essays on character types in the collection begins with two complementary essays
on Crusaders and Saracens. In his chapter on crusaders, Robert Allen Rouse demonstrates how
some of the crusade romances produced in England after the fall of Acre in 1291 could challenge
the motivations and expose weaknesses behind the Christian desire to fight the Saracens in the
Holy Land. He explains how Richard Coer de Lyon attributes the failure of the Third Crusade to
the lack of unity between the English and the French, before examining how the Middle
English Guy of Warwick and Sir Gowther encourage their heroes to redirect their violent actions
towards their legitimate enemies, the Saracens, which will allow them to be successful on
crusade and to redeem themselves in the eyes of God. Following this, Siobhan Bly Calkin’s
chapter explores how non-convert and convert Saracen knights could be used to contrast and
emphasise the flaws of their Christian protagonists. She illustrates that the Eastern enemies of
medieval Christendom could also display military and martial prowess at the expense of their
opponents, and so they pose a challenge to the traditional model of chivalric, Christian heroism
prevalent in medieval romance. Calkin’s essay, then, rethinks the stereotypical portrayal of the
medieval Saracen, and she shows the portrayal of such characters to be more complex than
conventionally assumed.

The final two essays by James Wade and Neil Cartlidge discuss the nature of moral conduct and
ethical behaviour in romance. In his contribution on Ungallant Knights, Wade focuses on the
construction of domestic miscellanies, and he considers how moral exempla in two manuscript
collections – Bodleian MS Ashmole 61 and Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.5.48 – could
have been read in context with Lybeaus Desconus and Thomas of Erceldoune. He argues that the
contrast between exempla and romance could affect the way that readers interpreted the
behaviour of the two-knight protagonists as the juxtaposition of texts foregrounds their
ungallantry and deviance from the chivalric ideal. Meanwhile, in his essay, Cartlidge examines
how the Antichrist became a prototype for a range of romance characters known to be descended
from the Devil. He claims that the conception of characters fathered by the Antichrist imitates
and parodies the Incarnation – this is most notable in the conception of Merlin in the French
Arthurian romances – and he considers how demonic lineage can question the nature of
humanity and expose its wickedness. Nevertheless, Cartlidge also shows that characters with such diabolic paternity do have the potential to repent and turn towards God, and so there is no need for romance readers to fear corruption by the seductive power of the Devil.

Overall, this collection of essays sheds new light on the romance genre by asking some innovative questions about the nature of the conventional romance protagonist. While some of the essays could probe further into the reasons why these characters underwent such dramatic changes in the transformation from hero to villain, the essays are generally accessible and detailed, and they also cover a good range of romance and pseudo-historical texts. The collection as a whole could benefit from a bibliography, rather than relying on footnotes and references in the individual essays, but this useful collection should interest both students and scholars of medieval romance. This volume succeeds in its aim to offer separate ‘case-histories’ (2), or short cultural biographies, of a variety of heroes and anti-heroes in medieval romance, and it should prove a valuable addition to the study of a genre of writing that has still not been fully appreciated.

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