



Article scientifique

Article

2014

Published version

Open Access

This is the published version of the publication, made available in accordance with the publisher's policy.

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

Ivanova, Petya

How to cite

IVANOVA, Petya. Le Bone Florence of Rome: The Profaned Body in Use and in Language. In: Hortulus, 2014, vol. 10, n° 2.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:75141>

Hortulus ~ The Online Graduate Journal of Medieval Studies

Le Bone Florence of Rome: The Profaned Body in Use and in Language—By Petya Ivanova

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 body^[1]: 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 Deleuze^[2]. The Middle English romance *Le Bone Florence of Rome*^[3] 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^[4], expressed in the abundance of corporeal signifiers in stark contrast with the literature of the early Middle Ages^[5], 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”^[6]. 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 / object body^[7]. 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^[8]—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 Meiðhad*. 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”^[9] proposed by Riddy opens a perspective relating the text to the mindset and preoccupations of its potential readership constructed around the “bourgeois home”^[10]. 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”.

^[11] 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”.^[12]

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^[13]—but rather as an agency which escapes being reduced while being structured 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 delimitating 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^[14], 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)^[15], who wages 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 thyng" (l. 307)^[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:

Hys flesche trembylde for grete elde,
 Hys blode colde hys body unwelde,
 Hys lyppe 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)

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:

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,
 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^[17]. 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^[18]:

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 somedeale mare;
 And eyther toke a spere.
 So harde togedur can they ryde,
 Owt of ther sadyls they felle besyde,
 And graspyd to odor 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^[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 bryght as blome,
 That brewyd hath all thys care
 When that Y have leyn hur by,
 And done hur schame and vyleneye,
 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^[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^[21] 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^[22]. 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 thyng, / That evyr was seen wolde or yyng, / Made of flesche and felle" (l. 307). The word "thing" 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 "thing" 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 yyng", 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 "thing". "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^[23]. 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 clothys 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 portreyed 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^[24]. 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 thyng" (l. 1727-28). Being a "feyre thyng" 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:

And hurselſe 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)

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^[25]. 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 sevyne;
 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*^[26], adjoin painted representations of the deadly sins, and the *occupatio* *topos*^[27] 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 thyng,
 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 yelow 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, / Therefore 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 thyng, / 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 "*deshonnée*" (dishonored)^[28] and "*honnie*" (shamed)^[29] 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^[30]. 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,
Hur nakyd flesche tyll he was yrke,
sche gaf many a rewoffull crye.

...

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

...

Sche was the feyrest creature,
And therto whyte as lylly flowre,
Hur 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^[31]. 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^[32]. 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 aby’e” (l. 1507-09). His accusation places the agency over the events entirely in Florence’s control, which she at once reclaims and defers:

“Sche answeyrd 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 aby’e / ... / 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^[33]: 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 thyng 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 I” (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 prayer^[35]:

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 blysse,
 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")^[36] 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^[37], 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 identity concepts^[38]. 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)^[39], 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. 772-73). 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 to wonne and 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 thyng,
That evyr ye sye olde or yyng’,
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 certes 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 wrought” (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:

Yyt schall ye nevyr in bedde me by,
Tyl ye have broght me Syr Garcy,
For no maner of thyng,
Or lefte hym in the felde for dedd;
Be hym Y sawe in forme of bredd,
When the preest can synge’. (l. 1000-05)

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:

“Myls 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 guilty^[41]. 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^[42] 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^[43]. 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. ... [N]ot 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.^[44]

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^[45]. 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 wyttten 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 profane^[49]—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 milieu^[54]. 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^[55] 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 predestined 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^[56].

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^[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^[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”^[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^[60]. According to the results of Agamben's investigation, this enunciation remains a *hapax* in the history of Western thought, which seems to lack the very basis for such an ontology of use^[61]. If we can detect the traces or intuition of this idea in an unpretentious literary text like *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^[62], is characteristic of the late medieval and early modern literary production in English. 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.

Petya Ivanova

Petya Ivanova teaches Creative Writing at the University of Geneva. Her PhD thesis considers the notion of exemplarity in Middle English literature. She has published articles on Chaucer, Malory and anchoritic texts.

[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).↵

[2] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, [1990,] 2004), p. 280.↵

[3] The text survives in a single manuscript—Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.38 dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. It presents “a much shortened version of an early thirteenth-century French poem, *Florence de Rome*, which circulated in England in the Anglo-Norman period. The English translation was possibly made in the early fifteenth century” (Felicity Riddy, “Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-Making”, in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 202, n. 17. Hereafter cited as Riddy. The text is usually discussed in terms of “popular romance”—for the problematics inherent in this classification see Derek Pearsall, “The Pleasure of Popular Romance: A Prefatory Essay”, in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011); and Riddy, p. 199. Scholarly criticism on this text is scarce: with the exception of Riddy’s article, it is most often only briefly mentioned as a representative of the Constance/Griselda type of plot, e.g. Charbonneau and Cromwell, “Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance”, in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 96-110; and Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). 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.↵

[4] 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.↵

[5] For this comparative observation and a discussion of corporeal signifiers in the textual sources of the early Middle Ages, see Nira Pancer, “Entre *lapsus corporis* et performance: fonctions des gestes somatiques dans l’expression des émotions dans la littérature altimédiévale”, *Médiévales* 61 (2011): 39-54.↵

[6] Riddy, p. 207.↵

[7] 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).↵

[8] 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.↵

[9] “[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).↵

[10] 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).↵

[11] Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 83.↵

[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.↵

[14] See Riddy, p. 203; Heng, *Empire*, p. 220-21.↵

[15] I have used Viëtor’s edition of the text: Wilhelm Viëtor, 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.↵

[25] For a discussion of these elements in the Breton lay *Sir Orfeo* see Seth Lerer, “Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*”, *Speculum* 60, (1985), p. 92-109.↵

[26] “Al the utemoste wal / Was cleer and shined as crystal. / An hundred towres ther were aboute, / Degiseliche, and batailed stoute. / The butres cam out of the dicke / Of reed gold y-arched riche” (*Sir Orfeo*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Fourth Edition*, gen. ed. M.H. Abrams, Vol. 1 (New York; London: W.W.Norton & Co, 1979), p. 230, l. 357-62).↵

[27] *Occupatio* is a rhetorical term designating the passages where the author claims not being able to express or describe something while actually doing it.↵

[28] *Le val des amants infidèles, Lancelot du Lac IV*, ed. Yvan G. Lepage (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 2002), p. 150.↵

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 152.↵

[30] “Et la damoiselle 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.↵

[31] Sarah Kay, “The Sublime Body of the Martyr: Violence in Early Romance Saints’ Lives”, in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 3-20.↵

[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).↵

[33] Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath (Homo Sacer II, 3)*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).↵

[34] The MED glosses the latter meaning for this line of the poem, see “desriven”, 2 b. Florence’s other accomplishments are harping and the knowledge of the psalter (l. 63). Phillipa Hardman, “Popular Romances and Young Readers”, in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), p. 153, provides a brief note on her education in terms of parental care.↵

[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 / Therefore let y hur goo” (l. 2068-70).↵

[36] *Le val des amants infidèles*, p. 188.↵

[37] “Mout est la damoisiele empirie et del cors et de la parole, et nompourquant, si comme elle puet parler, se plaint et se demente mout durement”, *Le val des amants infidèles*, p. 188.↵

[38] 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.↵

[39] R.F. Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, [1999], 2002), p. 100 evokes the image of “bursting” in reference to the act of breaking an oath.↵

[40] Riddy, p. 204.↵

[41] On this custom see Roger D. Groot, “Lie Detectors: Of Sacred Morsels and Polygraphs”, *Legal Studies Forum* 10.3 (1986): 203-27; and Richard Thomson, *Illustrations of the History of Great Britain*, vol 1 (Edinburgh: Constable & Co., 1828). This trial known in French as “*l’épreuve du pain*” was wide-spread in the early and high Middle Ages, and was possibly popular well after the movements for abolition of trials in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; see Dominique Barthélemy, “Diversité des ordalies médiévales”, *Revue Historique*, T.280, Fasc. 1 (567) (1988), p. 3-25.↵

[42] 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.↵

[43] Michael Mullett, *Popular Culture and Popular Protest in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 47-9.↵

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 46-7.↵

[45] James Joyce, “Epiphanies”, in *Poems and Shorter Writings*, ed. Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz and John Whittier-Ferguson (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 161-200.↵

[46] Deleuze, *Logic*, p. 285.↵

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 285.↵

[48] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 73.↵

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 75.↵

[50] *Idem.*↵

[51] *Idem.*↵

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 76.↵

[53] 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).↵

[54] Mullett, *Popular*, p. 28-9.↵

[55] Mullett, *Popular*, p. 28-9.↵

[56] Deleuze, *Logic*, p. 286.↵

[57] The virgin body is presented as endowed with the characteristics of the glorious body by Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum Libri Duo*, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 023, accessed at http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Adversus_Jovinianum_Libri_Duo,_MLT.pdf.↵

[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 Tyrry.↵

[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*.↵

[62] See for instance Melissa Furrow, ed., *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems* (New York: Garland, 1985).↵

[Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.](#) [The Chateau Theme.](#)

Follow

Follow “Hortulus”

Powered by WordPress.com