

“Ele boute son doi en son con...”: The Question of Anglo-Norman Obscenity

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Summary:

Across the Middle Ages, Continental French texts satirised the French spoken by Englishmen, with particular comic value attached to their alleged tendency unwittingly to use *foutre* and other obscene terms. Since the Anglophones' jargon relies on grotesque parody of attested morpho-syntactical and phonological features of Insular French, this article assesses whether there may also be a lexical kernel of truth underlying the satire by exploring the frequency and context of occurrence of specific items of sexual vocabulary in Anglo-Norman texts, including fabliaux, comic monologues and dialogues, courtly narratives, *manières de langage*, word-lists and glosses, legal records, and medical writing.

In Branch 1b of the *Roman de Renart*, our vulpine anti-hero, his skin dyed yellow from the vat into which he had previously fallen, completes his disguise as the Breton jongleur Galopin by speaking to the unwitting Isengrin in a garbled form of French which, in combination with a good range of morpho-syntactical and phonological eccentricities, is distinguished especially by the lexical trait of insistent and nonsensical use of the verb *foutre*:

“Fotre merci” dist Galopins.
“Je fot saver molt bons chopins,
Si fot saver bon lecheri
Dont je fot molt a cort cheri”.¹ (vv. 2459-62)

This famous scene is the earliest extant – and doubtless decisively influential – instance of a comic topos which was to thrive across the Middle Ages, aptly named by Jeay as SE_MOQUER_MAUVAIS_FRANÇAIS_LOCUTEUR_ANGLAIS.² In this small but celebrated corpus of satirical Continental depictions of Anglophone speakers of French,³ one of the

My thanks are due to Heather Pagan at the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* for sharing materials incorporated into the corpus analysed, and to Tony Hunt, Ian Short, and Keith Busby for their responses to my enquiries about the topic. Another friend and colleague who answered such an enquiry with characteristic erudition and generosity was David Trotter, whose untimely passing has cast a cloud over the final stages of preparation of the article: it would be some solace to think that its content might have appealed to the irrepressibly irreverent sense of humour for which he was so loved.

¹ *Le Roman de Renart*, ed. Ernst Eduard Martin, 3 vols (Strasbourg / Paris: Trubner / Leroux, 1882-87), 1:69. Cf. Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker, “Renart, le jongleur étranger: analyse thématique et linguistique à partir de la branche 1b du *Roman de Renart*,” in *Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium*, ed. Jan Goossens and Timothy Sodmann, *Niederdeutsche Studien* 30 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1981), 381-91; Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, “L’art du comique dans *Le Roman de Renart: Renart teinturier et jongleur*,” in *A la recherche du Roman de Renart*, ed. Kenneth Varty (New Alyth: Lochee, 1988), 217-27; William C. Calin, “Obscene Anglo-Norman in a Central French mouth; or, how Renart the Fox tricks Isengrin the Wolf, and why it is important,” *Florilegium* 18, no. 1 (2001): 7-19. The scene is also discussed in a number of the studies cited in the following two footnotes.

² Madeleine Jeay, “La rencontre des langues dans le récit médiéval,” in *Topographie de la rencontre dans le roman européen*, ed. Jean-Pierre Dubost (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2008), 19-39, at 19.

³ Cf. John E. Matzke, “Some examples of French as spoken by Englishmen in Old French literature,” *Modern Philology* 3 (1905-6): 47-60; Hermann Albert, *Mittelalterlicher englisch-französischer Jargon*, *Studien zur englischen Philologie* 23 (Halle a.S.: Niemeyer, 1922); Mildred Katharine Pope, *From Latin to Modern French, with Especial Consideration of Anglo-Norman*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), 425; Peter Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature: 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 171-78; Ian Short, “On bilingualism in Anglo-Norman England,” *Romance Philology* 33 (1979-80): 467-

most prominent characteristics of the defective French spoken by the hapless island dwellers remains the predilection for unintentional use of *foutre*.⁴ In the fabliau of *Deus Anglois et l'anel* (NRCF, 8:171-81),⁵ Alein, one of the Englishmen, accounts for his unusual dialect which bemuses his Continental interlocutor with the self-explanatory declaration “Mi fout Aglois” (v. 52), before clarifying that he wishes to purchase meat to aid the recovery of his friend, for “Mi companon fout mout malart” (v. 57).⁶ Two complementary satirical texts are juxtaposed in Paris, BNF, fr. 837 (ff. 220va-221va), the A manuscript of the fabliaux. In the verse *Paix aux Anglais*,⁷ apparently composed in response to the Treaty of Paris in 1259, the Englishman who describes the riotous progress of the regal council of war that he attended manages ten lines before declaring of the King of France: “Lonc tens fout il croupier sor Parris son maison” (v. 11), the first of eight occurrences⁸ of *fout* in an 88-line

79, at 469; William Rothwell, “Stratford-atte-Bowe and Paris,” *Modern Language Review* 80, no. 1 (1985): 39-54, at 40; Elisabeth Lalou, “Les textes en jargon franco-anglais du XIIIe au XVIe siècles,” in *La “France anglaise” au Moyen Age: Actes du 111e congrès national des sociétés savantes (Poitiers, 1986)* (Paris: Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 1988), 543-62; Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker, “French conceptions of foreigners and foreign languages in the 12th and 13th centuries,” *Romance Philology* 41, no. 1 (1987-88): 24-47, at 39; Darwin Smith, “Le jargon franco-anglais de Maître Pathelin,” *Journal des Savants* 3 (1989): 259-76; Ana Paiva Morais, “Lieux et non-lieux de la parole: la guerre des langues dans les fabliaux,” in *Locus in fabula: la topique de l'espace dans les fictions françaises d'Ancien Régime*, ed. Nathalie Ferrand (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 67-75; Denis Hüe, “Carrefour des langues: L'Anglais en France et l'Ecossais en Italie,” in *Pour acquérir honneur et pris: Mélanges de moyen français offerts à Giuseppe Di Stefano*, ed. Maria Colombo-Timelli and Claudio Galderisi (Montreal: CERES, 2004), 391-401; Ardis Butterfield, “English, French and Anglo-French: language and nation in the fabliau,” in *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006), 238-59; Ardis Butterfield, “Guerre et paix: l'anglais, le français et l'anglo-français,” in *Journée d'études anglo-normandes*, ed. André Crépin and Jean Leclant (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 2009), 7-23; Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66-101; Ian Short, “Another look at ‘le faus franceis’,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 54 (2010): 35-55, at 37.

⁴ The prevalence of this trait is also noted by Hüe, “Carrefour des langues,”: “Le passé simple du verbe être ‘fus’ est toujours remplacé par un ‘fouty’ qui semble traditionnel” (393).

⁵ Here and following, NRCF = *Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux*, ed. Willem Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard, 10 vols (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983-98). For reasons of space, I shall limit references to secondary literature on the fabliaux, safe in the knowledge that any gaps can be remedied by consulting the *vade mecum* for scholarship in the field: Anne Elizabeth Cobby, *The Old French Fabliaux: An Analytical Bibliography*, Research Bibliographies and Checklists, N.S. 9 (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009).

⁶ Cf. also “foustes vos la?” (v. 16), “mi cors fou si fort treblé!” (v. 24). In addition to the useful analysis of the dialect in NRCF, 8:172-73, see Charles H. Livingston, “The fabliau *Des deux Anglois et de l'anel*,” *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America* 40, no. 2 (1925): 217-24.

⁷ All quotations from the *Paix aux Anglais* texts (including the *Nouvelle charte* mentioned in footnote 12) are taken from *Mimes français du XIIIe siècle: contribution à l'histoire du théâtre comique au moyen âge*, ed. Edmond Faral (Paris: Champion, 1910), 29-51. Less widely available, but with very informative supporting notes (including analysis of the jargon), are the editions in *Approcci con la satira nell'837 (ms. f. fr. B. N. di Parigi). La paix aux Anglais, La charte de la paix aux Anglais*, ed. Luciana Borghi Cedrini, 2 vols (Turin: Giappichelli, 1979-80). Both Faral's otherwise insightful analysis of the texts' language and his translation downplay the obscene content (cf. allusions to “équivoque” of *fout*, 37, 50), whereas the translation which accompanies the edition in *The Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Camden Society, 1839), 63-68, at least tries to capture the *cul* puns by using “behind” (cf. also his notes on 358-61). Both, however, prove far more revealing than Michel, who says of the *Paix*: “L'énormité de l'ordure qui caractérise cette production nous empêche d'en donner le moindre extrait” (*Le Mystère de saint Louis roi de France*, ed. Francisque Michel (Westminster: Roxburghe Club, 1871), iii).

⁸ “Que tout ne fout venez a ce grant plaiderment” (v. 17), “lonc tens fout il que Mellins profita” (v. 21); cf. vv. 23, 54, 63, 73, 84.

poem which expands the scurrilous lexicon of English speakers of French by including repeated confusions of *cuer* with *cul*, as in: “J’ai trova a ma cul .i. chos que je dirra” (v. 4) and “Tu m’as percé la cul” (v. 86).⁹ The following prose *Charte de la paix aux Anglais*, which tells of the “gros pes” (l. 2) concluded between Henry III and Louis IX, not only reprises the scatological *cul* puns,¹⁰ but also develops the dangers of unwitting blasphemy through linguistic incompetence when the English speaker claims that Mary Magdalen says:¹¹ “Je quere Jhesum qui fout a la crucefemie” (l. 26), to which the angel replies: “Il ne fout pas ci: il fout alé cestui matin a Gallerie!” (ll. 27-28).¹² In the romance of *Jehan et Blonde*, the buffoonish Duke of Gloucester offers to buy Jehan’s horse, explaining: “Il fout mout bel prende deniers” (v. 2651), and asking: “Cil varlet fou il vostre gent?” (v. 2645).¹³ This topos continues into the later Middle Ages: just as the *Mystère de la Résurrection* presents a character successfully convincing a blind man that English archers are attacking by crying: “A mort! A mort! Vous futy mort i / Saint Georg(e)!” (vv. 3-4),¹⁴ the *Mystère de saint Louis* depicts the King of England, with pronouncements such as “Je voy bin qu’il futy trop fort” and “Je fut à Cantorbery”, as setting an example that his men follow with great gusto.¹⁵ And just as the anguished lover in a *sotte ballade* begins his lament: “Goth helpemy! Je fouty bin amoureux” (v. 1), before protesting: “Je l’am / De tout ma cul” (vv. 3-4),¹⁶ an early sixteenth-century ballad portrays an English soldier lamenting the death of Admiral Edward Howard with the doubly obscene refrain: “Il fout mouru: velà faict de son vy” (v. 8).¹⁷

These satirical portrayals of Englishmen’s French rely, of course, on a grotesque parodic deformation of well-attested characteristics of Anglo-Norman dialect, such as confusion of gender (exacerbated by the Insular instability of schwa), modification and simplification of conjugation, and, in the case of *foutre*, the assimilation of Continental palatal /y/ to Insular velar /u/.¹⁸ One wonders, however, whether there might not be

⁹ Cf. likewise “Il suspire de cul, si se claima a l’art” (v. 31), “Se Diex salva ma cul” (v. 35); cf. vv. 42, 44, 86, 87.

¹⁰ “Et por ce que je veele que ce chos fout fiens en estable, je veele pendez ma saiele a ce cul par derrier” (ll. 14-15).

¹¹ The danger is also present in the *Paix*: “Or doint Godelamit par son culmandement [...]” (l. 87)

¹² The same linguistic jokes are included in the later fragmentary *Nouvelle charte de la paix aux Anglais*: cf. “Et en tel maner fot faite pès; et par ço que ço soit femier en estable, je penderer le seal Phelippote a cest cul par derer” (ll. 11-13).

¹³ In *Oeuvres poétiques de Philippe de Remi, sire de Beaumanoir*, ed. Hermann Suchier, 2 vols, SATF (Paris: Didot, 1884), 2:1-193. Suchier analyses the speech of Gloucester at 2:415-16; cf. also Meg Shepherd, “Humour in disguise: language and character in Philippe de Beaumanoir’s *Jehan et Blonde*,” *Neophilologus* 71, no. 4 (1987): 496-504; Carol Harvey, “The discourse of characterization in *Jehan et Blonde*,” in *Speaking in the Medieval World*, ed. Jean E. Godsall-Myers, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 145-64, at 161.

¹⁴ This episode involving Saudret is an addition in one manuscript; cf. *Le Mystère de la résurrection: Angers (1456)*, ed. Pierre Servet, 2 vols, Textes Littéraires Français 435 (Geneva: Droz, 1993), 2:913-14. Cf. “Donne dix solz et on futy / Monstre les my sans plus rasler” (vv. 19-20).

¹⁵ *Saint Louis*, ed. Michel, 70. The same linguistic joke occurs more than thirty times, as when the Constable declares: “Velà cy Jouan et Willam / Qui fouty prest” (57), or Thommelin hopes “Que ly ne fouty point mon fam” (70); cf. Smith, “Le jargon franco-anglais de Maître Pathelin,”; Darwin Smith, “Le *Jeu saint Loÿs*, Paris et Saint-Denis,” *Rapports - het franse boek* 67 (1997): 67-74.

¹⁶ *Die Liederhandschrift des Cardinals de Rohan (CV. Jahrh.)*, nach der Berliner HS Hamilton 674, ed. Martin Löpelmann, Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur 44 (Göttingen: Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur, 1923), 37-39, no. 27, with abbreviations expanded. Cf. the lover’s eventual despair: “Ma cul crevy dedans and crie a l’arm / De grant courroux fouty fors son spiry / Par qui mon dam fout plain de grant oultrach” (vv. 23-25).

¹⁷ *Recueil de poésies françaises des XVe et XVIe siècles: morales, facétieuses, historiques*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and James Rothschild, 13 vols, Bibliothèque elzévirienne (Paris: Jannet, 1855-78), 6:95-96; the ballad is placed at the end of the *Traité de Paix*.

¹⁸ The best guide to these and other features of conventional Insular French is Ian Short, *Manual of Anglo-*

another issue at stake. Melissa Mohr has recently argued that in the development of swearing in Middle English, blasphemous oaths emerged as the most obscene form of expression, while sexual and stercoraceous vocabulary was considered less offensive.¹⁹ Could it be that in the satirical portrayals discussed, there is a further lexical kernel of truth: might our comic texts depict Insular speakers of French as using words such as *foutre*, *cul*, and *vit* so frequently because their real-world counterparts were actually perceived as being more deliberately foul-mouthed than their Continental peers? To evaluate this hypothesis, I shall explore the use of obscene vocabulary in Anglo-Norman writing.

It need scarcely be said that the question of what constitutes obscenity in medieval culture is as vexed as it is important, and then as now it was doubtless shaped and determined by a complex interplay of manifold contextual variables, many of which will prove irrecoverable.²⁰ For pragmatic reasons, I shall focus specifically on the appearance of those *orz moz* relating to the sexual body and its activities which, in the widely disseminated *Roman de la Rose*, are famously condemned by Guillaume de Lorris's God of Love only to be rehabilitated by Jean de Meun's Reason,²¹ and which the traces of censorship found in some manuscripts confirm as having been objectionable to at least some of their readers.²² The principal terms involved are: *foutre*, *con*, *vit*, and *coille*. For reasons of space, I shall largely ignore both scatological vocabulary and texts which, although obscene in their implications, do not feature these key terms.²³

The obvious place to begin this quest is in the area which boasts the greatest concentration of the terms in Continental French, namely comic literature, which, in relative contrast to the situation in Middle English,²⁴ is better represented in Anglo-Norman than is

Norman, 2nd ed., OPS 8 (Oxford: ANTS, 2013); the specific linguistic traits found in the comic jargon of Anglophone speakers is covered in the studies cited in footnote 3.

¹⁹ Cf. Melissa Mohr, *Holy Shit: a Brief History of Swearing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 88-128.

²⁰ For a range of perspectives, see the various essays in Jan M. Ziolkowski, ed., *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 4 (Leiden / Boston / Cologne: Brill, 1998); Nicola F. McDonald, ed., *Medieval Obscenities* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2006)

²¹ *Le Roman de la Rose par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun*, ed. Félix Lecoy, Classiques français du Moyen Age 92, 95, 98 (Paris: Champion, 1965-70), vv. 2097, 5670-94, 6898-7198. The *Rose* is likewise taken as a point of reference for obscene vocabulary in the contributions to Ziolkowski, ed., *Obscenity* by Charles Muscatine ("The fabliaux, courtly culture, and the (re)invention of vulgarity," 281-92) and R. Howard Bloch ("Modest maidens and modified nouns: obscenity in the fabliaux," 293-307).

²² E.g. in Paris, BNF, fr. 837 the erasure of instances of *foutre* from the copy of *Le Pardon de foutre* (cf. *Two Old French Satires on the Power of the Keys: 'L'Escommenement au lecheor' and 'Le Pardon de foutre'*, ed. Daron Lee Burrows, Research Monographs in French Studies 18 (Oxford: Legenda, 2005), 83) and of *vit* and *coille* from *Du vit et de la coille* (edited by Thomas Städtler, "Du vit et de la coille," *Revue de linguistique romane* 59 (1995): 131-35; cf. Daron Lee Burrows, "Do Con, do Vet et de la Soriz: Edition d'un texte tiré de Berne 354," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 117 (2001): 23-49, at 25). Likewise, finite forms of *foutre* are scratched out in the copy of *Celui qui bota la pierre* (NRCF, 6:125-44) in Paris, BNF, fr. 2137, which have been helpfully restored by a less prudish reader, a censorship repeated and expanded to cover all of the priest's sexual misdemeanour in the fifteenth-century copy of MS Cologny, Bodmer 113 (cf. Barbara Nolan, "Turning over the leaves of medieval *fabliau*-anthologies: the case of Bibliothèque Nationale MS. français 2173," *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1998): 1-31, at 31, note 43).

²³ A prime example of the latter category in Insular literature is a neglected satirical poem whose play with metaphors is so thoroughgoing and sophisticated that scholars have hitherto failed to recognise its sexual content: the *Solaz de une dame* (printed as "The Lady and Her Dogs" in *Reliquiae Antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts Illustrating Chiefly Early English Literature and the English Language*, ed. Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, 2 vols (London: William Pickering, 1841-43), 1:155-56). On other vernacular texts in the manuscript, see Diana B. Tyson, "Power corrupts: an Anglo-Norman poem on the abuse of power," *Fourteenth-Century England* 6 (2010): 95-113. I hope to offer a new edition and interpretation of this fascinating text in the near future.

²⁴ Cf. Keith Busby, "Conspicuous by its absence: the English fabliau," *Dutch Quarterly of Anglo-American Letters*

sometimes appreciated. In particular the Insular fabliaux, especially if one applies the criteria for generic definition adopted by the *Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux*,²⁵ prove especially fruitful, so much so that Nico van den Boogaard was moved to identify obscenity as “le caractère par excellence” of the Anglo-Norman fabliaux.²⁶ Not only do the Insular narratives centre squarely on sexual activity, but also a proportionally significant number of them feature what Roy Percy winningly termed “a peculiar kind of surreal and grotesque obscenity” which, he claimed, in a thought-provoking challenge to the conventional opinion regarding direction of influence, may have originated in Britain and then been emulated on the Continent.²⁷ For example, *Les Trois Dames qui troverent un vit* (NRCF, 8:269-81; Dean no. 185)²⁸ describes the fortuitous discovery by three female pilgrims of a disembodied but strikingly healthy phallus in their path; when they seek arbitration at a nearby convent as to which of them should keep the member, the abbess claims it as the misplaced bolt for their gate. *Les Quatre Sohais saint Martin* (NRCF, 4:189-216; Dean no. 192) presents a peasant who is granted four wishes by his favourite saint, only for him and his wife to squander them by wishing variously for themselves to be covered with and then deprived of sexual organs. In *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les cons* (NRCF, 3:45-173; Dean no. 188), a knight receives from three fairy-ladies whom he helps the gift of making vaginas and anuses speak, which he deploys to great effect on the bodies of a mare, a chambermaid, and finally a countess who bets – incorrectly – that he cannot bring his power to bear on her. The kind of language which appears in these narratives is exemplified by another tale of a wager, the Insular unicum of *La Gageure* (NRCF, 10:1-10; Dean no. 187), in which a lady’s bet against her husband that his squire will kiss her chambermaid’s backside fails when the squire, upon seeing the maid raise her clothing, espies an opportunity for a different mode of engagement:

Yl sake avaunt son bordoun,
 Si l’a douné en my le coun
 Un gros vit long e quarré:
 Si ly a en my le coun doné. (vv. 77-80)

Yet as striking as the profusion of the proscribed terms in the Anglo-Norman fabliaux may be, connoisseurs of their Continental equivalents will recognise that they are by no means extraordinary in terms of their linguistic transgression,²⁹ and since the texts have moreover already benefited from a number of insightful studies,³⁰ it is more interesting to

12 (1982): 30-41. On the later development of a comic narrative tradition in English, see Ben Parsons, “The English fabliau in the 15th and 16th centuries,” *Literature Compass* 10, no. 7 (2013): 544-58.

²⁵ While the collection *Eighteen Anglo-Norman Fabliaux*, ed. Ian Short and Roy Percy, ANTS PT 14 (London: ANTS, 2000) incorporates the more wholesome narratives found within the vernacular *Disciplina Clericalis* and the *Ysopet*, they are excluded from the NRCF corpus on the grounds that they are not free-standing (cf. Nico van den Boogaard, “Le Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux,” *Neophilologus* 61 (1977): 333-46).

²⁶ Nico van den Boogaard, “Le fabliau anglo-normand,” in *Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium*, ed. Jan Goossens and Timothy Sodmann, Niederdeutsche Studien 30 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1981), 66-77, at 77.

²⁷ Roy J. Percy, “Anglo-Norman fabliaux and Chaucer’s Merchant’s Tale,” *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000): 227-60, quotation at 235.

²⁸ Here and following, “Dean” indicates the number ascribed to the text in the indispensable guide by Ruth J. Dean and Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: a Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, OPS 3 (London: ANTS, 1999).

²⁹ Indeed, it should be noted that none of them feature the verb *foutre*, with the Insular version of *Cele qui fu foutue et desfoutue* (NRCF, 4:151-87; Dean no. 191) instead using the term *croistre*.

³⁰ In addition to Boogaard, “Le fabliau anglo-normand” and Percy, “Anglo-Norman fabliaux” see in particular

focus on some of the less well-known, but no less obscene gems to be found elsewhere in the two main manuscripts in which numerous of the Insular fabliaux are preserved: the famous trilingual anthologies of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86 and London, British Library, Harley 2253.³¹

In Digby 86 (ff. 162rb-163vb) we find a copy of *Ragemon le bon* (Dean no. 222),³² a fortune-telling game in which quatrains were written on a roll to which a tag was attached, with players selecting a tag and unrolling the scroll before reading out their predicted fortune, good or ill, before a captive audience.³³ Unlike the other two French versions of the text, namely the pious Insular parody in Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 14 (ff. 73ra-b and 82va-b) and the anodyne Continental *Geus d'aventure* in Paris, BNF, fr. 837 (ff. 259vb-260va), the Digby 86 *Ragemon* offers a number of remarkably salacious predictions, to both victim and perpetrator, concerning female infidelity and promiscuity:³⁴

La damaisele ki vous prendra
Mout sovent vous gabera,
Kar ele se fra verraiment
Sovent foutre de la gent. (49-52)

Un prodoume averez a baroun;
Mes vous li frez grant treisun;
Vous durrez quant ke il avera,
E un autre te fotira. (181-84)

Bele sere, ne vous coroucez,
Si de vous dis mes volountez;
Sovent avez esté fotue,
Cul discovert e jaune nue. (197-200)

It is not, however, only women whom the Digby *Ragemon* identifies as the active participants in a pastime which, by definition, is not an individual sport. The thirty-fifth

Keith Busby, "'Esprit gaulois' for the English: the humor of the Anglo-Norman fabliau," in *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin Lynn Burr, John Frederic Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson / London: McFarland, 2007), 160-73.

³¹ *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86*, ed. Judith Tschann and Malcolm B. Parkes, Early English Text Society: SS 16 (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1996); *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Susanna Greer Fein, David B. Raybin, and Jan M. Ziolkowski, 3 vols (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2014).

³² All three extant French versions of the text are printed in *Un jeu de société du moyen âge: Ragemon le Bon, inspireur d'un sermon en vers*, ed. Arthur Långfors, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Ser. B 15.2 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia, 1920), the Digby 86 text being at 17-24.

³³ On the game, see Serina Patterson, "Sexy, naughty, and lucky in love: playing *Ragemon le Bon* in English Gentry Households," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79-102. The reception of *Ragemon* is also discussed by Nicola F. McDonald, "Games medieval women play," in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette, *Chaucer Studies* 36 (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 176-97. For further consideration of historical background, see Charles Bémont, "Le statut 'De justiciis assignatis quod vocatur Rageman'," in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, ed. Mary Tout, Andrew George Little, and Frederick Maurice Powicke (Manchester: Printed for the subscribers [by R. & R. Clark, Edinburgh], 1925), 163-70.

³⁴ Cf. *Ragemon le Bon*, ed. Långfors: "La petite amulette de société qu'est le poème français est devenue entre les mains du versificateur anglo-normand [...] une chose singulièrement grossière: outre qu'il semble prendre un plaisir particulier à dire des choses désagréables, il a du goût pour les imaginations scabreuses, comme on le voit surtout dans les strophes destinées aux femmes" (7).

quatrain also describes an energetic present and a frantic future for one lucky male player of the game:

Jolifs estes e amerous,
Mout fotez en nuiz, en jours;
Ja si lede ne troverez
Que volouters ne la foutrez. (137-40)

The indefatigable lover thus favoured in *Ragemon* is not the only young man whom Digby 86 presents as *jolif* through love, for the poem headed *De un vallet qui soutint dames et dammaiseles* (ff. 102va-103vb; Dean no. 200) presents a speaker who declares himself so “jolif et juaunt” (v. 13) on account of all women that he is moved to enumerate their many virtues over nearly 150 lines.³⁵ Yet much closer in nature to the priapic individual identified as “jolifs” and “amerous” in the *Ragemon* quatrain is the speaker in the piece headed in Digby 86 as *La Vie de un vallet amerous* (ff. 114rb-116vb; Dean no. 214).³⁶ Directly following the copy of *Les Quatre Sohais saint Martin*, the *Vie* continues the misogynistic theme set in the manuscript by the addition to the end of the *Quatre Sohais* of extracts from the virulently anti-feminist diatribes *Blasme des femmes* and *Chastiemusart*,³⁷ while reprising the humorous obscenity which characterises the fabliau.³⁸ The poem, over 300 lines in length, begins with the speaker lamenting that “Jolifté” (v. 1) has consigned him to wandering around, his mind so consumed with thoughts of love that he cannot sleep: his problem is that he does not know “la manere de daunner” (v. 13). Fortunately, he discloses his dilemma to his brother, a smooth-talking man of experience who is able to offer him a sure-fire wooing technique, the importance of which is helpfully highlighted by a *manicula* in the manuscript:

³⁵ Transcription in *Codicem Manu Scriptum Digby 86 in Biblioteca Bodleiana asseveratum*, ed. Edmund Stengel (Halle: In Libraria Orphanotrophei, 1871), 22-27; parts of the text are also found in the pro-feminist *Bounté des femmes* (Dean no. 198). The judgement of the text as a “satire contre les femmes” in Jürgen Beyer and Franz Koppe, *La Littérature didactique, allégorique et satirique. Grundriß der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters* 6, 2 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), 296, no. 7252 seems wide of the mark, even if one considers the hyperbolic praise of women as bordering on the parodic.

³⁶ Quotations are from my edition in preparation. A transcription of the text is provided in *Digby 86*, ed. Stengel, 40-49; the edition in Charity Meier-Ewert, “A Study and a Partial Edition of the Anglo-Norman Verse in the Bodleian MS Digby 86” (D. Phil., Oxford, 1971), 228-37 remains unpublished. Although the text was noted as early as 1843 (cf. *A Selection of Latin Stories From Manuscripts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: a Contribution to the History of Fiction during the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Percy Society, 1843), 235), it has received little critical attention, although an excellent summary and consideration of manuscript context is provided by Busby, “‘Esprit gaulois’,” 165-66.

³⁷ On these interpolations, see *NRCF*, 4:409-10; *Poemetti misogini antico-francesi I: Le Blasme des femmes*, ed. Mario Pagano, Università di Catania, Quaderni del Sicularum Gymnasium 19 (Catania: Università di Catania, 1990), esp. 9-10; Busby, “‘Esprit gaulois’,” 163-64.

³⁸ Cf. Beatrice Barbieri, “Le contexte manuscrit du *Lai du cor* et la réception tardive des lais (avec une note sur *Renart le Contrefait*),” *Etudes françaises* 48, no. 3 (2012): 115-25, who considers the *Vie* “plutôt humoristique et obscène que misogynne” (122). Although the *Vie* has been little studied, obscenity has generally been seen as its defining trait: in *Digby 86*, ed. Stengel, it is described as “obscœnum poema agn. ineditum” (40); Marilyn Corrie, “The compilation of Oxford Bodleian Library MS. Digby 86,” *Medium Ævum* 66 (1997): 236-49 deems it “even more scurrilous” (240) than the *Quatre Sohais*; Dean and Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature* term it “a thirteenth-century series of obscenities in a free form of verse” (121); Marilyn Corrie, “Harley 2253, Digby 86, and the circulation of literature in pre-Chaucerian England,” in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Context of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 427-43 calls it “categorically obscene” (434); and Busby, “‘Esprit gaulois’” classes it “an obscene *unicum*” (165).

“Quant entre vos bras tendrez
 Voustre amie,
 Si luy priez: ‘Pur Deu mercie,
 Amie chere,
 Oiez ore ma priere!
 Vous hos jeo foutre
 E mun vit en toun coun boutre.’
 Pus la acolez,
 E mout sovent la beysez
 En la place.” (vv. 30-39)

The speaker immediately recognises the wisdom of his brother’s counsel and successfully follows it, only to realise, once his ardour cools, that the object of his affection is in reality as malodorous as she is hideous. Regretting his wasted effort, he vows henceforth to restrict his affections to women of small stature – at least until such time as they fall pregnant, for not only does he find bawling, mangy children repugnant, but even worse, they also cause women to rebel against their husbands. He concludes by expressing his desire to find a barren wife who meets his exacting criteria for beauty, asking God and various saints for their assistance in this laudable quest, before granting him forgiveness for his sin upon his death.

The explicit dialogue between our lovelorn *vallet* and his pedagogically inclined brother has a virtuous counterpart in Digby 86 in the form of the *Estrif des .ii. dames* (ff. 192v-195v; Dean no. 194) – an Anglo-Norman version of *De la fole et de la sage*, yet another poem preserved in Paris, BNF, fr. 837 (ff. 338rb-339va)³⁹ – in which a speaker, visiting an orchard as Spring blooms, falls asleep and has a dream in which a faithful wife and a promiscuous adulteress take turns to extol the merits of their chosen modes of conduct, with the virtuous woman ultimately persuading her interlocutor to change her wanton ways. Harley 2253, by contrast,⁴⁰ presents a dialogue between two similarly disposed and opposed women which develops in a direction much closer to the discussion between the brothers in the *Vie de un vallet amerous: Gilote et Johane* (ff. 67va-68va; Dean no. 193).⁴¹ This poem, dated 15 Sept. 1293 and comprising nearly 350 lines of couplets, tells of a young knight who goes out in May to visit a blooming wood, where he overhears a conversation between Gilote, boasting of her new lover, and Johane, a virgin who tries to persuade her companion of the errors of her ways. In contrast to the *Estrif*, however, the virtuous Johane’s arguments in favour of virginity are so convincingly defeated by Gilote’s pragmatic

³⁹ The Paris copy is edited in *Nouveau recueil de contes, dits, fabliaux et autres pièces inédites des XIIIe, XIVe et XVe siècles: pour faire suite aux collections Le Grand d’Aussy, Barbazan et Méon*, ed. Achille Jubinal, 2 vols (Paris: Pannier, 1839-42), 2:73-82; the Anglo-Norman version is transcribed with Jubinal’s variants in *Digby 86*, ed. Stengel, 84-93.

⁴⁰ The similarity between the two poems is also noted in *Digby 86*, ed. Stengel, 93; Beyer and Koppe, *Littérature didactique*, 293, no. 7156.

⁴¹ The edition cited is that in *Harley 2253*, ed. Fein, Raybin, and Ziolkowski, 2:156-73. For all their merits, neither this nor the other printed editions are strictly critical, and there remain philological questions requiring attention (cf. e.g. note 42); other editions include *Nouveau recueil*, ed. Jubinal, 2:28-39; Carter Revard, “The Wife of Bath’s Grandmother: or, how Gilote showed her friend Johane that the wages of sin is worldly pleasure, and how both then preached this gospel throughout England and Ireland,” *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 2 (2004): 117-36. On the significance of the text’s manuscript context, see Carter Revard, “Gilote et Johane: an interlude in BL MS Harley 2253,” *Studies in Philology* 79 (1982): 122-46; Mary Dove, “Evading textual intimacy: the French secular verse,” in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Context of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 329-49, at 347-48.

and, indeed, theological reasoning that the maiden is persuaded to take a lover, a choice with which she declares herself absolutely delighted as soon as she has enjoyed her first experience. Gilote and her zealous convert then sally forth to preach their doctrine of promiscuity around Winchester, converting many women to their cause, until one morning they are approached by a young wife with a particular domestic problem involving her husband:

“Ce est la verité, il ad un vit,
Trop est il plyant e trop petit,
E je su molt pres si me tienk clos,
E son vit est touzjours derere mon dors”.⁴² (vv. 230-33)

The situation has left the wife sleepless and ailing, and she fears death unless she can secure the affections of some lusty rascal. Gilote declares herself aghast at this lamentable state of affairs:

⁴² Interpretations of vv. 232-33 have varied. Jubinal printed “me tient clos”, without any indication of emendation, although responsibility for the text was not his, but rather was ascribed to the mysterious “M. Thomas Writh, de Londres, professeur au Trinity College” (*Nouveau recueil*, ed. Jubinal, 2:17, note 1); given that the prolific Thomas Wright was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, we assume that he was the individual in question. Subsequent editions have retained the MS reading *tienk*, with the couplet having been translated thus: “and I am too near, so close he holds me, and his prick is always behind my back” (Thomas Corbin Kennedy, “Anglo-Norman Poems about Love, Women, and Sex from British Museum MS. Harley 2253” (Ph.D., Columbia, 1973), 166); “I’m ready for him, think he’s found the crack, and then the soft worm slips out by the back” (Revard, “The Wife of Bath’s Grandmother,” 129); “And I’m very near and he holds me close, and his prick is always behind my back” (*Harley 2253*, ed. Fein, Raybin, and Ziolkowski, 2:167). All of these translations (Revard’s being the most free, driven by constraints of rendering in verse) indicate that *tienk* has been understood as ind.pr.3 of *tenir*, and *clos* apparently as an adverb denoting proximity. Both assumptions are problematic. If we accept MS *tienk*, it is ind.pr.1 of *tenir* (as it clearly is elsewhere in the manuscript: in *Harley 2253*, ed. Fein, Raybin, and Ziolkowski, cf. *ABC a femmes* (Dean no. 201), 2:18-33, v. 156; *De l’Yver et de l’Esté* (Dean no. 146), 2:34-47, v. 32; *Quant voy la revenue d’yver* (Dean no. 150), 2:58-67, v. 102), and so either we are dealing with a reflexive verb, or should emend to *tient*; and since there are no attestations of adverbial *clos*, we must assume that it is the usual past participle of *clore* “to close, enclose”, without a feminine singular agreement with the preceding *me* that it qualifies (the absence of concord does not pose any difficulty, since this is an Insular trait, but could if wished be remedied by emending *clos* to *close* and *dors* to *dosse* or *dorse* (both attested in the online *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* [www.anglo-norman.net], ed. William Rothwell, David Trotter, Stewart Gregory et al. (henceforth *AND*), s. *dos*; likewise the rhyme *-os* : *-ors*, which is also found in the following two lines (*repos* : *cors*) is standard in Anglo-Norman through the effacement of pre-consonantal /r/; cf. Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, § 22.1). If we emend to *tient*, the couplet becomes a clear lament about the wife’s confinement, with the proximity of the *vit* to the wife’s back being a synecdochic evocation of the physical proximity of its owner, who is constantly prowling behind her, with the sense: “I am always near him, and he keeps me locked up, and his cock is always right behind my back”. While this emendation may be the most likely solution, if we retain ind.pr.1 *tienk*, we may be led towards an interpretation more in line with Revard’s erotic rendering, although with the wife portrayed not as frustrated but rather frustrating. “Me tienk clos” would then describe the wife’s active resistance to penetration by her husband’s sub-par member, as a consequence of which it consistently fails to reach its target; in this context, *clos* could even be read as a deliberate masc.sg., wherein *me* through synecdoche takes on the gender of the *coun* which is meant (cf. from the forthcoming edition by Tony Hunt of the medical treatise *Circa instans*: “ceo fait venir le menstruum et jette hors de ventre le enfant mort et evere le coun q’est clos”). In this interpretation, it would make sense to follow Revard, whose translation suggests that he reads *pres* as a reflex of *PRAESTO* (without fem.sg. concord; note that *preste* would create a decasyllabic line, which seems the underlying metre), yielding a reading with the sense: “And I am quite ready, and keep my fanny closed, and his cock always slips behind my back”.

“Trop est femme desçu malement
E forement trahy, qe tiel honme prent.
Yl ne puet foutre ne fere talent”. (vv. 242-44)

Gilote promises to remedy the problem by introducing a young cleric, but the wife demurs, explaining that she has avoided such actions on account of the preaching by priests and friars. Gilote counters this resistance with two winning points. First, annulment on grounds of non-consummation, even if the familiar legal justification is couched in unfamiliarly forthright terms:

N'est il pas baroun tenuz en terre
Qe ne puet ov sa femme engendrure fere,
Ne il ne puet foutre, ne il ne puet trere. (vv. 260-62)

And second, the hypocrisy of those preaching a doctrine of continence:

Pus qe le frere qe list de son art
Preche al pueple e foute de sa part. (vv. 266-67)

Having successfully allayed all of the wife's fears with further compelling arguments, Gilote and Johane spread their message of free love far and wide, converting women throughout England and Ireland, including, in particular, the town of Pontefract (v. 340).

From this brief overview, we can see that there are a good number of occurrences of our key (presumed obscene) terms in Anglo-Norman comic literature. As interesting and as deserving of further attention as this material is, however, these are precisely the kinds of texts in which one would expect to encounter such terms on the Continent as well: hardly, therefore, a basis for considering speakers of Anglo-Norman to be particularly foul-mouthed. It would perhaps be more significant if the terms were found to appear in Insular examples of text-types which would usually avoid the terms on the Continent; and, indeed, there are a few instances of such usage in twelfth-century Insular material.

In his *Roman de Rou*,⁴³ Wace includes an anecdote in which William Rufus, marching towards Le Mans, finds in his path two rivers, of which “l'une est Cul, l'autre est Con nomee” (v. 9874); on account of the *vilté* of these names, which William often heard mentioned, and more specifically the derision which was sure to ensue if he came into contact with them, Wace tells us that William preferred a lengthy detour so that “il trespassa e Cul e Con” (v. 9884) without ever touching their waters. While it is uncertain whether this episode, which Wace is the only historiographer to relate in respect of two otherwise unrecorded geographical entities, has any historical basis, or whether it has been included only for humour or to insinuate William's homosexuality,⁴⁴ it is clear that Wace, repeating each word twice, does not share his subject's alleged squeamishness in the face of

⁴³ *Le Roman de Rou de Wace*, ed. Anthony J. Holden, 3 vols (Paris: SATF, 1970-73).

⁴⁴ Cf. Francoise Hazel Marie Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), who observes that the episode “is clearly included to provide some light relief” (265); the same may well be the case shortly afterwards, when William marches on a *borc* bearing the dubious name of *La Fesse* (v. 9907). Frank Barlow, *William Rufus* (London: Methuen, 1983), rightly notes this as a “rather good story” (403, note 269), although his assertion that William takes the detour “in order to enter them” is less secure; the same apparent misreading, offset by useful consideration of the vexed question of the King's sexuality, is replicated in William E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 50.

the ignoble terms. Nor does Hue de Rotelande in the romance of *Ipomedon*:⁴⁵ not content with thinly veiled allusions to coital jousting (vv. 4313, 4989-90) or the notorious epilogue in which he invites any women who doubt that he holds a letter of absolution to come and inspect it, even if insertion of the names may lead its seal to hang down on their buttocks (vv. 10751-80), he shows no compunction in using more forthright expressions.⁴⁶ He concludes a detailed description of the beauty of his heroine, La Fiere, by asking his audience, given how well formed her other parts are, how they would picture that lower part known as the *cunet* to be, his own presumption being that the diminutivised substantive was rather small;⁴⁷ when a disguised Ipomedon attracts the gaze of Ismeine, La Fiere's chambermaid, the impassioned narrator exclaims: "Dehez ait il, se il ne la fut!" (v. 8648);⁴⁸ and when the lovers finally come together, we are assured that they are so much in love "Ke il se entrefoutent tute jur" (v. 10516). Although some of his scribes may have tried to censor him,⁴⁹ Hue was clearly not averse to such terms. And while colourful insults are part and parcel of the chansons de geste, the Anglo-Norman manuscript which preserves the sole extant copy of the *Chanson de Guillaume*⁵⁰ is unique in the genre for the terms in which William harangues his sister,⁵¹ when she claims to her husband King Louis that William's wife Guiborc will poison him if he goes to her aid, by accusing her of sexual

⁴⁵ *Ipomedon: poème de Hue de Rotelande (fin du XIIe siècle)*, ed. Anthony J. Holden, Bibliothèque Française et Romane 17 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979).

⁴⁶ The key passages are perspicaciously highlighted in *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, 52-57. For further discussion, see Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 158-74; Kathryn Gravdal, 'Vilain' and 'Courtois': *Transgressive Parody in French Literature of the 12th and 13th Centuries*, Regents Studies in Medieval Culture (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 126-30; Roberta L. Krueger, "Misogyny, manipulation and the female reader in Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*," in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context. Selected Papers from the 5th Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, the Netherlands, 9-16 August, 1986*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1990), 394-409; Nicholas Jacobs, "Une allusion impudique chez Hue de Rotelande: *se li seaus li pent as nages*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96 (1995): 223-24; Penny Eley, "Sex and writing: Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon* and Alan of Lille's *De Planctu naturae*," in *Courtly Literature and Clerical Culture. Selected Papers from the Tenth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Universität Tübingen, Deutschland, 28. Juli-3. August 2001*, ed. Christoph Huber and Henrike Lähnemann (Tübingen: Attempto, 2002), 93-103; Suzanne Kocher, "Desire, parody, and sexual mores in the ending of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*: an imitation through the looking glass," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 429-48.

⁴⁷ "Quant si beaus out les membres tuz, / K'en dites vus de cel desuz / Ke nus apelum le cunet? / Je cuit qe asez fut petitet" (vv. 2267-70).

⁴⁸ The sense of the manuscript reading seemed to escape the editors in *Hue de Rotelande's Ipomedon: ein französischer Abenteuerroman des 12. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Eugen Kölbing and Eduard Koschwitz (Breslau: Koebner, 1889), who transcribed perplexingly as the unattested "l'afut" (147).

⁴⁹ In addition to the critical apparatus to the cited lines, see the textual notes in *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, 536, 564. Holden thankfully resists the correction to "s'entrebaissent" suggested through an interlinear addition in his base manuscript.

⁵⁰ *La Chanson de Guillaume (La Chançon de Willame)*, ed. Philip E. Bennett, Critical Guides to French Texts 121 (II) (London: Grant & Cutler, 2000). On the possibility that the text itself may, at least in part, also have been Anglo-Norman in origin, see Philip E. Bennett, "La Chanson de Guillaume: poème anglo-normand?" in *Au Carrefour des routes d'Europe: la chanson de geste: Actes du Xe Congrès international de la Société Rencesvals*, Senefiance 20-21 (Aix-en-Provence: CUERMA, 1987), 259-81.

⁵¹ Philippe Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France du Moyen Age* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), notes that this is the only epic in which "l'acte sexuel [...] est crûment désigné" (141), and that together with *Girart de Roussillon*, it is the only one to feature *coilles*, when Gui justifies – to Guillaume's satisfaction – his apparently cruel slaying of the already wounded Deramé with the explanation that "si aveit coilz pur enfanz engendrer" (v. 1971).

debauchery, complementing metaphorical evocations of sexual impropriety⁵² with the declarations: “Tedbalt vus fut, le culvert leccherre” (v. 2604) and “Quant es colché ben es acuvetee, / si te fais futre a la jambe levee!” (vv. 2617-18).⁵³

Further, and potentially more significant, use of our key terms is also to be found in a range of non-literary texts. A relatively light-hearted transition into this area is provided by the so-called *Manières de langage*, which are in essence manuals extant in various redactions from around the end of the fourteenth century which through sample speeches and dialogues illustrate to the reader how to speak French.⁵⁴ On occasion, these manuals take a comic twist, in particular in their lists of insults which are sometimes deployed to devastating effect in a portrayed scene, as in the exchange at a market in which a draper suggests an alternative explanation as to why his apprentice arrived late that morning:

“Hé, tu mens fausement. Tu as esté avec tes filletz putaignes, et pur ce je pri a Dieu que tu puisse avoir le vit coupé [...]!”⁵⁵ (ll. 10-11)

Given the context of slapstick vituperation, such use of explicit terms is hardly surprising.⁵⁶ This is perhaps not the case, however, in another dialogue, in which a lady stops a gentleman riding to London in order to ask him to assess whether her twelve-year-old son, who has been studying for a quarter of a year with the renowned teacher William

⁵² “Ces leccheurs te donent granz colees” (v. 2619), “Plus de cent prestres vus unt ben coillie, / Forment vus unt cele clume chargee” (vv. 2608-9). Alas, in the second example, the attempts in *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. François Suard, Classiques Garnier (Paris: Bordas, 1991) to derive *coillie* from an enticing verb *coiller* “user des testicules, posséder” (266), whence the translation “plus de cent prêtres ont joué des couilles avec toi” (165), is less convincing than the derivation from *coillir* proposed by the *AND*, s. *coillir*.

⁵³ Modern renderings of these lines demonstrate an interesting variation in interpretation of the key terms. Compare, for example, *Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. Bennett: “Tedbalt fucks you, that lecherous slave”, “When you’re bedded you’re well screwed, you get fucked with your legs pulled up high!” (156-57), with *Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *Klassische Texte des romanischen Mittelalters in zweisprachigen Ausgaben* 20 (Munich: Fink, 1983), 225: “Tedbald treibt es mit Euch, der dreckige Schuft”, “wenn Du zu Bette liegst, paarst Du Dich immerfort und läßt Dich mit erhobenen Beinen stoßen” (225). Which is the more appropriate register?

⁵⁴ *Manieres de langage (1396, 1399, 1415)*, ed. Andres M. Kristol, ANTS 53 (London: ANTS, 1995). For a brief introduction to the texts, see Douglas A. Kibbee, “For to speke Frenche trewely”. *The French Language in England, 1000-1600: its Status, Description and Instruction*, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series III: Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 60 (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1991), 78-83. Further on their significance for the status of French in Britain, see Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 328-35.

⁵⁵ *Manière de 1396*, in *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 19. A similar curse is found in the version of the argument between two friends in an inn found in Paris, BNF, nouv. acq. lat. 699, in which Perrot is given a choice of ripostes to Guiliam: “Dieux met toy mal en mal an, meschant poillart que tu es, car tu n’echiveras ja. *Vel sic*: Je pri a Dieu que de malle faucille roillié peus tu avoir le vit coupee”. Having dealt his interlocutor a lusty blow, Perrot colourfully continues: “Teis toy, senglant merdous garson, vilain mastin, meschant paillart cornart qui tu es”. For transcriptions, see *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 87; *La Manière de langage qui enseigne à bien parler et écrire le français: modèles de conversation composés en Angleterre à la fin du XIVE siècle*, ed. Jean Gessler (Brussels / Paris: Edition Universelle / Droz, 1934), 73-74, 85, 89.

⁵⁶ The insults are very similar to those in the Continental fabliaux analysed by Anne Elizabeth Cobby, “‘Chains de pute corioie, fel et deputaires’: les injures dans les fabliaux,” in *L’Etude des fabliaux après le Nouveau recueil complet des fabliaux*, ed. Olivier Collet, Fanny Maillet, and Richard Trachsler, *Rencontres: série Civilisation médiévale* 11 (Paris: Garnier, 2014), 119-40; many thanks to Anne for sharing this valuable study with me. For specifically sexual insults in fabliaux, see Danielle Bohler, “L’invective sexuelle dans les fabliaux,” in *L’Invective au Moyen Age. France, Espagne, Italie*, ed. Michel Garcia and Eric Beaumatin, *Atalya* 5 (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1994), 221-30.

Kingsmill, is sufficiently well educated for an apprenticeship.⁵⁷ When asked what he can say in French, the boy answers that he can say his name and describe his body. In fact, the eventual list of vocabulary that he recites is much more extensive, also comprising clothing, social positions, animals, utensils, and pearls of apophthegmatic wisdom, but in his description of the body that he took to the feast the day before, he identifies:

“Ventre, os, dos, mamels, costees, coustees, umbyl et la peel dehors
Que covere le vyt, lez coyllouns, le cuyl, la chaar et tout le corps”. (vv. 28-29)

This choice of terms does not earn for the boy application of the rod whose corrective use he himself wholeheartedly endorses⁵⁸ – nor, fairly enough, should it, given that these are the very words, without any alternatives proposed, which are included in the section devoted to the body in the lists of vocabulary prescribed in “un petit livre pour enseigner les enfantz de leur entreparler comun françois”:⁵⁹

Mon nombril, mon penil, mon vit, mes coillons, ma conne, mes cuisses, [...] mon cul, mes fesses.⁶⁰

Indications that these are, in fact, considered the normal and proper terms for describing the sexual body are found more generally in Anglo-Norman word lists and glosses.⁶¹ An early fourteenth-century bilingual *nominale* in couplets helpfully includes Middle English equivalents:⁶²

⁵⁷ *Manière de 1415*, in *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 76-79; the same terms are used in the copy printed in *Liber Donati: a 15th-Century Manual of French*, ed. Brian S. Merrilees and Beata Sitarz-Fitzpatrick, ANTS PT 9 (London: ANTS, 1993), 25, ll. 279-80. On Kingsmill, see Mary Dominica Legge, “William of Kingsmill - a 15th-century teacher of French in Oxford,” in *Studies in French Language and Medieval Literature Presented to M.K. Pope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1939), 241-46.

⁵⁸ “Beneyt soit la verge que chaste l’enfaunt!” (*Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 77, v. 6).

⁵⁹ *Manière de 1399*, in *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 49, ll. 2-3.

⁶⁰ *Manière de 1399*, in *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 52, ll. 5-7. A slightly shorter list is found in the *Manière de 1396*, in *Manieres*, ed. Kristol, 4, ll. 11-12: “le penyl, le vit, lez cuilons, le cul, le hanche”; cf. the copy in *Manière de langage*, ed. Gessler, 46.

⁶¹ The words do not appear in the vocabulary provided by Bibbesworth and the subsequent redactions of his work, yet not because other terms are preferred, but rather because the sections devoted to the body do not cover these specific parts of the anatomy when discussing the nether regions: cf. *Walter de Bibbesworth, Le Tretiz*, ed. William Rothwell, ANTS PT 6 (London: ANTS, 1990), 6; *Femina (Trinity College, Cambridge MS B.14.40)*, ed. William Rothwell (Aberystwyth / Swansea: The Anglo-Norman Online Hub, 2005), 21. J.H. Baker, “A French vocabulary and conversation-guide in a 15th-century legal notebook,” *Medium Aevum* 58 (1989): 79-102 conjectures that “the private parts [...] may have been deliberately omitted from Bibbesworth and *Femina* as unsuitable in a textbook for ladies and children” (82). This was evidently not the case for Kingsmill’s young pupil, but such presumed prudery is a complicating factor when one tries to compare the linguistic norms for Anglophone speakers of French with those of their Flemish-speaking counterparts, for whom similar linguistic guides were prepared. In *Le Livre des mestiers de Bruges et ses dérivés: Quatre anciens manuels de conversation*, ed. Jean Gessler, 6 vols (Bruges: Fondation universitaire de Belgique, 1931), 4: *Vocabulaire*, 35, the nether regions are glossed thus: “Les membres secrez – die secrete leden”; not even these are mentioned in 1: *Livre des mestiers*, 10; and the failed seduction scene described to her mistress by Janette, the innocent object of the knavish Jehan’s attentions in 2: *Gesprächbuchlein*, 31, remains relatively discreet, although we learn that her evasive tactics may resemble those deployed by the wife in *Gilote et Johane* (cf. note 42): “Et je tenois toudis mes gambes clous, que ilh ne puet ouvrier”.

⁶² Cited from Walter W. Skeat, “Nominale sive verbale,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* 25, no. 3 (1906): 1-50. This is amongst a number of instances of *coillon* in documentary materials also noted in a fascinating footnote in which William Rothwell, “Anglo-French and Middle English vocabulary in *Femina nova*,” *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000): 34-58, at 57-58, note 60, persuasively argues that Chaucer’s use of the term in the

Vyt coylons et furchure
Pyntul ballok and greynes. (vv. 41-42)

Latin-French glosses confirm this pattern of usage: *vit(h)* is the standard equivalent for *priapus* and *veretrum*, *cun(e)* for *vulva* (*cunnus* is not used), *coille* and *cuyllun* for *mentula* and *testiculus*, and *cul* for *cullus* and *anus*.⁶³ Likewise, in a French vocabulary guide preserved in the third of four gatherings of a fifteenth-century legal notebook, preceding a brief *Manière de langage*, one finds:

Mon penyl – shar
mon vit – veretrum
mes cuoillons – testiculi
mon cul – i. culus.⁶⁴ (ll. 44-47)

The appearance of these terms in a legal notebook is particularly interesting in the context of a widely recorded case which came to trial in London in 1320-21.⁶⁵ In this, it was alleged by Joan, the eleven-year-old daughter of Eustace the saddler of London, that a certain Reymund of Limoges had abducted her by force, taken her back to his lodgings, and raped her. The description of the assault in the report of the oral proceedings of the second appeal in the London eyre is remarkable for its detail. It is alleged that Reymund forced Joan to lie face-up on the floor and lifted her clothes up to her navel:

[...] et felonusement cum felun nostre seignur le Roi de amedex les mains les jambes et les quises meime cete J. overa et de sa main destre prit soun vit de lounoure etc et de la grossure etc et le mit en mi le coun meime cete J. et li debrusa le Watershad et la foti tout outre, et la fit senglante et ravit sa puselage etc.⁶⁶ (88)

Host's famous threat to unman the Pardoner and enshrine his testicles in porcine faeces reflects thoroughgoing assimilation of the French word into Middle English.

⁶³ *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England*, ed. Tony Hunt, 3 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991). *Vit(h)*: 1:412, 421 and 2:25, 78; *cun(e)*: 1:412, 421 and 2:125; *coile*: 1:412, *coylon*: 1:421, *culiuns*: 2:17, *cuyllun*: 2:168; *cul*: 1:127, 412, 421 and 2:125. *Foutre* does not occur: for *coitu frequenti*, one finds *sover lescherie* 2:140.

⁶⁴ Baker, "French vocabulary," 86.

⁶⁵ Cited from *Year Books of Edward II: the Eyre of London, 14 Edward II, A.D. 1321*, ed. Helen Maud Cam, 2 vols, Selden Society 85-86 (London: Quaritch, 1968-69), 1:87-93. The case is also covered in the quite widely disseminated *Novae narrationes*, although the edition provided in *Novae Narrationes*, ed. Elsie Shanks and Stroud Francis Charles Milsom, Selden Society 80 (London: Quaritch, 1963), 341-44 leaves something to be desired; cf. the numerous corrections proposed even for the brief citation from the text included in *AND*, s. *watershad*. A translation and helpful overview of the case, including chronological reordering of the source materials, is provided by Patricia Skinner and Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts, *Medieval Writings on Secular Women*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2011), 80-88.

⁶⁶ I have corrected the meaningless *conu* and *foci* of the edition to *coun* and *foti* respectively. *Novae Narrationes*, ed. Shanks and Milsom, 341 does not render this passage in the facing-page translation, preferring presumably for reasons of decency simply to repeat the Anglo-Norman (the only section thus treated). *Eyre of London, 14 Edward II, A.D. 1321*, ed. Cam, translates: "and feloniously as the felon of our lord the King who now is, with both his hands separated the legs and thighs of this same Joan, and with his right hand took his male organ of such and such a length and size and put it in the secret parts of this same Joan, and bruised her watershed and laid her open so that she was bleeding, and ravished her maidenhead" (88). The version offered by Skinner and Van Houts, *Medieval Writings*, reads, more convincingly: "And feloniously as a felon against our lord the king who now is, with both hands separated the legs and thighs of this same Joan, and with his right hand took his male organ of – length, and put it in the vulva of this same Joan, and broke her watershed, and possessed her sexually so thoroughly that she was bleeding" (88).

If an even more shocking aspect of this case is perhaps the miscarriage of justice that we can discern in tracing Reymund's initial attempt to avoid trial by claiming clerical privilege, his subsequent exploitation of technicalities to avoid conviction, and his eventual suit against Joan's father and his witnesses for abetting the original case against him, we cannot fail to be struck by the terms used to describe the assault. Can we conclude from this evidence that *vit*, *coun*, and *fotre* were the appropriate technical terms for use in Insular law French, or do we assume that they simply appear here because they best reflect the precise words used in the oral testimony against the defendant?

Support for the possibility that the terms may indeed constitute standard professional vocabulary is provided by an area of writing in which Anglo-Norman is particularly well represented: medical texts. For the sake of illustration, a single example may suffice: an Anglo-Norman translation of the so-called *Practica brevis*, an early twelfth-century compilation of received medical wisdom with strong Galenic influence conventionally ascribed to Johannes Platearius II.⁶⁷ Amidst the text's coverage of a range of ailments, we find in the section dealing with suffocation of the womb (Book XIV, ch. 3) the recommendation that if the condition is caused by retention of menstrual humours or poisonous humours, the patient should be bled from the saphenous vein in order to provoke menstruation, before treatment with an electuary comprising musk-scented oil:⁶⁸

Pregne l'en coton et moille l'en ens et li boute l'en au con et l'espurge om de benoite ovesques gerologodion ovesques theodor[ic]o[n] [eu]periston. (1:244)

If, however, the affliction should stem from corrupted sperm coming from the "coillions de la matrix" (1:243), the woman should lie with her husband, or if she is a widow or virgin, obtain a husband; but if she has taken a vow of chastity, she should apply a mixture of rock-salt and nitre mixed in vinegar and salt-water in order to create an irritation which will cause emission of the sperm, or instead take recourse to titillation:

Ele boute son doi en son con et le move amont et aval por fere issir le sperme. (1:244)

Such examples suggest that for this translator, *con* is an entirely normal medical term; indeed, while he elsewhere uses *con* to render *vulva*,⁶⁹ in the preceding two cited cases, he has actually introduced the term where the Latin contains no equivalent substantive.⁷⁰ That

⁶⁷ *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, ed. Tony Hunt, 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994-97), 1:147-315; on the doubts surrounding the attribution to Platearius, see esp. 149-50. Latin citations are from *Practica Jo. Serapionis dicta breviarium ...* (Venice: Bonetus Locatellus, for Octavianus Scotus, 1497).

⁶⁸ On the mysteries of medieval gynaecology see Daniel Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir médical au moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985) and, in particular, the indispensable body of work by Monica H. Green, including *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts*, Collected Studies 680 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); *The Trotula: a Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: the Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ E.g. "une froidure de la matriz et du con" (1:245) for "frigidity vulve et matricis" (XIV:4).

⁷⁰ "[...] et supponatur etiam benedicta resoluta cum oleo muscelino in bombace intacta. Fiat purgatio cum benedicta vel yeralogodion theodoricon euperiston [...] vel digitum sibi mulier imponat ut ex motu et titillatione possit spermatizare" (XIV:3). These extracts are also transcribed in Enrique Montero Cartelle, "El "mal de la madre" en *La Celestina*," in *Humanismo y pervivencia del mundo clásico, IV: Homenaje al profesor Antonio Prieto*, ed. José María Maestre Maestre, Joaquín Pascual Barea, and Luis Charlo Brea (Alcañiz Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Humanísticos, 2008), 2749-76, at 2756. A third example of introduction of *con* is found in the discussion of retention of menstrual fluids, where the treatment "Radix malve ab exteriori cortice mundata imponat" (XIV:1) is rendered by: "Pregne l'en les racines des mauves mundeas des foreynes escorses et li boute l'en el con" (1:242).

this translation choice is influenced more by a desire for clarity than for obscene effect is apparent from the treatment of the male anatomy. In the discussion of impediments to conception, we learn that if the problem stems from the quality of the man's sperm, an electuary is to be applied "sor les reins et sor les membres honteuses"; there is, however, no remedy if the problem stems "del vit qui est tort ou cort" (1:245). The same alternation between "membres honteuses" and "vit", corresponding to Latin *pudenda* and *virga*, is likewise found in a section dealing with problems during intercourse which includes other interesting terms:

Approximeron apele om une maladie come om a comencé a foutre et nel poet parfaire. [...] Comme froidure est en cause, ce conust l'en par la froidure de meime les parties genitales et des autres qui sunt environ. Et si sentira li malades une froidure en parfont sans nule grevance, et si est le vit arest. [...] Come ce avient de cholor qui dessout les espiriz, ce conoist l'en de une cholor que l'en sentira entor les membres honteuses. Et chaudes choses nuissent. Et la verge dresce a la fiez. (1:239; my emphasis)

For the underlined expressions, the Latin source presents, in order, "coitus", "ipsarum partium", "erectio virge", "partes illas genitales", and "virga [...] erigit" (IV:3). What seems most interesting here is not that *vit* interchanges freely with the more scientific "parties genitales" and the more euphemistically moralising "membres honteuses", since *vit* is clearly considered just as standard and correct an anatomical term as *con*, but rather that *foutre* appears an equally neutral term. Plenty of examples indicate that it is seen by our translator as a perfectly anodyne and scientific rendering of *coitus*. He tells us that those suffering from major epilepsy fall to the ground, contort their faces, shake, grind their teeth, and:

[...] chient et se compissen[t] et foutent en meime l'action.⁷¹ (1:176)

To treat epilepsy, there are many things from which the patients should keep themselves, including:

[...] de poudre, de foutre trop, de bagnier, de presse de gent.⁷² (1:177)

Diabetes, we learn, is a disease which affects the kidneys, but diagnosis must heed the symptoms carefully, for kidney complaints can come from other causes:

[...] sicome de trop boivre et de trop foutre et de user trop chaudes dietes.⁷³ (1:235)

May we then conclude from the range of material cited that there is indeed a lexical kernel of truth in the comic figure of the foul-mouthed Anglophone speaker of French with

⁷¹ "Quandoque urinam egestionem sperma involuntarie emittunt: stertunt et spumant" (II:4).

⁷² "Abstineant generaliter a [...] pulvere: coitu immoderato caveant etiam a balneo a conventu hominum" (II:4).

⁷³ "Ut ex multo coitu precedente propter renum percussionem ex usu calide et sicce diete" (XII:1); we note the slight difference in causes identified. In the fourteenth-century *Euperiston (Anglo-Norman Medicine)*, ed. Hunt, 2:129-89), for which no source is known, the author apprises us that amongst the many principles for the treatment of epileptics, "Ausi une reule est ke bain e foutre nusent a eus pur ceo ke enfielissent les nerfs" (2:144). Likewise, strangely enough in a section dealing with nose-bleeds, we learn that if one should cut one's finger with a knife, one should bind it to staunch the bleeding, and then: "Le patient manjue viandes ke legerement defient e se gard[e] del contrere e de cri e de foutre e de travail" (2:156).

whom we began our investigation, and that Anglo-Norman does exhibit greater freedom in the use of the proscribed terms than appears to have been the case in Continental French dialects?

As appealing as the hypothesis is, and while the possibility is perhaps not to be discounted entirely, the evidence is, alas, not overwhelming. Considered in the round, Anglo-Norman comic literature does not use the terms more frequently than comparable Continental fabliaux, *dits*, and *fatrasies*. And as interesting as the occurrence of the words in other areas of Anglo-Norman writing is, one cannot ignore that there are equivalent instances in Continental texts. In the late twelfth-century romance of the *Bel Inconnu*, for example, we read of a giant harassing a maiden that “A force foutre le voloit” (v. 714);⁷⁴ the chronicle of Jean le Bel, and following him Froissart, uses “vit” and “coulles” recording the castrations performed during the executions of Hugh Despenser and Mortimer;⁷⁵ and a thirteenth-century medical treatise from Liège assures us that drinking the root of a bugle cooked in honey and wine “donrait talant de foutre a l’ome” (l. 499).⁷⁶

Yet while the present analysis may have failed to offer conclusive evidence that Insular speakers of French were especially prone to profanity, I hope that it may have succeeded in two other respects. First, that it may have signalled the potential interest of a variety of texts which, by reason both of their content and of their dialect, tend to escape more widespread scholarly attention; and second, that by collating examples of occurrence of terms such as *vit*, *con*, and *foutre* from a broad selection of literary and non-literary material, this article may shed new light on, and encourage fresh consideration of, the actual register and force of terms which many English-speaking scholars are only too quick to render using the most offensive and transgressive forms available in the modern idiom.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Le Bel inconnu: roman d’aventures*, ed. Gwladys Perrie Williams, Classiques Français du Moyen Age 38 (Paris: Champion, 1929). The history of this line is not without interest to various of the points touched on in the present article. In her first edition of this *unicum* (*Li Biaus Descouneüs de Renaut de Beaujeu* (Oxford: Fox, Jones, & Co., 1915)), Williams had printed “A force prendre le voloit”, giving the rejected manuscript reading as “A force le voloit” (22); in the first published edition (*Le Bel Inconnu, ou Giglain fils de messire Gauvain et de la fée aux blanches mains*, ed. Célestin Hippeau (Paris: A. Aubry, 1860)), the verb supplied had been *baisier*. The reading with *foutre* is retained without comment in *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. Michèle Perret and Isabelle Weil, Champion Classiques: Série Moyen Age 7 (Paris: Champion, 2003); in *Renaut de Bâgé: Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. Karen Fresco, Colleen P. Donagher, and Margaret P. Hasselman, Garland Library of Medieval Literature: Series A 77 (New York / London: Garland, 1992), the reading for v. 714 is “[f]outre” (translated as “rape”), the critical apparatus clarifying that censorship had occurred in the manuscript: “all but *f* of *foutre* erased” (44). On the scene, see Dietmar Rieger, “Le motif du viol dans la littérature de la France médiévale entre norme courtoise et réalité courtoise,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 31 (1988): 241-67, at 249.

⁷⁵ *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, ed. Jules Viard and Eugène Déprez, 2 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1904-5): “On luy couppa tout premierement le vit et les coulles pour tant qu’il estoit herites et sodomites [...] Quant le vit et les coulles luy furent coupeez, on les jetta au feu et furent arses” (1:28); “Et puis luy fut le vit coupé et les coulles” (1: 103). For Froissart, attestations of the terms across the manuscript tradition can be obtained by searching on the Online Froissart: <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/onlinefroissart/index.jsp>; one notes that Chicago MS f. 37, vol. 1., f. 6v prefers “li membres” to “vit”, but retains “coilles”.

⁷⁶ *Médecinaire liégeois du XIIIe siècle et médicinaire namurois du XVe: manuscrits 815 et 2769 de Darmstadt*, ed. Jean Haust (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1941), 112; cf. “Ki ne puet gesir a femme, boive le jus de la vervoine a lait de chievre, fouterat” (l. 110); cf. also ll. 448, 1183.

⁷⁷ Recourse to “fuck”, “cunt”, “prick”, and similar is standard in Anglophone fabliau scholarship; one may cite as examples Emma Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 27-70 or Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge Studies in French 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 234-85, but any number of adherents to this orthodoxy could be named. An interesting justification for deliberate introduction of transgressive English terms in translating the *Roman de la Rose* is offered by Alasdair J. Minnis, “From *coilles* to *bel chose*: discourses of obscenity in Jean de Meun and Chaucer,” in *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2006), 156-78, at 158, note 9.

Further research into the full extent of use of such terms throughout medieval French writing may help us to ascertain whether their register was more dependent on context than their current equivalents or whether, perhaps, we contemporary Anglophone speakers of French might unwittingly be committing, in our own tongue, the transgression of foulmouthedness for which our fictional forebears were satirised centuries ago.

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