Keeping Body and Soul Together: Gender, Sexuality and Salvation in the Works of Jean LeFèvre de Ressons

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If, at the general resurrection, we shall rise again with our bodies intact, and if therefore Adam's rib is restored, what will become of Eve and women in general? It was this conundrum, expressed humorously by the narrator of Jean LeFèvre's *Lamentations de Mathéolus* that alerted me to the fascinating interaction in medieval thought between sexuality and salvation, the gendered body and the soul.

The lamenting protagonist Matthew, a henpecked husband who has lost his clerical privileges because he has married a widow, addresses this thorny question about the resurrection of Eve to God during a dream vision in Book 3 of the *Lamentations*.[1] He immediately asks for forgiveness, claiming that distress makes him pose such a theologically erroneous question. However, he goes on to challenge God (in what is to modern readers a shocking, but amusing way) by asking Him why he has made marriage a sacrament which cannot be broken, and why men cannot have wives on probation. God replies that marriage is a purgatory which purifies husbands to such an extent that in the afterlife they will be placed above celibate virgins in heaven's hierarchy. This passage is no doubt meant to be comic, but it also reflects serious debates that were taking place in the Middle Ages about the connection between the body and soul, the conditions of the general resurrection, the superiority of virginity and celibacy over marriage, and the role of sexual reproduction as a means of fulfilling God's plan for the human race. As we shall see, in medieval clerical texts the corporeal was often inextricably linked with the intellectual and moral, especially when bodily language was employed to describe spiritual matters.

[1] See van Hamel ed. (1892, 1905). On 'bigamous' clerics whose privileges were withdrawn if they indulged in behaviour not condoned by successive thirteenth-century popes, see D'Avray (2005), Chap. 4.

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These topics and linguistic strategies are all to be found in the writings of Jean LeFèvre from Ressons-sur-le-Matz, who practised as a *procureur* (defence lawyer) at the royal parliament in Paris in the second half of the fourteenth century.[2] Most of his works were translations of Latin works, including the reputable school texts the *Ecloga Theoduli* and *Disticha Catonis* (his *Théodelet* and *Caton*). He also translated the less canonical, but nevertheless very popular *Lamentationes Matheoluli* by Matthew of Boulogne and the pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula* (*The Old Woman*), sometimes attributed to Richard de Fournival.[3] The latter two Latin sources date from the 1270s, and were thus near contemporaries of Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*, another text exploited liberally by LeFèvre a century later.[4]

In his translations (*Les Lamentations de Mathéolus* and *La Vieille*) LeFèvre has in most cases rendered passages on the body and soul quite faithfully, and has sometimes even elaborated further on the meaning of his sources. However, he then re-uses much of this material in two original works, his palinode in defence of women, the *Livre de Leesce* (c. 1380) and especially his *Respit de la mort*, produced in the 1370s. So it seems that the philosophical and theological debating points found in his thirteenth-century sources were still deemed relevant enough in the late fourteenth century not only to be retained in his translations, but also to be incorporated into new works. Moreover, in the *Respit*, usually viewed as a serious work on death and salvation, LeFèvre quotes extensively from his often comic and bawdy *Vieille*, which makes the tone and function of these quotations in the *Respit* difficult to interpret. It is quite possible that the lengthy theological and scientific passages found in LeFèvre's own texts and in his preferred sources, including the *Rose*, reflect a medieval predilection for the encyclopaedic. However, Peter Godman has suggested that the pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula* may be a parody of this impulse, poking fun at the 'ideal of united learning erected by Bernardus Silvestris and Alan of Lille, only to be undermined by John of Hauvilla'.[5] If this was the way *De vetula* was generally received by thirteenth-century readers, one wonders whether LeFèvre recognised and retained the parodic element in his later translation, *La Vieille*.

In the following I should therefore like to consider what theological and philosophical issues relating to the body and soul most concerned Jean LeFèvre and his predecessors, and what contemporary scholastic debates and authoritative sources they were invoking. We shall also see to what extent these themes are intercon-

[2] For further biographical details, see the introduction to Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969).

[3] Since the attribution is by no means universally accepted, I shall treat this work as if it were anonymous; see Klopsch (1967) and Robathan ed. (1968). All quotations from *De vetula* are taken from the Robathan edition. When p. and pp. are used in references to editions, they refer to pages containing editorial comments. The absence of such abbreviations indicates that the reference is to a line in the edited text.

[4] The intertextual relations between *De vetula*, Matthew's *Lamentationes* and Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Rose* are complex, but the works are likely to have been composed in that order since the *Lamentationes* refers explicitly to *De vetula*. However, when Jean LeFèvre came to translate the two Latin texts a century later, he took further material from Jean de Meun's vernacular compendium of knowledge, thus bolstering the authority of his translations. See Pratt (1999).

[5] Godman (2000), Chap. 9, especially p. 326.

nected by noting how the bodily affects the moral and how corporeal language is used both literally and figuratively to express the spiritual. Moreover, we shall examine the role these controversial topics played within each individual text, how seriously they were being treated and who their ideal readership could have been. Clearly the Parisian lawyer's translations were able to convey to lay audiences current doctrinal debates, and given the import of issues relating to the Christian teaching on salvation, these were no joking matter. LeFèvre may therefore have imitated the method and rhetoric of serious scholars in order to render his own works more authoritative. On the other hand, it is quite possible that he, taking the lead perhaps from the authors of his immediate sources, was poking fun at scholastic methods, parodying the style without necessarily undermining the content of scholastic writing. Indeed, these clerical writers may well have been indulging in rhetorical games and dialectical pyrotechnics with the aim of enhancing the entertainment value of their works, while nevertheless instructing their readership. So, in order to gauge what sort of response passages relating to the body and soul may have elicited from their readers, special attention will be paid here not only to the presentation of these interconnecting themes, but also to the somewhat incongruous contexts in which they find themselves.

A seminal work within my clerical corpus is the pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula*. It is a medieval fake—a work which supplies a highly fictionalised biography for a famous writer[6] and a fabricated explanation for the text's own existence as the poet's last output. In many manuscripts, the Latin text is accompanied by a sort of *accessus* to the poet's whole *oeuvre*. It is unclear whether or not this was by the original author,[7] but LeFèvre clearly thought it was and has incorporated it into his translation, placing it between his own translator's prologue and the text proper.[8] The ensuing first-person narrative, supposedly in the voice of the classical poet, outlines in three books his transformation from a young man engaged in a variety of pursuits, including hunting, fishing, dicing and womanising, into a mature scholar, who has given up women in order to pursue his studies. In fact, so successful is Ovid in abandoning the pleasures of the flesh, that he becomes a proto-Christian, prophesying the virgin birth.[9] The cause of the protagonist's radical mutation is his failed attempt to seduce a beautiful young woman, thwarted when an aged go-between substitutes herself for the lovely virgin in bed (see Pratt 2007, pp. 321–342). This very funny episode involving the eponymous old woman constitutes, however, a brief interlude

[6] There are similarities here with contemporary Occitan vidas, which supplied prose biographies of questionable authenticity for the troubadour poets whose lyrics were included in the same manuscripts. See Egan ed. (1984).

[7] Godman (2000), p. 327, thinks it was and sees it as ironizing 'the hair-splitting techniques of scholastic method', p. 329.

[8] See Cocheris ed. (1861). Since *La Vieille* is a fairly close translation, the following synopsis is relevant to both source and translation. However, the more detailed analysis below is based on the Middle French text, with the occasional reference to the Latin source usually when LeFèvre strays significantly from it.

[9] Henceforth I shall use the name Ovid to refer to the protagonist of source and translation (and, of course, to the real classical author), and pseudo-Ovid to refer to the author of *De vetula*.

in Book 2 and is surrounded by a wealth of encyclopaedic information, which dominates Books 1 and 3. One therefore wonders how far the humorous sexual and somewhat misogynistic narrative was perceived as integral to a work dealing largely with matters medical, astrological and theological. The structure in three books may, however, provide a clue as to contemporary analogues and possible modes of reception. For it shares this tripartite structure with Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, another Latin book purportedly on love, which likewise ends with an anti-love, anti-women section reminiscent of the real Ovid's own *Remedia amoris*.[10]

Despite these similarities, Andreas's text is evidently about *amor*, while the main theme and purpose of *De vetula* is less obvious. It was clearly very popular, having survived in at least 45 manuscripts and fragments dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. However, 11 of the 45 (9 of them copied in the fifteenth century) contain only Book 3, which suggests that the work's perceived value changed over time and that later readers preferred the more serious subject matter.[11] In fact, two fifteenth-century Cambridge manuscripts (Jesus College Q. G. 22 and Sidney Sussex Δ 3.11) explain that Books 1 and 2 have been suppressed because they contain much scurrilous material ('multa scurrilia') (Robathan ed. 1968, p. 30). Yet many manuscripts contain scholia for *all three* books: scholarly annotations including definitions, relevant citations and source identification, and some of these scholia acquire authority as they are copied from manuscript to manuscript. This would suggest that the whole of *De vetula*, but especially Book 3, was frequently treated as a reliable source of knowledge, and indeed the thirteenth-century philosopher Roger Bacon cites it in his *Opus Maius* (1260s) as an authority on the relationship between Aristotle and astronomy.[12] It seems to have acquired the status of a school text, since it circulated from an early date in university and monastic circles, and was owned by important Church figures (Robathan ed. 1968, pp. 23–29; Klopsch 1967, pp. 160–183). *De vetula*'s transmission along with serious philosophical and religious material, as well as with authentic Ovidiana, suggests, though, that it could give rise to a variety of different readings and may well have been viewed differently depending on its manuscript context and circumstances of reception.

[10] Godman (2000), p. 331, also sees *De amore* as offering 'a precedent for the send-up of prescriptive style in *De vetula*'. Moreover, he argues that *De vetula* undermines the author portrait offered by Ovid's *Tristia*, 2, pp. 353–356, where the poet claims that his poetry is far less moral than his own life.

[11] The statistics on manuscripts quoted here are based on Robathan ed. (1968), pp. 23–30, but corrected with information taken from M. L. Colker's review of her edition in Colker (1970). Colker pointed out that Robathan had missed 8 further witnesses, including those in Escorial, Manchester, Paris Arsenal and London Congregational Library, but as he gives no information about the contents of these manuscripts, I cannot include them in my figures for manuscripts containing Book 3 only. However, we can add manuscripts mentioned by Klopsch (1967), pp. 160–182, to Robathan's findings: i.e. Budapest, Bern, Frankfurt (not noted by Colker, but actually a fifteenth-century copy containing only Book 3), Melk and Naples, plus a second manuscript in Budapest unknown to all these scholars: see Tóth (2006). So, while my figures may not be complete, they do give us a good indication of the number of fifteenth-century manuscripts containing only Book 3 as a proportion of all extant copies.

[12] See Robathan ed. (1968), pp. 13–14, for a list of references in the works of Bacon.

Jean LeFèvre, in translating all three books, seems to reflect the attitude prevailing in the fourteenth century towards *De vetula*, in that he preserves its erudition, but also its entertainment value. To this end, as elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, he frequently increases the humour and scurrilousness of his source.[13] Yet, in his translator's prologue he stresses the usefulness of translating in order to pass on the knowledge of the ancients, and seems to ally himself with those who translated the Bible from various languages, and even with St Jerome, who relied on these translators when producing his Vulgate version. This dual function is present in his concluding remarks, which place as much emphasis on entertainment as they do on intellectual utility:

> I'm doing it for the entertainment of my lords, and those who love knowledge.[14]

For LeFèvre, then, his *Vieille* was an amusing and bawdy pseudo-biography of a famous classical poet, a compendium of knowledge on serious topics, an opportunity to show off his erudition and training in the seven liberal arts, and perhaps also a knowing parody of overconfident scholasticism.[15]

The majority of the scholarly material in *De vetula* is to be found in Book 3, which relates the protagonist's post-erotic pursuit of knowledge of God through the study of the liberal arts, especially the quadrivium.[16] However, the first two books also present much learned information on the natural sciences, integrated loosely into his account of his amorous pursuits. For instance, the narrator, preparing himself for love, claims that although he is going to shave, his strong beard is a sign that he will be a good lover:

> You can judge performance in the trousers from the thatch on the chin.[17]

He is thus invoking the well-known distinction between the male and female sexes based on hairiness which can be found, for example, in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, but he is also pointing to the contrast between the masculine and non-masculine man, which will become relevant when he moves on to discuss eunuchs (see Cadden 1993, pp. 181–182). Since, unlike them, he is able to propagate the species, he manages to present his dubious amorous activity rather pompously as the divinely ordained means to save the human race from extinction:

[13] See, for example, line 310, where he employs the phallic metaphors of flaming torch and stiff candle to describe the defloration of a virgin and lines 115–116 quoted below.

[14] '… je le fais pour l'esbatement de mes seigneurs et ceuls qui aiment science.' *Vieille*, 3. All English translations, unless otherwise cited, are mine. *La Vieille* is quoted in this essay from Cocheris ed. (1861) and *De vetula* from Robathan ed. (1968).

[15] I am using the term parody here to cover attitudes towards the source material ranging from the highly critical to the gently amused. LeFèvre as translator definitely imitates humorously, but it is difficult to ascertain to what extent he is critical of some of the virtuoso methods and techniques he shares with his predecessor—slight exaggeration or elaboration may not imply ridicule.

[16] This is a commonplace of twelfth-century Chartrean philosophy.

[17] 'Car à la chaume du menton/L'essay des braïes congnoist on' (115–116). LeFèvre's version is wittier than the Latin text which speaks of a 'silva' or wood for the beard; see *De vetula*, I, 62.

> Through which, there is no room for doubt, the divine race will be saved through natural inclination.[18]

Within a few lines we have gone from immoral seduction to man's natural duty to procreate, so it is perhaps no surprise to find in the next line a comparison between the eternity of the soul and the mortality of the body, whose continuation throughout history is procured through sexual reproduction:

> The soul is divine and immortal, but the body is in charge of creation… everything strives to procreate so that every species continues.[19]

In order to encourage this, we are told, sex is made pleasurable for both male and female (149).[20] To render yet more authoritative his justification of his dubious plans LeFèvre's Ovid then quotes Aristotle (161) in saying that intercourse does not give rise to love, but love is unnatural and brutish if it does not lead to intercourse.[21] In this section of Book 1, sex and philosophy are two carefully interwoven strands. A description of Ovid's bedchamber contains a discussion of different types of light, hence enlightenment: external knowledge coming from the world outside through the window and accessed through the senses ('la sensible', 260) is presented as inferior to the inner illumination ('vertu… intellective', 254–255) coming from 'lumiere de doctrine/Qui l'entendement enlumine' (263–264)—doctrinal enlightenment leading to greater understanding.[22] The 'lumiere de doctrine' is represented by the arts of the quadrivium and other subjects which are painted on the walls of Ovid's bedchamber; maths, science, philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and astronomy all being topics which are covered later in *La Vieille*. This academic, somewhat unconventional bedroom decor allows the narrator to pass seamlessly into a disquisition on loving different types of women: widows, married women and virgins—all advice with which his readers would have been familiar from studying Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*.[23] By turning bodily pleasures into an academic subject, pseudo-Ovid and LeFèvre neatly join the intellectual with the corporeal. These are epitomised in the manly person of the protagonist; his beard marks him out as superlover, ready

[18] 'Et par lequel n'en dobtez mie,/Sauvee est l'espece divine/Par nature qui si encline.' (118–120).

[19] 'Divine et pardurable est l'ame,/Mais le corps de former est dame…/En engendrant tout s'esvertue/Que toute espece continue.' (121–122, 125–126). The denial that this process is circular *Vieille*, 129; *De vetula*, I, 65 'non in se rediens') may be a response to the Averroism of a Siger of Brabant, especially his cyclical theory of time and the unity of the human intellect—theories refuted by Thomas Aquinas; see Jeauneau (1963), p. 100.

[20] On the role of pleasure in medieval medical literature on sex, see Cadden (1993), p. 64.

[21] This remark is added to the source.

[22] Here the source is Robert Grossteste's *De luce* according to Klopsch (1967), p. 62, and his *Summa philosophiae* (see Robathan ed. (1968), note to *De vetula*, I, 106): 'Quod virtus intellectiva omnino est immaterialis, licet eius obiectum est materiale' [Although the intellective force is entirely immaterial, yet its object may be material].

[23] Moreover, his comments on how some husbands end up raising the offspring of other men prepares us for the misogynous episode describing his betrayal by the Dipsas-like old crone. For a discussion of similarly antifeminist material favoured by LeFèvre in his translation of the misogamous *Lamentationes*, see Pratt (1999).

to serve Natura by seducing and impregnating the virgin he is pursuing.[24] Ironically the most detailed description of love-making occurs when the narrator *imagines* how he will obey the laws of nature with his beloved (*Vieille*, 581 ff.). In a manner both erotic and somewhat medical, foreplay and coitus are described, and orgasm is depicted according to contemporary medical knowledge: i.e. both parties 'weep the tears of Venus', 623, in other words ejaculate/emit seed.[25] Furthermore, orgasm is compared to a semi-death, for it seems as if their souls escape their bodies: 'Tant qu'il semble que l'ame en saille'/Et qu'en ce point demi mors soient' (627–628). It is striking that postcoital recovery is described in language associated with death and resurrection: when they return to their senses 'quant leur esperit ressourt/Et que leur vie resuscite' (636–637), they feel as if they are in an earthly paradise. Thus Ovid slyly expresses medical ideas about sexuality using theological vocabulary, thereby making his lust seem part of a grander design. LeFèvre's readers are at once entertained by a lascivious story and provided with some rudimentary sex education and information on the natural sciences.

As in a true compendium of knowledge, the rest of Book 1 is taken up with descriptions of various noble pastimes, including hunting, fishing and dicing. The vicissitudes of gambling provoke comments on the laws of chance and mathematics, various games, including chess are described, and Ovid ends by lamenting that too few people are interested in philosophy, preferring instead to use their rhetorical skills to earn money, a notable example of this being lawyers.[26] Then, at the beginning of Book 2, the narrator launches into a diatribe against eunuchs. The inclusion of this subject may be justified by the fact that it fits in with the protagonist's general theory of gender and reproduction, as well as his moral defence of sex on the grounds that it is necessary for the perpetuation of the species. Hence, there is a tenuous link with the narrator's biography in that he, still possessing a strong beard, bears all the traits of a virile man, whilst the sex of a eunuch is indeterminate (see Cadden 1993, p. 181). Nevertheless, Ovid's pronouncements on the castrated represent a (from our modern perspective) somewhat incongruous, lengthy digression of more than 500 lines in LeFèvre's supposed biography of a famous poet. For the medieval mentality, however, it may have been perfectly acceptable to treat bodily imperfection as a reflection of one's moral state.

Ovid begins by dividing eunuchs into three groups:[27] those who are born without genitals, and are therefore deprived by nature of all masculine attributes, including lust; those who have been castrated as punishment for their lechery; and those

[24] This idea, shared by Genius in Jean de Meun's *Rose*, is highlighted by the rubric to this section of the translation in MS BNF, f. fr. 19138: 'Comment le voult barbu monstre parfaittement l'omme estre naturel pour continuer son espece' [How a bearded face perfectly demonstrates man's natural disposition to perpetuate his species].

[25] On foreplay, see Ruth Mazo Karras (2005), p. 79, and on female emission of seed, see Cadden (1993), pp. 93–94.

[26] It is surprising, given his profession, that LeFèvre translates this section.

[27] The excessive systematicity with which both Latin and Middle French authors treat the subject may well betray their parodic intention, although the three types of eunuch recall a serious biblical text, Matthew 19, 10–12, discussed below. Klopsch (1967), pp. 59–60, argues on the basis of this and other passages that the author of the Latin source may have been a doctor—as indeed was Richard de Fournival.

who have had a medical problem cured by castration. Despite the ostensibly scientific approach to this question, LeFèvre cannot resist adding a lewd comment about such a man: 'Jamais ne batera les croupes' [he will never beat hindquarters] (2126; cf. Robathan ed. 1968, II, 20). Thus Ovid wonders whether these 'demi hommes' (2088, 2127) are male, female or possibly neuter, but since the natural world does not recognize an animal which is neither male nor female, he suggests they may be nothing at all ('néant', 2137). The narrator takes his scholastic reasoning to ridiculous extremes as he argues that if the eunuch is not an animal then he is not alive, nor is he a tree or a plant, as he has no seed. After an extended plant analogy whereby sperm equates to the seed of a plant, with the testicles as roots and the manly beard as leaves, he concludes that a beardless man is not worthy to procreate, being either castrated or (according to the theory of the humours) too cold (see Cadden, 1993, pp. 183–184). He concludes that the eunuch is a monster of nature (2180), which he then 'proves' within the disciplines of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, followed by the quadrivium, physics, medicine, ethics, metaphysics and theology.

In the chapters on the eunuch as moral monster (ll. 2299 ff.) he states that a castrated man should not be allowed to teach, nor become a priest, let alone a bishop. This is because the castrated are guilty of every vice in the book, in particular envy and covetousness 'pour leur froideur' [because of their coldness] (2328). The latter reference introduces the idea that they are of indeterminate gender, indeed effeminate men, who have 'le visaige/Com vieille qui mangue fromaige/Et la voix casse et feminine' [a face like an old woman who is eating cheese and a weak and feminine voice] (2331–2333), leading to the question 'is this a priest or a priestess?' (2389), followed by the damning conclusion that such a deformed creature 'emasculates' or feminises altars: 'beste diffourmee…les autelz affemine' (2395–2397). Finally, by linking the consecration of a bishop with the benediction given by Old Testament patriarchs,[28] the author argues rather implausibly that a eunuch who becomes a bishop only in order to gain worldly power is like Isaac's son Jacob, who, being hairless and therefore resembling a eunuch, deceived his father into giving him a blessing by placing animal skins on his neck and arms to recreate the hairiness of Esau.[29] Ovid further argues that a man who has never suffered sexual temptation should not be placed in the position of judging others, hence the eunuch should not be given the role of a bishop who imposes penance on sexually active sinners. The figure who wears the clothes of Aaron, but has the face of Marie has no right to judge others, he concludes (2306–2307). In this way the narrator speciously links anatomy with man's morality, hence one's prospects of salvation. Furthermore, not only does this exposition imply that the bearded narrator is indeed a virile man, but by arguing that the eunuch is morally unworthy, he seems to confer on himself a moral superiority arising from his intact masculine body, fit for purpose, so to speak.

[28] Rupert of Deutz, *In Genesim* VIII, 13 also does this; see Klopsch (1967), p. 56.

[29] This example is also given in the *Respit*, but there the aim is to prove the usefulness of translating biblical *exempla* into French. In this, LeFèvre's later work of his own devising, Jacob's mother is particularly criticised.

Klopsch has suggested that the anonymous author of *De vetula* must have had a personal antipathy against castrated bishops (Klopsch 1967, p. 57). On the other hand, it may be that this text is parodic and that the author has deliberately given his protagonist false reasons and excessive rhetoric in order to undermine his justification of dubious sexual behaviour. Yet Ovid, by arguing that he is not a moral monster because he is not a eunuch, placing instead his genitals in the proper service of procreation, may be invoking the authority of Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae* and of course the *Romance of the Rose* to exonerate himself. [30] Recognition of these possible intertexts, highly contentious in themselves, does not, however, resolve the ambiguity about what the author, translator and indeed readers of *De vetula* really thought of the young protagonist's justifications.[31] While some may have received these musings as obviously outrageous and parodic, others may well have perceived within these works echoes of serious contemporary medical and theological discussions concerning the body, the priesthood and salvation. The first Council of Nicea in 325 treated male mutilation in its first canon, arguing that castration should only be an impediment to the priesthood if it was self-inflicted. So, in the thirteenth century when *De vetula* was composed it had clearly been a topic of debate since the early days of the Christian Church. Pseudo-Ovid may indeed have had in mind Deuteronomy, 23: 'Non intravit eunuchus, attritis vel amputatis testiculis et absciso veretro, ecclesiam Domini' [A eunuch, whose testicles are broken or removed, or whose penis has been cut off, shall not enter the church of the Lord].[32] Whilst eunuch is to be understood here in the spiritual sense, i.e. someone who does not (re)produce good works, some medieval theologians, concerned about the integrity of the body, seem to have interpreted the term more literally. Moreover, Leviticus 21,16 ff. and 22, 23, for example, specifically exclude eunuchs or any males with defective genitals from the priesthood, just as castrated animals are excluded from sacrifice. Indeed, this biblical passage is mentioned by Abelard in his *Historia calamitatum*, at the point when his castration has turned him into a 'monstrosity', although he nevertheless enters the priesthood shortly afterwards (see Muckle 1964, pp. 39–40). The argument against women being priests today seems to rely also on Christ having had an undeniably male body, and the *De vetula* clearly shows that the indeterminacy of eunuchs was troubling for medieval gender theory and theological questions relating to sex.

[30] It is interesting to note that Alan of Lille in his *De fide catholica contra hereticos* refers to heresies as monsters, and since the terms heretic and eunuch were often equated with sodomite in the Middle Ages, there is clearly evidence here of a semantic network covering all that is perceived as unnatural, hence heterodox. See Godman (2000), 307, note 71.

[31] Rollo (2011) argues that although Alan of Lille's explicit message is an attack on homosexuality, his use of excessive rhetoric may identify him as a gay writer: 'Although vitriolic in denouncing homosexuality, Alain aligns himself with precisely the deviancy he decries, subverting the grammar of homophobia through his chosen means of rhetorical expression', p. 216. He also notes, (pp. 216–217) that at least one medieval scribe may have identified him as a 'sodomita profanus', thus supporting my view that his *De planctu naturae* was not received unambiguously in the Middle Ages.

[32] Knight ed. (2013).

The use of the term eunuch in medieval theology to refer to the celibate may also help us to interpret these passages. A telling example is to be found in Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*. When asked whether or not it is advantageous to marry, Jerome invokes Christ's words from Matthew 19, 10–12: 'Some are eunuchs by nature, others by the violence of men. Those eunuchs please me who are not such of necessity, but of free choice. Willingly do I take them into my bosom who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake…'[33] This praise of those who have chosen virginity over sexual reproduction, while reflecting the teaching of the Medieval Church, does not necessarily chime with the message, humorous or otherwise, promoted by the young Ovid and by Matthew, the narrator of the misogamous *Lamentations*, discussed below.[34] It is possible therefore that the target of the vehemence against eunuchs expressed by pseudo-Ovid may actually be the avowedly celibate clergy.

A rather more orthodox treatment of the relationship of the body and soul is offered by book 3 of *De vetula*. Disappointed in love, but still feeling the prick of love's temptation, Ovid turns to the consolation of philosophy (*Vieille*, 3789, picking up an idea already expressed in line 263). After a section in which the mathematical board game Rithmomachy and other pastimes are described at length, but with enough accuracy for modern mathematicians to be interested in this text (see Moyer 2001), the narrator gives an extended description of the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm based on thirteenth-century knowledge of Aristotle and Plato, supplemented by the medical teaching of scholars such as Albumasar and Maimonides.[35] Topics covered include the influence of the planets on man and his anatomy, in particular his reproductive function; the nature of God; the immortality of the soul, and the last things.

On the nature of God pseudo-Ovid and LeFèvre follow the teaching of Thierry of Chartres. Their narrator claims that God can only be comprehended through study of His creation via the quadrivium (3843; see Klopsch 1967, p. 61 and Jeauneau 1963, p. 50). Hence Ovid learns about the divine will by contemplating the planets, God's agents. Using his powers of logic, he proves that God is the supreme primary cause (3859); as such He is omnipotent, therefore He must be the *only* God (3935).[36]

[33] Jerome is here quoted in the translation by Marx (1992), p. 66.

[34] It should be noted though that Ovid, in a chapter entitled 'Comment spadons ne vivent pas chastement' [How the castrated do not live chastely] (2351 ff.), considers those who become chaste through effort to be superior to those whose abstinence is enforced, and the mature narrator, having mutated from lover into philosopher, is envious of those who are not tempted by love.

[35] Klopsch (1967), 59–77, gives detailed information on the possible sources used by the Latin author throughout, showing how he was influenced by different currents of thought and adapted them to his overall plan, not always elegantly and sometimes oversimplistically. According to Klopsch, pseudo-Ovid handled ideas from the natural sciences and medicine more successfully than theological issues.

[36] Pseudo-Ovid follows Peter Lombard in arguing that all of these Christian truths can be proved using the tools of pagan philosophy, see Klopsch (1967), pp. 60–61. He is here also arguing against the heresy of Manicheism (see *La Vieille*, 4018) and Roman polytheism.

Though immortal himself, God in His benevolence created the world out of nothing (4071),[37] beginning with matter and light (4081), the latter imposing form on matter.[38]

Within the cosmos, matter is found in the centre and light on the periphery. However, man, created in the image of the macrocosm (4324–4325), reverses this pattern: his delicate parts: the heart, brain and liver are inside, while the outer organs are more robust.[39] An exception though are the genitals, which have to be outside to function properly.[40] Each aspect of bodily and spiritual experience is controlled by a planet in a complicated system of influences: thus Venus controls the testicles, reproduction and also desire. This section of the text emphasises the way in which both body and soul/spirit/emotions are influenced externally by the macrocosm and internally by the elements (4429–4431). Indeed, everything is predetermined and can be read in the stars. It also presents the corporeal and the spiritual as two parallel systems, similar in many respects and inextricably linked.

Ovid's musings on man as microcosm lead him eventually into teaching on the soul and last things. He seems in particular to be concerned about the immortality of the soul and what happens to it between the death of an individual and the moment it is reunited with its original body at the time of the general resurrection. Pseudo-Ovid's theory of the immortality of the soul is based on Plato's notion of continuous motion. As Robathan explains, the followers of Averroes believed in the immortality of the soul, but did not believe that it returned to the body; the author of *De vetula*, on the other hand, followed Albertus Magnus and St Thomas Aquinas in refuting the latter part of the proposition (see Robathan ed. 1968, p. 160).

Ovid's account of events is the following: God set the whole world in motion (3977) and instituted the propagation of the human race. He gives to each individual a *vis speculativa* ('une noblesce/Qui est forte speculative', *Vieille*, 4548–4549), a sort of soul which, because it has no equivalent in the body, survives the body's death and is eternal.[41] Yet, he asks, how can it be created in time, but live forever? He argues that despite the constant motion of the cosmos, God has imposed an end on the world and will, through the power of his word, stop all motion. At this point the resurrection of the bodies of the dead and final judgement will take place (4660–4670) and everything will be renewed in a motionless, eternal better world. While Ovid makes the Platonic objection that something that has been created in the best possible way by God should not result in total dissolution (4677), he replies that continuous reproduction would require the constant creation of new souls and

[37] The probable source for this idea is Johannes Scotus Eriugena.

[38] See Robert Grosseteste's *De luce* (Klopsch (1967).

[39] See Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia*.

[40] Again LeFèvre cannot resist a lewd remark, perhaps another indirect attack on eunuchs, by saying that testicles are external to the body in order to aid reproduction provided that 'la bourse n'est mie wide' [the sack/purse is not empty] (*Vieille*, 4338); cf. *De vetula,* III, 237.

[41] There is also reference to the soul as entelecheia ('endelechie', 4683) of the organic body.

this is unacceptable to nature. Hence the end of the world is necessary, as is the general resurrection, when souls will be returned to their own bodies (4716) and live with God in eternal joy. There is no reason to fear death, since it will put an end to bodily suffering (4845–4850). However, for those who do not repent, things will not improve after death, especially if, as some argue, the soul cast into hell can suffer torment similar to the pain suffered by the body:

> I am almost driven to distraction and frightened to death by the misguided opinion of some people who claim that souls are tortured and go to hell.[42]

Yet Ovid is consoled by learning and returns to his study of the planets. He claims that Venus is associated with the pleasures of this world, while Jupiter is connected with eternal salvation, and the means by which this is achieved, namely faith and religion; since Jupiter can come into conjunction with six planets, this makes possible the birth of six religions. The sixth, which is influenced by the moon, is that of the Antichrist. So, drawing on the teaching of the Arab philosopher Albumasar, Ovid 'proves' that the planets can predict the birth of religions and this leads him to prophesy the Incarnation and the Apocalypse.[43] His religious speculations on the mysteries of the Trinity, the birth of Christ, the Assumption of the Virgin, whose body he predicts will be resurrected without corruption, culminate in a prayer to the Virgin asking her to intercede for those who wish to win God's grace.

As the foregoing analysis demonstrates, pseudo-Ovid and LeFèvre treat in Book 3 some weighty issues of great concern to the medieval Christian. Despite the somewhat incongruous context in which it is placed, the teaching is fairly orthodox. Moreover, the didactic intent is clear as the Socratic method of question and answer, here embodied in the protagonist's examination of opposing philosophical arguments, leads Ovid towards enlightenment as heterodox views are rejected.

Although the authority of the protagonist of *De vetula* is somewhat undermined by his comic love-life, and his theological credentials are questioned by his status as a pagan, LeFèvre nevertheless thought it worthwhile to translate and even amplify upon the content of his source. Perhaps it is more surprising though that he drew on his *Vieille* for some of the philosophical and theological material relating to the body and soul he required for his original work, *Le Respit de la mort*, composed sometime after 1376. The *Respit* takes as its starting point the (in my view) probably fictional situation of the narrator's illness, which prompts him to compose a work asking God for a reprieve from death. By analogy with a debtor who is able to claim insolvency and submit a legal request for an extension to his repayment deadline, the narrator constructs a petition to be delivered to the Royal Chancery, asking for a letter of reprieve which will force his divine creditor to postpone his death long enough for him to atone for his sins. The modern editor of

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[42] 'Certes pres de confusion/Me met la vaine opinion/D'aucuns, qui forment m'espouvente,/Qui racontent que l'en tourmente/Les ames, et vont en enfer.' (*Vieille,* 4895–4899).

[43] A burlesque tone may be in evidence here, for, as Godman (2000), 332, states, Ovid's 'supposed conversion to Christianity… is occasioned by neither faith nor revelation but by a display of celestial science, designed to dazzle the poem's readers'.

this text, Geneviève Hasenohr-Esnos, argues that LeFèvre was indeed ill in 1376 (as is mentioned in *Respit*, 39) and takes at face value his concern about death and indeed the negative comments he makes about his wife (2960).[44] I, however, feel that there is no more reason to think he was unhappily married just because here and in the *Lamentations de Mathéolus* he complains about his nagging wife, than to believe that in 1376, having supposedly passed the age of 50 (375–376) he starts to fear death and its consequences for the salvation of his soul. Whether this scenario is fact or fiction, it seems fitting that in the *Respit* LeFèvre the lawyer uses the legal petition as a framework for his work, in the same way that he uses a courtroom context for his defence of women in the *Livre de Leesce*. Another similarity with his other works is the humour with which he treats serious subjects like death (not unlike François Villon in his mock last will and testament). LeFèvre's sense of humour is, in my view, an attractive characteristic of his writing often overlooked by modern readers.[45]

The petitioner begins by presenting himself as being in a worse position than those who have been impoverished by war, since he has been attacked by three enemies: the flesh, the world and the devil (2971), not to mention his wife (2960)! This has resulted in the loss of his worldly wealth, but more importantly he has lost 'ma dame Prudence/…Attemprence… Force et Justice' (2981–2983). Whilst the human legal system of the time was willing to supply only one letter of reprieve to a creditor, the narrator's musings on divine compassion lead to the hope that God will reprieve him again and again, until he can achieve eternal life, for after all, God does not wish for the death of a sinner.[46] It goes without saying, therefore, that the overriding topic of concern to the narrator is what will happen to his soul after death, and his desire to do as much as possible in this life to avoid eternal damnation.

Within this legal and theological framework LeFèvre discusses a number of subjects which we have already seen in his *Vieille*. He is particularly exercised by the idea or 'oppinion vainne' (140, cf. *Vieille*, 4896 quoted above) expressed by pagan philosophers that the souls of the dead go to hell and burn there, which means that the bodily suffering of this life would not cease:

> I am very frightened and distressed by the erroneous opinion of some people who say that our souls go to hell and are tortured by its flames so that men and women would suffer from all directions both in this life and the next.[47]

He is comforted however by alternative theories: that of Pythagoras (14 comments he makes about his wife 6), who argues that when the soul leaves the body, it leaves humanity behind and exists as pure divinity; and that of Macrobius (in his commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*), who claims that only after the soul has left the body and has been delivered from its prison can it see the doorway to heaven

[44] The *Respit* is quoted from Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969).

[45] Evidence for this comic approach has already been identified in his adaptation of *De vetula*.

[46] This commonplace of medieval penitential literature can be traced back to Ezechiel 33, 11.

[47] 'Trop m'esbahist et donne paine/des aucuns l'oppinion vainne,/disans qu'en enfer vont lez ames/et sont tourmenteez de flamez/doncques seroient en exil,/de cha, de la, celle et chil,/et en ceste et en l'autre vie.' (*Respit,* 139–145).

(151–155). Finally, he invokes his *Vieille* by mentioning 'Ovidius, *De Vetula*' (157), who claims to have seen the entrance to heaven, talks of our resurrection and applies reason to prove that the soul is eternal (162). Aristotle's advice to avoid sin and subjugate the pleasures of the flesh in order to approach one's creator without fear of death, is, he claims, supported by Cato (175), who sees death as putting an end to life's pain and suffering. LeFèvre's narrator is clearly perturbed by the contradictory views held by 'Les philosophes anciens/et les grans astronomiens' [the ancient philosophers and the great astronomers] (179–180), whose 'oppinions diversez' he humorously characterises as 'blanches et noires, jaunez et perses' [white and black, yellow and blue].[48] However, unlike the pagan Ovid in *De vetula*, the narrator of the *Respit* is able right from the beginning to place his faith firmly in Christian doctrine, with its hope of eternal salvation offered to those who overcome sin (192). Nevertheless, the fate of the soul after death is a recurrent source of anxiety for him, to which he returns in lines 459–472. Here, the narrator expands on Africanus's words to Scipio in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, 14: the body is the prison of the soul, and only when the soul escapes is it able to live, see and understand the riches heaven has to offer. Thus the body should be despised and death should be welcomed as life-giving.[49] The narrator seems to agree with this view even though the denigration of the body was problematic in medieval theology given that Christ chose to adopt that form to redeem mankind.[50]

The lengthy section on the corruptibility of the sublunary world owes a great deal to the scientific knowledge LeFèvre has already translated in his *Vieille*. On the macrocosm we find an explanation of the creation of the two spheres, the influence of the planets on human beings, the ninth heaven which sets everything in motion, the eternal nature of the heavens, and the vanity of the worldly. Man as microcosm reflects in miniature the macrocosm, but reversed, as we know from *De vetula*. Yet once again LeFèvre cannot resist joking about man's genitals, which complicates our response to his argument about man's divinely instituted duty to procreate ('des chieulz l'office', 898):

> … and his balls are outside to aid the reproduction process; whether he is trotting or walking they bump into each other near the orifice.[51]

As before, the planet Venus is associated with the testicles (923), generation and desire (966)—thus each planet again has an influence both on the bodily ('vertus naturelles' (955) and what we might nowadays call man's emotions or temperament,

[48] Indeed, his situation resembles that of medieval scholars, who spent most of their time trying to harmonise the views of the pagan *auctores* with Christian belief.

[49] Line 468 'Quant l'ame est hors du corps ravie' [when the soul is snatched from the body] is quoted verbatim in his, *Livre de Leesce* 2094 (see van Hamel ed. (1892, 1905)), but in the latter work the author is making fun of Orpheus's attempt to rescue Eurydice from the underworld. He argues that it would be against nature for a mortal creature to be revived after death, joking that no amount of playing of instruments could make any difference.

[50] See Raskolnikov (2009), p. 22.

[51] 'Et les couillons sont par dehors/pour aidier a l'engendreüre;/o par le trot ou par ambleüre/se joignent pres de l'orifice.' (894–897).

but which LeFèvre calls ‘des animaulx’ (956), i.e the spiritual. God, we are told, created man with his own hands (1081) and placed an eternal soul in his mortal body, for although his bodily strength dies, the virtues of the soul remain after death (1088). LeFèvre, however, resists commenting on the difference between the spirit and the soul (1095) wishing to avoid either praise or blame—this is clearly a thorny theological question. Reciting the same arguments he had earlier found in *De vetula*, he notes that although the soul has a beginning, it will last forever, unlike the body, which takes its nourishment from the elements (1104). Despite Job’s claim that no man can continue beyond his time (1105–1106), the narrator adds in jocular fashion that good health can certainly lengthen one’s life.

LeFèvre’s discussion of man as microcosm reminds one of the anatomical details preserved in his *Vieille*. However, his division of the soul into three parts, each corresponding to a part of the body, is not found there. This is a neo-platonic idea, disseminated in the Middle Ages by reading the likes of Plotinus, Proclos and Apuleius.[52] In LeFèvre’s narrator’s words, his illness has attacked him with three swords—in the head, heart and feet. The head is free will, which controls his actions; the heart provides discernment and advice; the feet, being the lowest part of the body, are carnal desire.[53] He further elaborates that free will, the most noble of faculties, is made in the image of God and is eternal like Him (1174–1192); one’s will rules even over reason.[54] Moving on to the heart, LeFèvre claims that man’s thoughts—both good and evil—reside there and that it is a source of life. This life force is further divided into three types of spirit (1293): ‘animal’, ie. intellectual spirits, which are found in the head, ‘natural’ spirits in the liver and ‘vital’ spirits, which are in the heart.[55] The fact that they are not to be found in the genitals is ‘proved’ by the story of the carpenter who castrates the priest found in adultery with his wife (1316–1322).[56] The priest survives without his genitalia, but loses his beard and here LeFèvre recycles more material from his *Vieille* when he describes the ‘eunuch’s’ face as ‘fronchié… plus que vielle qui vent froumage’ (1325–1326) [more wrinkled than an old woman selling cheese].[57] Thus we see LeFèvre incorporating a discussion of the different functions of three bodily organs into his description of the central part of the soul, represented by the heart. This parallel between the corporeal and the psychological/spiritual is cemented by the use of a simile (compare 1362–1368):

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52 See Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969), pp. 166–167, and Apuleius’s *De dogmate Platonis*: I, XVIII and XIII (for the text, see *The Latin Library* online).

53 According to Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969), p. 167, this allegorical interpretation of the feet can be found in the *Reductorium morale* of Pierre Bersuire: ‘Per pedes, in *Scriptura*, intelliguntur affectus’ [in Scripture the feet are to be understood as the emotions].

54 This discussion of free will, which invokes Abelard (1235) and St. Augustine (1264), but which is based on St Bernard’s *De gratia et libero arbitrio* according to Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969), p. 167, is summarised in the *Livre de Leesce*, 2027–2070.

55 According to Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969), pp. 169–170, this medical knowledge is derived from Galen.

56 This is reminiscent of the fabliau entitled the *Prestre crucifié*.

57 Cf. *Vieille,* 2331–2332: ‘spadons ont froncié le visaige/Com vieille qui *mangue* [variant *vent*] frommaige’ [eunuchs have wrinkled faces just like an old woman eating/selling cheese].

> But just as a man would not be able to live without a heart and would in fact, die, so every action, if not governed by good intention, ought to be judged as dead, if he is not encouraged and incited to do good by good judgement.[58]

Finally, in line 1359, we are told that the foot represents desire, 'charnel appetit', which can lead astray a man's 'corage' (which he confusingly equates with 'l'esperit/qui les choses het ou cherit' [the spirit which loves or hates things] (1383–1384).[59] 'Appetit' leads eventually to most of man's vices.

In this lengthy and complex passage we see LeFèvre attributing those aspects of man's character which are associated with the soul to parts of the body, thus demonstrating how closely the two parts of man were interlinked in medieval thought. Indeed, in medieval iconography the soul was represented as a naked body, a conceptualisation which would have opened up the possibility of the soul suffering bodily pain in purgatory while waiting to be united with the original body at the general resurrection.[60] No wonder LeFèvre's narrators in his *Vieille* and *Respit* are so concerned with the torments of the soul.[61] In the latter work, though, we are reassured that patience in suffering is rewarded, leading to 30 benefits, including salvation.

Having acquired 'la lumiere de doctrine/qui l'entendement enlumine' [the light of doctrine which illuminates our understanding] (1837–1838), a phrase and concept familiar to us from the *Vieille*, the narrator indulges in some estates satire, including a discussion of married people. Here, ideas already expressed in the *Lamentations* are repeated: marriage is a martyrdom; procreation may help to perpetuate a family name, but it does not prevent the parents from dying, and children are a great burden. Realising that God's reprieve from death will not last for ever, the narrator turns to the ladder of penance, for which grace is the ultimate reward. The main idea here is that any suffering experienced by the body will also have repercussions for the soul. LeFèvre suggests the translating of biblical *exempla* into French for lay people as one act of penance (3195–3198) and the text ends with the narrator's hope that God through his grace will grant him respite from death—without his having to pay a penny (3736–3737)! Thus LeFèvre shows the same desire to provide encyclopaedic knowledge in the *Respit* as he found in the source of his *Vieille*. Although there are glimpses of humour in his later original work, purportedly on the imminent death and hoped-for salvation of an elderly man, he nevertheless seems to treat the theological issues seriously, no doubt responding to a demand by the laity for this sort of philosophical and doctrinal knowledge in the vernacular. What also

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[58] 'Mais si com l'omme ne porroit/vivre sans cuer, anchois morroit,/tout aussi chascune action,/s'il n'y a bonne intencion,/doit estre jugie pour morte,/se bon conseil ne li ennorte/et a bien faire ne l'excite' (*Respit*, 1331–1337).

[59] It is interesting to note that the mutable nature of man's heart, influenced by his passions, is described in a similar way to misogynistic literature's description of the fickle nature of women; see Fiero, Pfeffer and Allain (1989).

[60] Of course the body was also employed as a metaphor for political organisation by the Greeks (Plato and Aristotle) and by John of Salisbury in his *Polycraticus* (1159).

[61] Bynum and Freedman (1999), in their introduction to *Last Things,* refer to a thirteenth-century shift 'from emphasis on resurrection of the literal, material body… to stress on the experience of the separated soul after death… increasingly imaged as bodily (somatomorphic)', p. 6.

seems to be quite orthodox in his writing is his presentation of aspects of the soul using corporeal language—a method that jars with modern sensibilities.

While it is not surprising to see theological discussions on the relationship between the body and soul in a work about the narrator's preparations for death, it comes as more of a surprise to find similar preoccupations in another original work by LeFèvre, his defence of women *Le Livre de Leesce*.[62] This palinode to his translation of the *Lamentationes Matheoluli* not only quotes extensively his earlier misogamous work (the *Lamentations*), but also recycles material on the body and soul from his other writings. As the *Leesce* draws to a close, the narrator suddenly exhorts women to avoid vice and pursue virtue, and embarks on a digressionary sermon (3215 ff.) covering a variety of theological issues. He preaches on the immortality and omniscience of God, the trinity, the possibility of man's resurrection, the creation of the angels, the fall of Lucifer. He tells us that God created man, then woman to help him; both were given 'ame… sensitive/raisonnable et intellective' (3257–3258) [63] as well as memory, understanding (especially of that which we cannot see) and free will (3261–3263). The property of the rational soul is to be able to choose between good and evil (3275–3276), and just as God cannot be comprehended by any creature, so the soul cannot be comprehended by any 'visible' creature. Yet the latter is able to understand spiritual matters. The body is made of four elements (3303).[64] God created two creatures, one spiritual (the angels), one corporeal (humans) (3329–3330). The fall of the angels and man was foreseen by God, who wished not only to reveal Himself as a judge of their morality, but also to produce the great good of the Incarnation out of Adam's fault (3349 ff.). After Christ's resurrection, ascension and pentecost, his return for the last judgement is awaited (3385). Men should therefore prepare for their salvations and not sin.

Especially relevant in this context is the narrator's conviction that God will judge slanderers, and their words will count against them on the day of judgement (3411). This enables him to return from his theological digression to his main subject by concluding that Matthew, who has slandered women, will be in danger of damnation if he does not repent. This conclusion, however flippant, was taken seriously by the fifteenth-century anonymous author of the *Purgatoire de mauvais maris*, a defence of women produced in Bruges before 1467.[65] Drawing on motifs from LeFèvre's *Lamentations* and *Leesce* the author depicts a character called Matheolet and his disciples in the most painful part of purgatory reserved for bigamous clerics. His crime is, of course, to defame women, and no amount of suffering at the hands of a nagging wife in this life has exempted him from a most terrible punishment in the next.

[62] References to *Le Livre de Leesce* and *Les Lamentations de Matheolus* are from van Hamel ed. (1892, 1905).

[63] van Hamel ed. (1892, 1905), II, p. 254, cites Thomas Aquinas as a source for this material on the *anima intellectiva*, but LeFèvre found similar ideas in *De vetula*; see *Vieille*, 255, discussed above, p. 216.

[64] See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, Part 1, quest. 91; *Vieille,* 1104; *Respit*, 972.

[65] See Colombo-Timelli ed. (1998).

Although the *Livre de Leesce* is a defence of women, LeFèvre spends little time on women's salvation, lingering instead on the effects the defamation of women will have on men's souls.[66] Yet this final point hardly seems to justify the 200-line exposition of Christian mysteries just summarised, and again it seems that LeFèvre cannot resist any opportunity to lecture his readers and share with them the fruits of his knowledge, even if they are placed in a humorous and somewhat incongruous context.

The final LeFèvre text to be discussed here is his *Lamentations de Mathéolus*, with which I began. In it he follows his predecessor Matthew of Boulogne in allowing his lamenting and lamentable narrator, a married man and bigamous cleric, to dispute with God on various theological subjects.[67] Matthew, in a series of *quaestiones*, begins by criticising the Lord (even asking Him at one point if He is asleep or just an idiot, 690, cf. 904) saying that if He operates within eternity (84–85), He must have foreseen the Fall, so why create the first married woman and why make all men suffer for Adam's sin (106–113)? Why institute marriage (122–124), and even suggest that a man should leave his mother and father to join a woman, when Christ did not get married himself (181)? Whereas priests and monks have a year to decide whether they wish to pursue their vocation, why is there no let-out clause for married men, who are not allowed to divorce their wives (320)? Surely this gives the unfortunate impression that spiritual links can be broken more easily than carnal ones (510)? Not only are married men therefore expected to suffer for ever in this life, but, according to Christ's teaching, they will not be allowed to approach the heavenly banquet in the next life either (961–965). Matthew here wilfully misinterprets the husband's words in Luke 14, 20:'Et alius dixit: Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire' [I have taken a wife and therefore I cannot come].[68] Since the banquet has earlier been interpreted (*Lamentations*, II, 1272) as 'souper en pardurable vie' [eating for ever at heaven's table], the narrator erroneously concludes that God has ruled out salvation for married men:

> We are dead, body and soul: our bodies are tormented by our wives and our souls are not allowed access to you.[69]

Thus there is no point in Christ's redemption, for, he claims, eternal punishment will ensue just for getting married (1220–1221). Moreover, why has God promoted an institution which is not necessary for procreation, for in fact a man can propagate

[66] See the three short pro- and anti-feminist texts in Fiero, Pfeffer and Allain (1989), which also concentrate on the ill or beneficial effects women can have on men.

[67] In the following I shall use the name Matthew to refer to the narrator of both Latin source and Middle French translation. All references are to Book 3 of the *Lamentations* (van Hamel ed. (1892, 1905)).

[68] Whereas the wife in the biblical passage is used as an excuse by the husband to postpone his adoption of correct moral behaviour in order to save his soul, Matthew interprets his married state literally as an impediment to salvation. LeFèvre has Leesce attack Matthew's reasoning in his *Livre de Leesce*, 1905 ff.

[69] 'Mors sommes en corps et en ame:/Le corps est tourmentés par femme,/L'ame ne puet a toy aler.' (955–957).

the species more effectively without being tied to one wife (1053 ff.)—a view Matthew shares with Genius in the *Rose*. His distorted logic leads him to argue that God, through His mercy, should save everyone, except for women of course, and it is at this point that he speculates that the 'gendre femenin' [the female sex] (1437) might revert to nothing if Adam gets his rib back—a comment he immediately retracts as theologically unsound, but resulting from his marital distress.

Eventually, God is allowed some words in His defence, namely that not everyone should be saved, for man has free will so that he can choose good or evil, and be rewarded accordingly. Moreover, marriage is a purgatory, which must be endured by husbands, Job-like, until they are rewarded in heaven (1688–1692). When the narrator gives up arguing and asks instead for forgiveness, God takes him in a vision to heaven to see the reward that awaits him. Here Matthew makes the highly controversial claim that husbands will be seated next to martyrs in heaven and win a higher place in the celestial hierarchy than the celibate priesthood (2774). Moreover, since union between man and woman is necessary to perpetuate the species, God wants to publicise the fact that husbands will be rewarded for their sacrifice (2795). Thus canon law is wrong (2859) to suggest that Paradise will be filled with virgins; both heaven and the world would be empty were it not for married men carrying out this chore (2885). Yet just in case the narrator's words seem to be heretical, he reminds us that sadness leads him astray (2893–2895). The dream vision culminates in Matthew being accompanied by a legion of married men and bigamous clerics (2911 ff.) to a heavenly throne, where he is crowned by God (3085). Though convinced by this divine argument, Matthew is still upset to find, on awakening, his nagging wife at his side, and claims he would willingly forfeit some of his heavenly reward for more peace on this earth.

Matthew of Boulogne's dream vision was no doubt influenced by Alan of Lille's *De Planctu naturae* and his *Anticlaudianus*, whose overt message is that heterosexual sex is a natural human activity. He and his translator LeFèvre, who adds to his source the explicit reference to virgins in the heavenly cortege (2771), is clearly alluding humorously to the contemporary discussion about the superiority of virginity, known in particular through Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, '(I.12) Christ loves virgins more than others, because they willingly gave what was not commanded them.'[70] The idea that marriage is superior to virginity is well suited to the persona of bigamous cleric which LeFèvre and Matthew adopted for their *Lamentations*, and the latter clearly used this figure to criticise the withdrawal by successive thirteenth-century popes of privileges from clerics who had married widows.[71] However, it is unlikely that these two writers were seriously arguing that marriage was the preferred state. More likely is that the overriding tone of the Latin and French texts

[70] Jerome is quoted here from Blamires, Pratt and Marx (1992), p. 66. See also the discussion above on eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.

[71] Matthew of Boulogne attended the Council of Lyon in 1276 when the pope decided to withdraw privileges such as tithe exemption from bigamous clerics. The resentful attitude towards priests expressed by his narrator in the *Lamentationes* is also to be found in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la feuillee*, in which so-called 'clers bigames' claim that marrying a widow has disadvantaged them hugely while priests take mistresses with impunity; see Dufournet ed. (1977), 428–513.

is comic, and that LeFèvre and Matthew enjoyed using their skills in rhetoric and dialectic to contribute playfully to the debate without undermining th the soul composed of matter e Church's teaching on sexual matters (see Pratt 1994, pp. 57–66).

What I hope to have shown is that in the works which LeFèvre produced in the late fourteenth century, whether translated or original, several issues relating to the body and soul, sexuality and salvation, marriage and virginity, recur. He seems to enjoy taking every opportunity to include these erudite passages in his writings, however incongruous the context, perhaps to confer authority on his work. So, for example, the discussion about the suitability of the castrated for the priesthood (and it is striking that Abelard is nowhere mentioned in *De vetula*, although he is in *Leesce*, 2786) is linked in LeFèvre's works to serious questions about gender (a concept which seemed to rely on the integrity of male/female bodies) and salvation, the fate of the body and soul at the Last Judgement. He is constantly preoccupied with what Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (*Last Things*, 5 ff.) call the three eschatologies: the judgement of the individual at death, again at the Last Judgement and the collective fate of the human race faced with the imminent Apocalypse. These slightly conflicting models of salvation raised urgent questions such as what happened to the individual soul, judged once already, while waiting for the end of the world, and would some souls have long enough to make amends for their sins through purgatorial cleansing or intercessional prayer if their owner died shortly before the Last Judgement?

Another topic which preoccupied LeFèvre was how to reconcile the doctrine on the different natures of the body and soul with the prevalence of somatomorphic terms to envisage the soul's suffering.[72] He was not the only writer to struggle with the teaching on the general resurrection, which argued that when the soul returns to the body, only the latter needed to be resurrected since the soul was immortal. As we have seen, LeFèvre presents his narrators with conflicting evidence, for some philosophers argued that the body was the prison of the soul and therefore the soul would not want to be reunited with it. Yet this denigration of the body was heretical, irreconcilable with the Incarnation. It was therefore necessary at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 to state dogmatically that 'all men, whether elect or reprobate, will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear about with them'. It seems that this doctrine needed constant refinement and reiteration in the Middle Ages and was a rich source of material for clerical debate.[73]

LeFèvre is no different from any other educated medieval Christian in his preoccupation with the afterlife and man's proper preparation for it. Indeed, if one

[72] See St Augustine, who in his *City of God* says of hell: 'For that death, which means, not the separation of soul from body, but the union of both for eternal punishment, is the more grievous death.' This is 'dying for all eternity', quoted from Mills (2005), p. 92.

[73] Clearly this had been a controversial subject even before the time of St. Augustine, who claimed that 'No doctrine of the Christian Faith…is so vehemently and so obstinately opposed as the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh' (In Ps. lxxxviii, sermo ii, n. 5), see Maas (1911). On the issue of female resurrection raised by Matthew, see Augustine, *De civitate dei*, XXII. 17 (quoted in Blamires, Pratt and Marx (1992) 81) who says clearly that women will be resurrected as women, but men and women will not be married in heaven.

compares the issues which exercised LeFèvre with the subjects covered by Thomas Aquinas's *quaestiones* in his *Summa theologica*, one notes a remarkable similarity in content. There are questions on the union of the body and the soul such as 'Is the intellectual principle multiplied numerically according to the number of bodies or is there one intelligence for all men?' (*Summa*, Part 1, Question 76, see Knight Ed. (2008)) and on the nature of the soul, e.g. 'Is the soul a body?' or 'Is the soul composed of matter and form?' (Question 75, 1 and 5). Question 81 deals with the quality of those who rise again:

1. Will all rise again in the youthful age?[74]
2. Will they be of equal stature?
3. Will all be of the same sex?
4. Will they rise again to the animal life?

and in Part 1, Question 92 on 'The production of the woman' Thomas asks the following four questions:

1. Should the woman have been made in that first production of things?
2. Should the woman have been made from man?
3. Of man's rib?
4. Was the woman made immediately by God?

In light of this type of philosophical interrogation Matthew's fantasy that the whole female sex might disappear at the general resurrection seems not quite so far-fetched.

Not only is LeFèvre's subject-matter the stuff of scholasticism, he also adopts the dialectical method practised by the likes of Abelard in his *Sic et Non* and Aquinas in his *Summa theologica*, whose aim is to examine opposing views and arrive at a synthesis. Aquinas often refers to the philosopher (usually Aristotle), and similarly LeFèvre and his sources quote philosophical opinions or objections in order to defend or refute them. Thus we find Ovid in *Vieille*, 4671–4692, employing rhetorical questions and *anteoccupatio* in order to ascertain the truth.[75] All of these writers are concerned with harmonising ancient philosophical teaching and more modern Christian doctrine. However, one wonders to what extent LeFèvre's dialectic is really in the service of the truth. Given that the context for much of his musing is humorous, it is very difficult to judge whether he is parodying scholasticism or simply imitating it. In the latter case, proving his mastery of the dialectical method would be more important to him than the outcome. Thus, in the *Lamentations* the question form enables Matthew and his translator to exemplify the techniques of the Schools, although clearly the conclusion arrived at is not meant to be taken seriously.

Our interpretation of these texts is further complicated by the comic contexts and genres into which much of this serious material is introduced. LeFèvre has used the

[74] Medieval theologians in fact speculated that since Christ died at the age of 33, this would be the perfect age for resurrected bodies.

[75] *Anteoccupatio* is the rhetorical device by which a character can respond to a possible objection raised by an imaginary interlocutor.

entertaining genres of pseudo-biographical, anti-matrimonial and mock penitential literature to treat important doctrinal and theological issues which were current at the time. Like his predecessor Matthew, he seems to be making a serious point about the withdrawal of clerical privileges from those who had remarried or married a widow. Similarly, he cannot resist the opportunity to challenge the claim that the celibate priesthood was superior to the married clergy, when much anticlerical, satirical literature suggested the opposite. However, LeFèvre's repeated allusions to the negative effects of virginity on the propagation of the human race, remarks that we might be tempted to read as a joke, become more problematic when read against the remarks by Alan of Lille on homosexuality and the proper use of the sexual organs, and of course, against the highly ironic and ambiguous pronouncements of Genius in the *Romance of the Rose*. In the *Vieille*, Ovid, as an erotic adventurer and pagan may be an unreliable narrator. Obviously, he only has the tools of pagan philosophy at his disposal in order to arrive at the truth and it is therefore up to each reader to decide whether Ovid is a suitable witness to the revealed truth of Christianity.

Finally, we turn to the evidence of manuscript context, ownership and annotation in order to consider how LeFèvre's works may have been received. As Hasenohr-Esnos has shown, the manuscripts of *Le Respit de la mort*, especially Paris, BNF f. fr. 1543, and the early printed edition made in 1533 contain scholarly notes identifying the biblical, classical and theological sources LeFèvre seems to draw on.[76] This would suggest that the factual content of his work was taken seriously by at least some readers and by a sixteenth-century publisher. This impression is supported by the fact that the text often travels with translations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and other moral and philosophical works, especially on death. In Brussels MS 4373–4376, it precedes Christine de Pizan's *Epître d'Othéa*, two didactic texts intended for girls, and a work justifying tyrannicide. In a scribal colophon in fr.1543, dated 1402, the scribe is named as Alixandre Dannes and his patron as Mahieu de Hangest, a knight and lord of Genly and Maigny in Picardy. The latter fought loyally for two kings of France, Charles V and VI, and was frequently a litigant at the Parisian Parliament. Perhaps that is why he wanted a copy of LeFèvre's *Respit*.

The Parisian Parliament provides a connection with another owner of a LeFèvre manuscript, Arnaud de Corbie (1325–1414), who was counsellor to Charles V and VI of France, a cleric at the Parlement and Chancellor of France in 1388. He owned a copy of the *Vieille*, now BNF, f. fr. 881.[77] Thereafter the codex was owned by various urban moneychangers. LeFèvre's translation is transmitted in this manuscript along with a French version of the *Ars amatoria* and ballads and rondeaux by Machaut, which might suggest that the moneychangers had a taste for erotica.

[76] See Hasenohr-Esnos ed. (1969), pp. 210–221. The surviving manuscripts offering a complete copy of the *Respit* are Paris, BNF, f. fr. 1543, 994, 1445, 24309 and 19137, plus Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 4373–4376.

[77] The *Vieille* has survived in three manuscripts dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries now in the BNF: fr. 881 (A), 2327 (B) and 19138 (C); see *Traduction de Jean Le Fèvre*.

In BNF, f. fr. 19138 two poems on the Virgin Mary, 'un dit de la rose' and a 'salve regina en françoiz', appropriately follow Ovid's prayer to the Virgin at the end of the *Vieille*, thus giving this copy a more pious context; and in BNF, f. fr. 2327 the *Vieille* has been copied on its own. Clearly its Ovidian, but also its religious content was important to those who copied or commissioned it. As for the *Lamentations de Mathéolus* and *Livre de Leesce*, both fairly substantial works, especially the former, they were often copied on their own or together, but rarely with other texts. It is interesting to note that the British Library codex of both works, Royal 20.B.XXI, belonged in the early sixteenth century to George Boleyn, brother of Anne. One wonders how the siblings received this pro- and anti-feminist material. They seem to have shared the manuscript with Thomas Wyatt, whose name appears on the flyleaf, and who was later implicated in charges of adultery against Anne. From this brief survey of the reception history of LeFèvre's works, one might argue that their philosophical and religious importance was recognised, but they were also prized for their entertainment value.

To conclude, it seems to me that Matthew of Boulogne in his *Lamentationes Matheoluli* uses erroneous theological reasoning in order to create a humorous context for his defence of clerical marriage at a time when it was being attacked by Church officials. The author of *De vetula* gives overblown rhetorical and dialectical treatment to some spurious and some serious doctrinal and philosophical material in order to parody the *accessus ad auctores* and his contemporaries' fascination with encyclopaedic knowledge. LeFèvre employs this material in his translations and original works to produce rhetorically and dialectically sophisticated works of entertainment. Nevertheless, he conveys much important (and often authoritative) philosophical, scientific and theological information, challenging his readers to reflect not only on the arguments, but also on the very methods available to the scholar to arrive at the truth. In the process, he provides us with insights into the great scholarly questions of the time, revealing the complex ways in which the body and soul are linked in medieval language and thought.

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