

**Obscenity Out of the Margins:  
Mysterious Imagery Within the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, MS  
*Hunter 252***

Elise Boneau (University of Glasgow)

The conventions and standards of courtly literature and imagery changed greatly from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Throughout the early medieval period, what may be referred to as 'obscene' images were common in public sculpture during a time when 'no danger was seen to exist in explicit representation of bodies' (Camille, 1998, p.149). During the fifteenth century, Michael Camille observes a change from a more 'open' portrayal in earlier illuminated manuscripts to new images hiding their nakedness. This idea is contested by Brigitte Buettnner, who maintains that within a private sphere, one could find explicit erotic imagery appearing in 'precise thematic contexts' stimulated by the 'proliferation of secular products commissioned by laymen' (1992, p.86). Appearing within this context, we find a book of tales which seems more reminiscent of the risqué treatment of sexuality in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – the fifteenth-century Burgundian text of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*.<sup>1</sup> This illuminated manuscript, while consisting of tales that cover many themes,

---

<sup>1</sup> The original fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* was created for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, by 1469 at the latest. This original has since been lost. Modern published versions of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* are based on the parchment codex – the unique extant fifteenth-century production of the work – now located in the University of Glasgow Library Special Collections as *MS Hunter 252*. This copy, upon which the information in this paper is based, was likely never to have been in the property of the Duke of Burgundy; however, its creation is contemporaneous to the original. This copy could have been a gift to or created by a private owner who was member of the Burgundian court. The manuscript contains the text of a work which is claimed to have been written by an *acteur* who compiled the stories told by a group of courtiers at the request of the Duke. The tales were presented within a narrative frame which claimed novelty and truth. The personal nature of the commission, specifically for the use of Philip the Good, and its relatively small dissemination in manuscript form, suggests that the book was not intended for a wide circulation. (Many thanks to Edgar de Blicke for allowing me to extract the background information for *MS Hunter 252* from his thesis, 'The Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Text and Context: literature and history at the court of Burgundy in the fifteenth century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2004), pp. 44-109.)

contains several images containing genitalia, which do not seem to fit precisely into either hypothesis put forth by Buettner or Camille. The blatant portrayal of male genitalia is reminiscent of fourteenth-century marginalia, but here is located front and centre. Unlike marginalia, which was either allegorically related or not related at all to the text, these images are a direct portrayal of events recounted in the tales which they accompany. How can we explain where the inspiration for these images came from and how they fit into the ideas and conventions of the context in which they were created?

Traditionally, the motifs for illuminated manuscripts were taken from earlier examples of the same or similar images, though this may have been difficult in the instance of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*. The tales themselves follow earlier genres such as the *fabliaux*, the *Decameron*, and the *Facetiae*. The *fabliaux* appear in texts without illustrations. The fifteenth-century *Facetiae* was also not produced in an illustrated manuscript. The Italian versions of the *Decameron* contain only a few line drawings, and full-scale illustrations do not appear until the French versions translated by Laurent de Premierfait and produced relatively contemporaneous to the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*. (The *Decameron* was entitled the *Cent nouvelles* in its French translation.) Therefore it would seem that either these French/Flemish illustrators or whoever paid for the commission had to invent an original motif for illustration. Some images may have been extracted from religious sources; however the truly secular content of the tales necessitates new ideas for the imagery.

From the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, 'obscene' imagery could be found decorating the margins of even extremely high quality manuscripts; by the late-fourteenth century, marginalia were a signification of prestige and luxury. Such imagery could be subversive and vulgar – an opinion freely expressed – as long as it remained within the margins and did not take centre stage. According to Michael Camille: 'just as the scribe follows the grid of ruled lines, there were rules governing the playing-fields of the

marginal images that keep them firmly in their place' (1995, p.22). This is perfectly illustrated in a fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose* which features nine explicit margin drawings within its pages. The first image depicts a nun leading a monk with a string attached to his penis. Many of the images feature disembodied phalluses, including nuns picking phalluses growing on a tree, and a man handing a phallus to a woman. One of the final images portrays a griffin-type creature threatening a dragon with a phallus in its hand. These depictions have no direct relation to the text, but instead belong to a stereotype iconography directly concerning the concept of power and protection in the shape of phallic imagery (Koldeweij, 1995, p.499). However, (perhaps influenced by the overtly allegorical sense of the text of the *Roman de la Rose*) the phallic imagery of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* is not used in an allegorical sense such as that seen in this example, but is realistically portrayed and integrally linked directly to the story. This fact demonstrates an entirely different attitude towards the phallus between these two centuries. In the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, there is no underlying need to 'explain away' the portrayal of the penis as an allegorical symbol or a disembodied personification of gender. Instead, the characters' genitalia are frankly portrayed within the obvious and necessary context of the tale. Camille claims that manuscript marginalia were encouraged by authorities as a 'carefully controlled valve for letting off steam' which 'often served to legitimate the status quo' in the process of subverting it (Camille, 1995, p.143). By the time the manuscript of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* was produced, however, the changes wrought by a post-plague, pre-Reformation sensibility of appropriateness had caused margins to be drawn into the centre of imagery. Additionally, the change of conventions 'regulating the rendering of figures in courtly manuscripts reinforced what was morally and socially appropriate or inappropriate' (Buettner, 1993, p.384). However, images of an obscene nature as had previously been found only in marginalia could now be found only in

specific contexts.

In his influential article 'On Silent Reading', Paul Saenger claims that the advent of privacy in the late fifteenth century resulted in a transition from an oral to a literate culture, represented by an increase in elaborate illustration of books and the growth of book ownership among the laity. While he primarily references books of hours for personal study and prayer, Saenger also emphasizes that the new process of *silent reading* stimulated a revival of obscene and erotic book decoration. In France, 'the practice of private reading encouraged the production of salacious writing, tolerated precisely because it could be disseminated in secret. Miniatures of certain French and Flemish vernacular texts depicted bordello scenes of carnal lust with explicit and seductive realism' (Saenger, 1982, p.412). The *fabliaux*, which may also be categorized as 'salacious writing,' had been composed in an oral tradition. Two centuries later, the regulation of obscenity by the Church had resulted in the production of similar stories under the table, to be passed around secretly and appreciated privately. However, all of society could not have been as prurient as is supposed, since 'understanding [in a literary sense] depended on a reader's existing mind-set and the context in which reading took place. Readers seem to have looked for works to reinforce their own point of view, or to have read books for ideas that confirmed those they already had' (Houston, 1988, p.222).

Unlike the marginalia of the fourteenth century, this obscenity as private pornography was not regulated and could therefore be even more explicit, even while everything else in a wider context (and presented to a wider audience) was under strict moral control. In this emerging category of pornography, Saenger lists the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*. It is in this instance, however, that his argument does not work. He claims: 'the author of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* anticipated that the prince would read it privately as an "exercice de lecture et d'estude"...The text was circulated in *modest format* so that it could be discreetly passed from reader to reader'

(Saenger, 1982, p.413, emphasis mine). The first problem is that Saenger is removing the manuscript from its historical context. The tales of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, while not contained within a narrative structure like the *Decameron*, were told by various *raconteurs*, who were members of the court, to a limited but varied audience including but not limited to the Duke himself. The manuscript could not be solely relegated to Saenger's category of private text since the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* functioned as a link between an oral and a written culture in a time when book production was beginning to replace a medium which had previously been predominantly oral. The tales appear to have been related orally to the court, and later copied into the book; it is also likely that the stories were read aloud from the text to a group. The quality of the manuscript's creation is also a factor to consider in trying to categorize it, since it is clearly an expensive venture; however, money was also well spent on elaborate books of hours, which were entirely for private use. The primary difficulty with Saenger's claims in this specific instance is that his argument is based upon that fact that the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* was produced in a format that could be 'surreptitiously disseminated', which seems an unlikely description for a manuscript measuring 255 x 183 mm and consisting of 207 folios (Saenger, 1982, p.413). This is not accounting for the fact that it has clearly been trimmed sometime during the process of storing and binding it. The size and weight of the volume would certainly make it difficult to transport and trade discreetly.

While the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* contains one hundred illustrations, many of which are merely conceptually derivative, there are six images sprinkled among the others which may shock a modern audience with their frank treatment of nudity and genitalia. Indeed, many modern readers of the manuscript have entirely overlooked these images, but here I would like to draw attention to them in order to question their existence in such a document. As Thomas Cooke says while referencing the thirteenth-

century *fabliaux*, if we choose examples of a more obscene quality, it is because herein is a 'genre in which art and obscenity serve each other well' ('Introduction', 1974, p.2). It is important to clarify the use of the word obscenity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the obscene as something 'offensively or grossly indecent; tending to deprave and corrupt those who are likely to read, see, or hear the contents'. Does this definition hold for both medieval and modern audiences? In the process of discussing the images, it is necessary to consider whether what modern readers may consider obscene would have had a similar effect on a fifteenth-century audience.

The manuscript of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* was produced in the late-fifteenth-century for the Burgundian court. The idea of what was considered obscene was changing during this time period, as a result of increased enforcement of Church reforms and the influence of a courtly ideal. However, interest in books for private use was also on the rise during the fifteenth century, resulting in the beginning of pornography production. Cooke considers the *fabliaux* to fit into a category of pornography as defined in a modern sense by Steven Marcus in his book *The Other Victorians: Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. Considering that the *fabliaux* are one of various precursors for the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, it is also possible to consider that the tales may be read in a pornographic context, dealing as they do with sexual encounters. The images do not fit this profile entirely since they do not act as 'an incentive to action' (Nead, 1992, p.27). However, unlike the typical covering of genitalia that occurs during this period, both tales and images place emphasis upon these areas, especially in the case of the male. Marcus claims that 'in the usual pornographic work there is an overwhelming concern with the physical aspects of sex, particularly with the penis, its size and potency' (Cooke, 'Pornography', 1974, p.138). This concern is a quality found represented in both text and image of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* as well as

in their thirteenth-century precursors. It was R. Howard Bloch who claimed that the humour of the fabliaux 'derives from the detailed description of the sexual organs themselves' (1998, p.297). And while it was emphasized in the fabliaux it was not unique that the genitals acted as markers defining gendered identity.

Three of the six obscene images of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* deal with the link of genitalia, gender, and identity by revealing the true gender/nature of the primary character. This is most clearly demonstrated in nouvelle 45, which tells of a Scotsman who, disguised as a female washerwoman, finds easy access to the beds of the wives and daughters of Rome. One of these maids reveals the secret to her father and the 'laundress' is paraded through the city with his skirts up, revealing the truth (literally!). It is the revelation of true gender that is portrayed in the image, which shows the Scotsman on display before the men of Rome (quite a logical moment of choice for the image, based on the brevity of the tale – requiring only one page). In this case, not only is his true gender physically revealed to the audience within the image, but also to the audience viewing the book. While the revelation causes the Scotsman to lose his 'job' and to be humiliated by the voyeuristic tendencies of the audience, he is also reasserting his role as a male; the males of the court must have felt (while laughing about the situation) a certain bit of envy for such an audacious and, however temporarily, successful stunt.

Nouvelles 64 and 85 are both tales of a castration of a curate, in both cases punished for sleeping with women of their respective towns. The priest of nouvelle 64, a bit of a comedian who also has been enjoying various women of his parish, intends to play a joke upon a horse gelder during a dinner party. Instead, it is the host who ends up playing the joke, and the trickster curate gets a taste of his own medicine and is castrated in the process. The illustration portrays the curate, tied to the table and quite literally placing himself (described as 'large, powerful, outsize testicles') in

the hands of the gelder (Diner, 1990, p.365). Clearly the cleverness of the gentleman host wins out over the rather stupid trickery of the curate. The priest of *nouvelle* 85, on the other hand, who has been servicing the wife of a smith, is discovered by the smith's valet who then reveals everything. The smith 'attach[es] the two hammers – which during the smith's absence had forged on his wife's anvil – to the bench' and then sets fire to the building, forcing the curate to run and leave part of himself behind (Diner, 1990, p.450). The illumination for this tale is constructed in a more complicated narrative structure, rather than a single image. On the left, the nude curate climbs into bed with the wife to 'hammer' on the woman's 'anvil' as below the smith and his valet work at the forge. This parallel emphasizes the euphemism used in the tale. To the right, the curate is being nailed (literally!) by the smith. Parallels can also be drawn between the lower images on right and left: the smith is forging on two different anvils. The pole that the smith is holding on the right is placed in a phallic position, demonstrating his genital superiority over that of the curate, whose genitals, while visible, are comparatively negligible in the castration scene.

In both illustrations for these *nouvelles*, the sexual natures of the licentious priests are revealed. The genitals act as 'the site of gendered identity' within the image (and the tale), and the priests are promptly put back into their appropriate 'asexual' role through the process of castration (Gaunt, 1995, p.251). While in these cases the crime is a sexual one, the portrayal of genitalia in the images is not in a sexual context. Indeed, the genitals of the priest in *nouvelle* 85 are not visible when he is climbing into bed with the wife, but can only be seen in the hands of the smith during his castration. The phallus, while not sustaining an artistic aesthetic, such as that of a Greek nude, is nevertheless not used as sexual enticement, but rather acts as a signifier of gender specificity. These depictions are not trying to elicit a sexual response, such as is expected from pornographic images,



despite the illicit use of penis imagery; they appear to simply be images which logically portray the events of the tale in a forthright manner.

The other three images which may be labelled obscene use the exposure of the genitals in order to re-emphasize and denote sexual manhood per se in an attempt to define masculine authority. The tales of nouvelles 15 and 46 have much in common; both are tales of monks who try unsuccessfully to have sex with nuns of neighbouring convents. The monk of nouvelle 15 wants a nun who has deemed his equipment inadequate, but she finally agrees if he allows her to feel the size of his penis beforehand. The monk convinces his well-endowed brother to take the test for him, but the ruse fails when the nun recognizes to whom the instrument she is holding belongs. In nouvelle 46, a monk colludes to meet with a nun in a garden in order to enjoy themselves away from prying eyes. They are seen by a man in a nearby tree, who frightens the monk away and satisfies the nun himself. The monks of each story are distinguished in the images as they would have been in life: the Carthusian of nouvelle 15 in white robes and the Dominican of nouvelle 46 in black and white robes. The illustration for nouvelle 46 relates the characters of the monk and the nun, both clothed in black and white, facing each other under the tree and *both* revealing their genitals to the other (as well as to any other viewers). The nun illustrated in nouvelle 15, on the other hand, remains fully clothed but is clearly grasping the monk's (literally that of the brother) penis as they face each other. While both interactions involve an outside viewer (the posing monk and the man in the tree), it is especially in nouvelle 46 wherein the characters are placed centre stage (not in a landscaped, narrative progression as that seen in the illustration for nouvelle 15), and the reader takes on a directly voyeuristic role – a position that may perhaps be motivated by the presence of feminine, as well as masculine, genitalia. Interestingly, in neither tale is the monk successful in having sex with the nun; the implication of prowess by revealing his genitalia garners only humiliation – in nouvelle 15, the triumph

of the nun over the monk and the triumph of the man over the monk in nouvelle 46. None of this is revealed, however, by the images chosen to illustrate each tale.

The final image dealt with herein is that of nouvelle 80, in which an unhappy wife describes her husband's shortcomings by comparing the size of his penis to that of their young donkey. The husband reveals himself to their guests, who chide the young woman for not appreciating such an instrument. At first glance, the illustration appears to be a basic dining scene, of which many similar examples appear in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*. With a closer look, the reader realizes that, instead of a plate of food, the man at the head of the table is holding his penis before him upon the table (but is otherwise fully dressed). The character of the wife can be identified as the woman holding her arm at the elbow, as though to indicate the size of the donkey's member. The illustrator seems to have had a little laugh of his own, by clearly giving the husband an instrument larger and more impressive even than the size the woman is indicating. In this instance, at least, the successful reassertion of masculine authority through the revelation of the husband's genitals is the obvious outcome.

The castration scenes mentioned above seem to share a common motif with other castration scenes of the same time period. In late fifteenth-century French manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait's translation of Boccaccio's *de Casibus*, found in the Bibliothèque Nationale Français,<sup>2</sup> castration is depicted in a mythological context in the portrayal of Jupiter castrating Saturn. The Boccaccio castration scenes are far more clearly detailed than those of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, but these illustrations lack the seemingly gratuitous imagery of genitalia such as that used for nouvelles 46 and 80. What remains questionable is whether this portrayal of genitalia equals pornography in this case. While the revelation of the genitals is linked to copulation in an indirect way, none of the images directly

---

<sup>2</sup> *Bibliothèque Nationale Français*, subsequently abbreviated *BNF*.

portray copulation in process. The BNF holds three manuscript copies of the French translation of the *Decameron* from the second and third quarters of the fifteenth century. In *MS Français 239*, there are two scenes of copulation which do not occur in a bed under covers, one of which is placed in a field but wherein nothing is revealed. In the other, depicting *Gianni di Barolo abusant de Gemmata*, the man reveals his penis during the process of copulation. This illustration, while physically revealing less than the images of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, edges far closer to the level of pornography than any of the images described above. The images of physical copulation in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* follow Michael Camille's supposition of visibility combined with concealment 'in a dynamic partial disclosure that is crucial to medieval representation more generally' – though here the disclosure is extremely overt (1997, p.58). Camille references a 'discussion of "les membres genitoires"', which in fourteenth-century manuscripts have nude figures but in the fifteenth century have a man and woman holding a cloth in front of their naked bodies' (1998, p.152). While this may be the case, the characters of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* are not shown nude and including genitalia, but rather, the genitals are displayed on an otherwise fully-clothed person. This reversal of visibility/concealment again demonstrates the uniqueness of this text in relation to the standards applied to manuscripts during this time period. However, never in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* do they show that pornographic staple that is so contentious even now – penetration. An exception to this occurs not in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, but in the *Decameron* image described above, in which Gianni de Barolo is seen clearly 'performing'.

The six images found in *MS Hunter 252* do not seem to fit the true qualifications for pornography despite the observations by Paul Saenger, and like the instance of the *Decameron* image. The existence of these illustrations within a relatively high-grade manuscript implies that the images were not regarded as obscene by a contemporary audience; but

should they have been? We mentioned previously the newfound sense of appropriateness and courtly ethical values which were becoming more and more influential at the end of the fifteenth century. Camille claims that 'it is in the fifteenth century that we can see the beginning of prurience in representing the sexual act and its intentional obfuscation, not by later readers but by the artists themselves' (1998, p.151). The changing perception of the body was caused by many outside factors, including the privatization of government, an increase in enforcement of Church reforms, and changing ideas towards medicine. In the same way that text and image interacted to reflect the ideals of the court, the ideas expressed in works of theology and medicine reflected and influenced the values of medieval society, and were in turn modified by popular culture and beliefs (Murray, 1996, p.129). The bawdy character of the thirteenth-century French *fabliaux*, on the other hand, reflected a medieval opinion of obscenity that was unselfconscious, ignored by law, and primarily disregarding of Christian moral influence (Muscatine, 1998, p.292).

Following the Black Death of 1348-9, doctors took advantage of events to familiarize themselves with the human body, and to encourage what they saw as a healthy activity. The medical community, in contrast to the Church, encouraged sexual activity and spoke against repressive behaviour, perhaps in hopes of promoting procreation and therefore a chance to regain population levels. Medical handbooks included chapters on conception and procreation, one of which by Michael Savonarola began: 'I will not hesitate to describe what is useful for procreation, even if it does not seem decent' (Jacquart and Thomasset, 1988, p.133); implying both an increased interest in the physicality of sex while also upholding that even this example was violating certain cultural taboos of decency. Despite such openness within the text, the 'medical gaze did not concentrate on sexual organs' (Rubin, 1994, p.106). The medical field categorized the areas of the body, placing the head as the primary region, while marking the genital area

as the lowest region: 'a site of shame [and] the uncontrollable Augustinian signal of man's Fall' (Camille, 1994, p.68). Typically the genitals were only revealed in medical imagery in situations wherein the method of treatment was directed at those areas, such as John Arderne's treatises on the surgical procedure for *fistula-in-ano*.<sup>3</sup> It was not until the innovation of Leonardo da Vinci that anatomical realism became common in medical illustration, sometimes attributed to a 'revival of the classical appreciation of the nude human figure' (MacKinney, 1965, p.57). So, much like the medical texts, the tales of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* contain 'indecent' information regarding copulation, but the images of the manuscript more accurately reflect the risqué character of the text than do the medical illustrations. While the advent of realism in medical illustrations coincides with the time period of the production of the manuscript, therein the portrayal of genitalia is simply a characteristic of the realistic classically-influenced nude. On the other hand, the portrayal of genitalia in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, while not directly sexual, lacks the clinical nature of these illustrations; it is not on par with the pornographic character of the *Decameron* image, but is more risqué than any contemporaneous medical illustrations.

According to James Brundage, 'the period between the demographic disaster of the Black Death and the religious revolution of the sixteenth century saw surprisingly little change in the law and theology of sex and marriage...and major alterations in European sex law and doctrine did not appear until the sixteenth century' (1987, p.437). Instead, changes and innovations occurred in the enforcement and administration, rather than the letter, of the law. Civil governments became more active in dealing with sexually related issues in response to the demographic dislocation that was a result of the plague outbreaks. In addition to this, civil institutions were growing in power, as an attitude shift away from the Church reflected the

---

<sup>3</sup> A revolutionary procedure for the treatment of anal ulcers, which included the administration of spear-like instruments to several sites surrounding the genital area.

general disgruntlement with the ability of ecclesiastical law to deal adequately with problems relating to sexual behaviour. The Church, in response, sought to apply reforms by strictly enforcing previously lax standards. Prostitution flourished post-Black Death, with the help of municipal law; in the late-fourteenth century, many towns supported their own brothels. While being lent comparative respectability, prostitutes were still tightly regulated and those not under the protection of a public brothel could be prosecuted and forced from the city (Rossiaud, 1988, p.56). This community support may have been in response to population decline, or could be regarded as an attempt to regulate sexual encounters wherein there was a possibility to spread disease. Sexual topics were clearly open for civic discussion, but the laws indicate 'the underlying belief that sex was evil because it was pleasurable' and that 'sex dirtied and defiled those who engaged in it' (Brundage, 1987, p.549). The openness of speech regarding sex tends to remain within clinical rather than erotic guidelines, and while this openness may correspond with the text of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, the humour and light treatment of sexual experiences would probably have offended the sensibility of the law.

Despite the many contradictions between societal perceptions and the images of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, the primary problem is that, except in the case of the medical point of view, the primary focus is upon the feminine body. Even in recent studies, the emphasis is placed upon the degradation of women inherent in the tales, using the images of women to indict the masculine author, patron, or illuminator, referencing such examples of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the apocalyptic Whore of Babylon. Brigitte Buettner accurately claims that 'the increased medical discussion of sexuality [does not] provide entirely satisfying models to explain the growing eroticization of pictorial bodies within lay society'; but herein she is discussing only the use of the feminine nude (1993, p.383). The illuminations in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* emphasize nudity in the male

to a far greater extent. Considering that the audience is primarily masculine, the theory of enticement does not hold, especially considering the context of the images. There are certainly opportunities to reveal the feminine body in many of the stories, but this is avoided. Perhaps this can be attributed to the Augustinian identification of lust located primarily in the male, rather than the female, genitals (Salisbury, 1996, p.87). The blatant use of masculine genitalia fits in with the standard of earlier marginalia. The question of how typically marginal decorations found themselves front and centre, in a document that cannot be marginalized in itself as pornography or under the table reading, remains. Charles Muscatine claims that obscenity within a courtly text could only be used 'for shock or parody or satire' (1998, p.282); while it is true that these tales *are* humorous, would the images have been perceived as 'obscene' during the fifteenth century? Our modern sensibilities would say 'yes', but I propose that it was the situation rather than the vulgarity which would have created the humour for the readers in the Burgundian court.

### **Bibliography**

- Bloch, R.H., 1998. 'Modest Maids and Modified Nouns: Obscenity and the Fabliaux', in J. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 293-307.
- Boccaccio, G.; trans. Laurent de Premierfait, 1425(?). *Decameron*, MS Français 239. Bibliothèque national de France.
- Boccaccio, G.; trans. Laurent de Premierfait, 1400(?). *De Casibus*, MS Français 226. Bibliothèque national de France.
- Brundage, J.A., 1987. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Buettner, B., 1993. 'Dressing and Undressing Bodies in Late Medieval Images', in *International Congress of History of Art: Künstlerischer Austausch*, 3 vols. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, II, pp. 383-92.
- Buettner, B., 1992. 'Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in Late Medieval Courtly Society', *Art Bulletin* 74:1, pp. 75-90.
- Camille, M., 1994. 'The image and the self: unwriting late medieval bodies' in S. Kay and M. Rubin (eds), *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 62-99.
- Camille, M., 1995. *The Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Camille, M., 1997. 'Manuscript Illumination and the Art of Copulation', in K. Lochrie, et al. (eds), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*. London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 58-90.
- Camille, M., 1998. 'Obscenity under Erasure: censorship in medieval illuminated manuscripts', in J. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 139-54.
- Cooke, T.D., 1974. 'Introduction', in T.D. Cooke and B. Honeycutt (eds), *The Humor of the Fabliaux*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, pp.1-5.
- Cooke, T.D., 1974. 'Pornography, the comic spirit, and the fabliaux', in T.D. Cooke and B. Honeycutt (eds), *The Humor of the Fabliaux*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, pp. 137-62.
- De Blicck, E., 2004. 'The Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Text and Context: literature and history at the court of Burgundy in the fifteenth century'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow.
- Diner, J., trans., 1990. *The One Hundred New Tales = Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*. London and New York: Garland.
- Gaunt, S., 1995. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Houston, R.A., 1988. *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800*. London: Longman.
- Jacquart, D. and C. Thomasset, 1988. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Koldeweij, A.M., 1995. 'A Barefaced *Roman de la Rose* (Paris, B.N. ms. FR. 25526) and Some Late Medieval Mass-Produced Badges of a Sexual Nature', in M. Smeyers and B. Cardon (eds), *Flanders in a European Perspective*. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, pp. 499-516.
- MacKinney, L., 1965. *Medical Illustrations in Medieval Manuscripts: a checklist compiled with the assistance of Thomas Herndon*, Publications of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 5 (London: Wellcome Medical Institute).
- Muscatine, C., 1998. 'The Fabliaux, Courtly Culture, and the (Re)Invention of Vulgarity', in J. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 281-92.
- Murray, J., 1996. 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in V.L. Bullough and J.A. Brundage (eds), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, pp. 123-52.
- Nead, L., 1992. *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rossiaud, J., 1988. *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. by Lydia Cochrane. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Rubin, M., 1994. 'The person in the form: medieval challenges to bodily "order"', in S. Kay and M. Rubin (eds), *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 100-22.
- Saenger, P., 1982. 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator* 13, pp. 367-414.

Sale, Antoine de la, 1472(?). *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, MS Hunter 252.

University of Glasgow Libraries Special Collections<sup>4</sup>.

Salisbury, J.E., 1996. 'Gendered Sexuality', in V.L. Bullough and J.A.

Brundage (eds), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. New York and

London: Garland Publishing, pp. 81-102.

---

<sup>4</sup>Antoine de la Sale is traditionally referred to as the “editor” of the nouvelles in his role as *autor* of the 50<sup>th</sup> nouvelle. The manuscript itself is incorrectly dated (1, 10 verso) as “1432”, which is possibly a copyist error. The beginning address to Monseigneur le Duc is not to Philippe le bel, but to his son Charles, Comte de Charolais, who did not succeed his father until 1467. The correct year may possibly be 1472.