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**FROM ADDRESS TO DEBATE: GENERIC CONSIDERATIONS
IN THE *DEBATE BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY***

by J. Justin Brent

Although many scholars think of debate as a distinctively medieval genre,¹ just about every culture known to man has composed verbal contests of wit that might be termed debates.² Their universal appeal results at least in part from two inherent features. One is the excitement and suspense that comes from observing a contest between two skillful opponents. Like spectator sports, verbal contests provide a vicarious pleasure for the audience, which shares the suspense of the contest with the two or more opponents. The second aspect, more frequently discussed by students of medieval debate, is the tendency towards opposition. Because a contest cannot take place without opponents, verbal contests tend to produce philosophical perspectives that are both op-

¹Thomas Reed, for instance, claims that debate is “as ‘distinctly medieval’ as a genre can be” (*Middle English Debate Poetry* [Columbia 1990] 2); and John W. Conlee suggests that no other age was more preoccupied with “the interaction of opposites,” which furnishes the generating principle of debates (*Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology* [East Lansing 1991] xi–xii). The medieval poets’ intense fascination or special fondness for debate poetry often receives mention in studies of this genre.

²As evidence of their existence in some of the earliest writing cultures, scholars have pointed out several debates in ancient Sumerian culture. See S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago 1963) 265; and H. Van Stiphout, “On the Sumerian Disputation between the Hoe and the Plough,” *Aula Orientalis* 2 (1984) 239–251. Sebastian Brock, “The Dispute between Soul and Body: An Example of a Long-Lived Mesopotamian Literary Genre,” *Aram* 1 (1989) 55, offers evidence of a fifth century B.C. debate in the Story of Ahiqar, found among the Papyri at Elephantine. According to Brock there are over fifty contest/dialogue poems in Syriac literature and ample evidence of their existence in other Aramaic languages. Indeed one of the most popular debate topics, both in classical and modern Syriac, is the debate between the Soul and the Body. For a comparative study of the Western and Oriental debate between the Soul and the Body, see M. Steinschneider, *Rangstreit-Literatur, Sitzungsberichte, Kön. Acad. Wiss.* (Vienna 1908); and S. Fiore, “La Tension en Espagne et en Babylone: évolution ou polygénése” in *Proceedings, IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, Fribourg 1964*, ed. F. Jost (Paris 1966) 982–992, who suggests that the contest poem may have been brought to Europe through Muslim Spain. Hans Walther, *Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol. 5, 2. Hft., *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters* (Munich 1920) 5–17, offers a useful synopsis of the debate tradition in the classical West. In spite of its date, Théodor Batiouchkof, “Le débat de l’âme et du corps,” *Romania* 20 (1891) 1–55, 513–578, is still the most comprehensive study of the soul and body tradition.

positional and extreme. The divergent viewpoints provide not only an entertaining showcase, but also a framework for organizing, recalling, and ultimately understanding the topic at hand. As Peter Elbow has observed, “A polar opposition can order the widest possible spectrum of otherwise chaotic phenomena. To have the idea of freedom versus necessity is to have a handle for organizing *all* behavior. Up versus down takes care of almost everything.”³ Considering their necessarily oppositional nature, we should not be surprised that different cultures independently produce debates between identical contestants: between Winter and Spring, between various agricultural and mercantile commodities, between Vice and Virtue, and most especially between the Soul and the Body. The items are so culturally ubiquitous that they are likely to appear in any literary tradition where debates are actively cultivated. The ease with which they are developed leads us to conclude that sources are oral, if they exist at all.

In Western Europe, however, there is one version of the debate between Soul and Body that unquestionably develops out of visionary and homiletic texts concerning the soul’s departure from the body.⁴ Originating in Egypt, the earliest visions were abbreviated into exempla concerning the soul’s address to the body. Such exempla were particularly useful for penitential writings concerning the end of time and can be found in a variety of Latin and Old English homilies dating from the sixth to tenth centuries.⁵ In the homiletic address tradition, the soul’s speech to its body can take place immediately following its separation from the body, during its periodic visits to the grave, or during Final Judgment, just before soul and body are reunited. The body almost never replies, though there are usually two speeches: the wicked soul’s diatribe is balanced by a panegyric from a good soul to its body. But when dialectic becomes a topic of interest in the twelfth century, at least

³Peter Elbow, *Oppositions in Chaucer*, 1st ed. (Middletown, CN 1975) 14.

⁴In addition to Batiouchkof (n. 2 above), see Rudolph Willard, “The Address of the Soul to the Body,” *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 50 (1935) 957–983, who discusses homiletic encounters between Soul and Body; and Louise Dudley, *The Egyptian Elements in the Legend of Body and Soul* (Baltimore 1911), who argues that Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife furnish the ultimate source for the Western tradition.

⁵For a list of these, see Francis Lee Utley, “Dialogues, Debates, and Catechisms” in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1400*, vol. 3 (New Haven 1926) 852. For a discussion of eschatology in penitential homilies, see Milton Gatch, “Eschatology in the Anonymous Old English Homilies,” *Traditio* 21 (1965) 117–165.

one poet decided that the wicked soul's address warranted a reply from the body. The debate that he fashioned exhibits the rhetorical sophistication that only a learned instructor of dialectic could summon; yet it is clearly modeled on homiletic accounts of the soul's address to the body that had been cultivated since the sixth century. Moreover, the *Royal Debate*, as it is presently called,⁶ must have inspired both the Anglo-Norman poem *Un Samedi par Nuit* and the extraordinarily popular *Noctis sub Silentio*.⁷ The precise relationship between these three poems has been studied most closely by Eleanor Heningham, who demonstrates at length the formative role of the *Royal* in the development of the other two poems.⁸ The *Noctis*, nevertheless, enjoyed a much wider reception than the others, and is most responsible for the profusion of soul and body debates between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.⁹ From the earliest addresses of damned and blessed souls to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular debates between soul and body, therefore, we find a common setting, rhetorical style, and admonitory

⁶There is no title for the poem in the only existing manuscript (MS Royal 7 A III). The designation that I use comes from Eleanor Kellogg Heningham, ed., *An Early Latin Debate of the Body and Soul* (Menasha 1937), whose *editio princeps* provides the best literary discussion of this poem. For details concerning the manuscript, see George Warner and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections*, vol. 1 (London 1921) 161–162.

⁷The *Samedi* is published by Hermann Varnhagen, ed., *Das altfranzösische Gedicht Un Samedi par Nuit*. Erlanger Beiträge zur englischen Philologie, vol. 1 (Leipzig 1889). There is no authoritative edition of the *Noctis* poem, but the three most commonly cited are *The Latin poems commonly attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. Thomas Wright, Camden Society Publications, no. 16. (London 1841) 95ff.; *Poésies populaires latines antérieures au douzième siècle*, ed. Edélestand Du Ménil (Paris 1843) 217ff.; and Theodor Georg von Karajan, ed., *Frühlingsgabe für Freunde älterer Literatur* (Vienna 1839).

⁸See *Early Latin Debate* (n. 6 above) 25–43. As Heningham demonstrates, passages in the *Royal* are often more complete or coherent than corresponding passages in the *Samedi* or *Noctis*. When it is paraphrasing the Vulgate or another work, the *Royal* supplies a more direct rendering of the original. Moreover, correspondences with the *Noctis* often appear in initial or rhyme position in the *Royal*, but elsewhere in the *Noctis*. As Heningham observes (42), this situation is common when a poet is working from another poem: he is more likely to preserve the initial or final word in the line from the original.

⁹The *Noctis*, which has been found in more than 132 different manuscripts, was translated into virtually every medieval vernacular in the West. For a list of the manuscripts containing the *Noctis*, see Walther, *Streitgedicht* (n. 2 above) 211. He also lists some vernacular paraphrases of the poem (66, n. 1). Since Walther's important study, a handful of other critics have written about the *Noctis*, most notably Heningham *Early Latin Debate* (n. 6 above) 39–43; Erik von Kræmer, *Dos versiones castellanas de la Disputa del alma y el cuerpo del siglo XIV. Edición y estudio*, vol. 18.3 (Helsinki 1956); and Michel-André Bossy, "Medieval Debates of Body and Soul," *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976) 144–163.

theme, collectively referred to as the *Legend of Soul and Body*.¹⁰ The purpose of this paper is to study how the exigencies of the genre of debate influence the speeches and the general delivery of the narrative, which previously appeared as a dramatic monologue in sermons.

At the beginning of the *Royal Debate* we are told that a certain dedicated monk falls asleep and has a vision of a soul that is visiting its former body. Although we don't know when the visit takes place, the monk falls asleep

noctis circa medium
subsequentis sabbatum (5–6)¹¹

which situates the vision on a day when souls traditionally return to their bodies.¹² In its speech the soul is primarily concerned with vilifying the body, but it also laments its own wretched condition—often echoing the *ue michi, ue misere* interjection from the address tradition.¹³ The *Royal Debate*'s longest and most well developed descriptions coincide with three of the most common motifs associated with the homiletic soul's address: the *Ubi Sunt* passage,¹⁴ the description of the decomposing body (951–1098),¹⁵ and the description of Final Judge-

¹⁰Dudley (n. 4 above) was the first to use this phrase in her study of Egyptian elements in the legend, but the tag persisted in subsequent studies, including my own dissertation "The Legend of Soul and Body in Medieval England" (SUNY Stony Brook 2000).

¹¹"...in the middle of the night following the sabbath." This and subsequent citations come from Heningham's edition of the poem; all translations are mine.

¹²For details concerning the soul's weekly visit taking place on Sunday, see Willard, "Address" (n. 4 above) 968–979.

¹³In the *Royal Debate* see lines 173, 428, 2429. The same expression occurs in all six versions of the Macarian homily, edited in Louise Dudley, "An Early Homily on the 'Body and Soul' Theme," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 8 (1909) 225–253. It also appears in J. Leclercq, "Deux anciennes versions de la légende de l'Abbé Macaire," *Revue Mabillon* 36 (1946) 65–79; and in the Junius homily edited by Willard (n. 4 above).

¹⁴The *Ubi Sunt* motif, of course, does not belong exclusively to the address tradition, but it frequently appears within address homilies. See for instance Vercelli IV, in D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Early English Text Society, o.s. 300 (Oxford 1992) 100.266–101.270; Junius 85, CCCC 201 in Hans Sauer, *Theodulfi Capitula in England*, ed. Helmut Gneuss and Wolfgang Weiss, vol. 8, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie* (Munich 1978) 412–413; and the Pseudo-Isidore Sermo III in PL 83, col. 1224.

¹⁵This motif appears in all of the homilies. The most sustained meditation on this topic is in the Old English poem *Soul and Body*. See Douglas Moffat, *The Old English Soul and Body* (Wolfeboro, NH 1990), lines 108–119.

ment (1145–1452).¹⁶ Although the importance of penance is not stressed as regularly as in most homiletic versions, the soul frequently laments that the body never once repented for its wickedness and even cites Augustine for its explanation of the futility of late penance:

Augustinus assertit
quia male interit.
Qui nonquam euigilat
donec mors appropriat;
Hoc est omni tempore
delectatur scelere
Neque mali penitet
donec mors se obsidet; (483–498)¹⁷

In homiletic fashion, moreover, the soul regrets that God deigned to give it human form, rather than that of an animal or inanimate object. Unlike previous homiletic instances of this motif, the *Royal Debate* assigns this sentiment to the body:

Ó deus. ó utinam
dedisses cuiuspian
Me fuisse uolucris corpus.
uel quadrupedis;

¹⁶Since it takes place at Final Judgment, Vercelli IV contains the most well developed depiction of Final Judgment, but see also the poems “Soul and Body” and “The Soul’s Address” (Douglas Moffat, *The Soul’s address to the body : the Worcester fragments*. [East Lansing, MI] 1987); as well as Assmann XIV (Bruno Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa, vol. 3 [Kassel 1889]); CCCC 201 (n. 14 above); and Pseudo-Isidore Sermo III (PL 83, col. 1223–1225). In all of the addresses the soul reminds the body that they will reunite at Final Judgment.

¹⁷“Augustine assures that he is lost to evil who never wakes up until death approaches. That one is always charmed by wickedness, nor does he repent his malignancy until death haunts him.” An analogous articulation of this theme can be found in the Pseudo-Isidore Soul’s Address: “Certe multi audacia diabolica decipiuntur, Dicunt enim, Juvenis sum: dum est mihi tempus, et interim quod floret in me juvenis, fruar mundo; cum ad senectutem venero, et amplius quae volo exercere nequivero, tunc poenitentiam agens abstinebo. Et non cogitat ille miser, quod non habet certum unius horae vel momenti spatium, seu etiam potestatem de vita sua. Eia, charissimi fratres: non vos decipiat aut seducat ista pessima securitas: quæ non securitas, sed potius periculum dici potest.” (“There are many who through the audacity of the devil are deceived by a wicked security and they say among themselves: ‘I am young and have time to enjoy the world; when I am old I will go to penance.’ O wretched are you who think this, since you do not have the space of one hour of your life, nor the power of one day. Brothers, let not this depraved security deceive you, but always have the day of your death before your eyes with fear and true penance.”)

Vtinam uolatile
 essem. uel aquatile
 Animal uel marmoris
 pars. uel truncus arboris.
 Anguis aut uermiculus
 non timerem amplius
 Concremanda ingeri
 in profundum inferi; (1717–1728)¹⁸

Finally, we observe the influence of the visionary tradition when the demons—referred to as *satellites* and *demonēs*¹⁹—arrive to return the soul to hell. They have a terrifying appearance and voice; their visage is four times blacker than pitch; they carry bright shining tridents; they gnash their teeth, as they aim their fierce, luminous eyes at the soul; and eventually they stab the soul with their tridents and lead it off to hell.²⁰ Because the echoes appear not only in the debate’s narrative frame, but in several of its most rhetorically stylized speeches as well, we can be certain that our poet endeavored to mimic the exemplars from the address tradition.

But the *Royal Debate* represents a much more ambitious project, less constrained by the tropological concerns of the pulpit. In the homilies, we sense a reluctance to develop the speeches in directions that might compromise an overriding penitential theme. The homiletic soul, for

Augustine is cited at other points in this homily, though not specifically for this comment on late repentance. See Charles Darwin Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, vol. 6, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge 1993) 84–86, for further instances of the late-repentance motif. Because this homily also contains an *Ubi sunt* and soul’s address, it shows some striking parallels to the *Royal Debate*.

¹⁸“Oh God, would that you had given me the body of any bird or quadruped. If only I were avian or aquatic or made of marble or the trunk of a tree, a snake or a little worm, I would no longer fear being thrown into the smoldering depths of hell.” The *Visio Pauli* was probably the first to express this sentiment, which appears in most of the addresses, though in a much less elaborate form than above. In the Irish homily from the *Leabhar Breac*, it is the body that cries, “I would have remained like all of the fragile earth, had I not received you.” See H. Gaidoz, “Le débat du corps et de l’âme en Irlande,” *Revue Celtique* 10 (1889) 470. Similarly, the body from the *Royal* says: “Antequam adheseram tibi. non timeram mortem. nec ignjuomas acherontis caueas” (1713–1716). (“Before I received you, I feared neither death, nor the ignominious caves of Acheron.”)

¹⁹Both designations appear in the address tradition.

²⁰A similar abduction scene takes place in the Macarian homily and various redactions of St. Paul’s vision. Heningham (n. 6 above, 12–13) notes in the *Royal Debate* two motifs that have fairly analogous passages in Vercelli IV: the soul’s animation of the senses (559–566) and the faithless relatives of the deceased (699ff.). They are not, however, close enough to suggest borrowing.

instance, rarely describes in any detail the sinful acts that its body has committed, since a description of such deeds would distinguish the soul from members of the congregation and thus lessen the exemplum's moral force. The *Royal* poet feels no such restraint. In fact, we can surmise quite confidently that painting an entertaining picture of an extravagant lifestyle, using a vast catalogue of excesses and vanities, was chief among the poet's aims. The soul, whose speech is much longer than that of the body, supplies most of these details. Among other things, it accuses the body of stealing the property of neighbors, once they had passed away:

Gaudebas tunc maxime
 cum audires undique
 Dolere de mortuo
 in tuo confinio.
 Quanto ille ditior fuit qui obierat:
 Tanto eras letior
 quia sic acciderat;
 ...
 Fiebant insidie
 pupillis & uidue.
 Dum patri familias
 pararent exequias;
 Si ei prefueras
 quem obisse noueras:
 Mox cum uiolentia
 rapiebas omnia;
 Minor pars substantie
 accidebat uidue.
 Orphanis. parentibus:
 parum. aut nil penitus; (29–52)²¹

Through these and other means, the deceased acquired a huge hoard of goods, which never seemed sufficient to him (168).²² The *Ubi Sunt* pas-

²¹“You then rejoiced excessively when you heard of a sad death anywhere in your neighborhood. The richer [the deceased] was, the happier you were that it happened thus. ... Traps were laid [by you] for the orphans and the widow as they prepared the funeral procession for the father. If you were superior in rank to him whom you knew to have died, you quickly snatched away everything; the smallest portion, or nothing at all, fell to the widow, orphans and relatives alike.”

²²To emphasize the pathological nature of his greed, the poet compares it to dropsy (105–108). The dropsy motif reappears in a later Italian body and soul debate by Jacopone da Todi. See Bossy, “Medieval Debates” (n. 9 above) 156; and Franca Agno, ed., *Laudi, Trattato e Detti* (Florence 1953), Lauda 3.

sage, in turn, indicates in minute detail just how extensive his stockpile of stolen goods had become. Along with the huge household of servants (252–253), his shining armor, banquets, fine tableware, expensive clothing and luxurious furniture (269–276), the deceased owned vast tracts of land set aside for hunting, riding and cultivating provisions for his storehouses:

Ubi leporarij.
 ubi nunc dextrarij.
 Plena equis stabula
 molosi. venabula?
 Nisi & ancipitres.
 ubi nunc & aucupes.
 Silue. saltus nemorum.
 caule. greges pecorum?
 Molendina. orrea.
 pistrina. uiuaria.
 Coquine cellaria.
 plena promptuaria.
 Ubi nunc innumera
 tellus segetifera
 Vinearum iugera
 orti. & pomeria? (251–268)²³

In the homiletic tradition, the *Ubi Sunt* motif is a relatively detached reflection on the transience of worldly goods. The soul never asks the body where its own possessions have gone; instead it asks “Where are the princes and kings of yesterday?” A homiletic *Ubi Sunt*, after all, is not addressed exclusively to the corrupting body, but also to the general congregation. For this reason, it occasionally appears outside of the soul’s speech, as a separate *memento mori*.²⁴ The *Ubi Sunt* from the *Royal Debate*, however, is addressed exclusively to the body and performs a specialized rhetorical function. Anticipating the body’s argument that they could bribe their way out of perpetual torment, the soul concedes, for a moment, the possibility that the devil takes bribes. This

²³“Where are your greyhounds, where your chargers, your stables full of horses, hounds, and hunting spears? Where are your hawks and your bird snares? Where are your woodlands, your wooded pastures and groves? Your sheepfold, your flocks of animals? Your grains, your storehouses, bakeries, wildlife preserves, store-room provisions, and plentiful repositories? Where now are your countless tracts of corn-bearing (*segetifera*) land? Your blossoming tracts of grape vines and apples?”

²⁴See, for instance, Pseudo-Isidore Sermo III and the Macarian homily in CCCC 21.

feigned allowance, however, sets up a devastating illustration of just how impossible bribery is, since they are deprived of all worldly goods:

Tamen ut te miseram
 omni parte asseram:
 Ponamus te munere
 posse nos redimere.
 Esto. tu quid facies?
 opes ubi capies.
 Quibus datis demoni
 discedamus liberi?
 Ubi multifaria
 tua nunc eraria.
 Gemma. torques. anuli.
 pleni nummis sacculi? (233–244)²⁵

The *Ubi sunt* which follows begins an extended *interrogatio*, for which the answer—that the body now lacks the capital for bribery—is too obvious to warrant mention. As mentioned above, the catalogue of excessive wealth mocks the body's extraordinary greed. Unlike the detached contemplations of worldly transience in the homiletic tradition, this *Ubi Sunt* is designed to dismiss all false hopes of redemption and, of course, to caricature the forensic strategies of humiliation in the process.

The decomposition of body parts, also known as the food-for-worms motif, is one of the most recognizable features of the address tradition. The most elaborate homiletic treatment of the body's decomposition appears in the Old English Vercelli and Exeter poem *Soul and Body*,²⁶ where it appears as an epilogue to the address, articulated by the narrator. Rather than reproducing this motif as it appeared in sermons, the *Royal* poet employs a descriptive figure far more suitable to the classroom than to the pulpit. Originally a forensic mode of description for the purposes of identifying a criminal, the popular rhetorical scheme called *effictio* proscribed that a portrayal of an individual advance sequentially from head to foot. The figure usually is reserved for beautiful

²⁵“Nevertheless in order that I assure you, wretch, in every way, let us assume that you might be able to redeem us with a gift. Indeed, where would you seize the wealth with which you might pay the devil, so that we might depart freely? Where now are all of your various treasures, gems, necklaces, rings, and sacks full of money?”

²⁶Both are published in Moffat's *The Old English Soul and Body* (n. 15 above).

women, such as Alison in the Miller's Tale.²⁷ But as Jan Ziolkowski has pointed out, the portrayal of hideous individuals must have been just as popular, offering a welcome diversion to students bored with the stock formulas for female beauty.²⁸ The soul's description of the body follows the same head-to-toe pattern; but because it pauses occasionally to consider the body's prior condition, the soul manages to incorporate many of the commonplaces for beauty as well. The description of the body's hair provides an excellent example of this:

O capilli diuitis
 non egetis digitis
 Cum expeditorijs.
 neque redimiculis;
 Oportebat dominam
 esse potentissimam.
 Que tam admirabilem
 pecteret cesariem;
 Modo non est aliqua
 meretrix tam publica.
 Que eam contingere
 uellet. nedum pectere;
 Non utetur amodo
 galea uel pilleo.
 Mitra neque circulo.
 pectine. nec lauachro; (951–966)²⁹

²⁷The most systematic study is Walter Curry, *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty* (Baltimore 1916). For discussions of *effictio* in the Miller's Tale, see Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French tradition; a study in style and meaning* (Berkeley 1957) 229ff; E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (New York 1970) 22–25; Kevin S. Kiernan, "The Art of the Descending Catalogue, and a Fresh Look at Alisoun," *The Chaucer Review* 10 (1975) 1–16; and D. S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, especially 'Harley Lyrics,' Chaucer, and Some Elizabethans," *Modern Language Review* 50 (1955) 257–269.

²⁸Jan Ziolkowski, "Avatars of Ugliness in Medieval Literature," *Modern Language Review* 79 (1984) 1–20. Matthew of Vendome's *Ars Versificandi* gives seven examples of *effictio* (I, 50–58), two of which describe ugly individuals. One of the earliest, and no doubt most influential, models for descriptions of ugliness must have been Sidonius's description of Gnatho. See W. B. Anderson, ed., *Poems and Letters*, vol. 2 (London 1936) 46ff. As F. J. E. Raby notes, "Every schoolboy learned how to describe a woman's beauty, and how to write an "invective" against women" (*A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (Oxford 1957) 2.45

²⁹"Oh hair, so fine, you will no longer need disentangling fingers or chaplets. It is right that a mistress be very powerful who should comb such an admirable head of hair. Now there is no harlot so common that she would wish to touch or comb it. [Your hair] no longer needs helmet, felt cap, headband or garland, comb or shampoo."

The soul employs a similar then-now descriptive technique for the face, throat, body, hands, legs, and feet. Scatological treatments, such as that of the throat, are not at all uncommon in iconic portrayals of ugliness.³⁰

Hoc gule contiguam
guttur olim niueum:
Putri plenum cerebro
simile est cacabo; (1007–1010)³¹

The words used to describe the body's prior beauty—brilliantly white (olim *candidi*) teeth, snow-white (*niveum*) neck, robust (*robore*) chest and arms, brilliantly white (*candide*) hands, and most (*lenissima*) smooth skin—articulate conventional norms for male attractiveness. Likewise, the corpse's eyes like carbuncles (*uelut carbunculi*), that flow with bloody matter (*fluunt sanie*), the crooked (*incongrua*) mouth, foul (*turpes*) and stinking (*fetidi*) teeth, and pale (*pallide*) skin are perfectly congruous with medieval portraits of ugliness.³² The soul's cultivation of this antithesis is quite similar in effect and purpose to allegorical portrayals of youth and age found in Middle English poems like *Death and Life*, *Parliament of the Three Ages*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,³³ where connections with medieval romance and the *chanson d'aventure* are much more obvious.

Moreover, this use of antithesis is significantly different from previous antithetical structures in the Legend of Soul and Body. In the homiletic soul's address, for instance, it was common for the soul to contrast the pains of the soul with the joys of the body, during their previous life. The soul's lament from the Macarian homily edited by Leclercq offers a fairly typical example: "Tu eras fecundus et ego maculenta. Tu eras rubens et ego palida. Tu eras helaris et ego tristes. Tu ridebas, ego semper plorans."³⁴ Whereas this antithesis emphasizes the

³⁰See the examples cited by Ziolkowski (n. 28 above) 2ff.

³¹"Next to the palate, this throat, once white, now full of rotting brains, is like a privy." The comparison of the throat to a privy may have given the author of a later Body and Soul debate the idea of having the devils force feces down the mouth of the soul, as they lead it off to hell. See the editions of *Noctis sub silentio* edited by Wright (n. 7 above) 105, line 280, and Du Ménil (n. 7 above) 228.

³²Ibid. See also Sidonius's description of Gnatho, in Anderson (n. 28 above) 46.

³³See the "Alliterative Debates" section of Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry* (n. 1 above) 102ff and 142ff.

³⁴J. Leclercq, "Deux anciennes" (n. 13 above) 65–79, lines 138–145. "You were rich and I was soiled; you were ruddy and I was pale; you were merry and I was sad; you

moral discrepancy between soul and body—what is good for the body is bad for the soul—the *Royal* poet’s antithesis draws attention to the inevitable decay of outward appearances. The *Royal* soul becomes a much more human figure than any of its predecessors had been. Several passages that in the address tradition were abstract laments are now personalized invectives, whose purpose, by the soul’s own admission,³⁵ is to avenge the wrongs committed by the body. As a result, the logically sound and forensically devastating reply fashioned by the body strikes us as long overdue.

In the narrative material between the soul’s rebuke and the body’s reply, the visionary describes the revivification of the body as if it were a miraculous event (*mirabilia*). The soul has already informed us that the body is dependant on the soul for all forms of sensation, speech, animation, and reason.³⁶ On the basis of its animation alone, therefore, we can call the event miraculous. But the body’s speech is also miraculous, insofar as the Legend of the soul’s visit to its grave was known as an address, not a debate. In the address treatments of the Legend, the body is typically inert, decaying and utterly defenseless.³⁷ Like the skull of Yorick, the body supplied a stage prop to contextualize the soul’s soliloquy. The *Royal* body, however, is no stage prop. Its forensic acumen, far surpassing that of the soul, owes a significant debt to dialectic instruction in the twelfth century cathedral schoolroom and the

laughed and I was always crying.”

³⁵Cf. lines 91–92, where the *Royal* soul candidly states: “Sitque hec inuectio/ in te: michi ultio ...” “May this invective against you be my revenge ...”

³⁶Lines 59–66:

Per me namque senseras
per me & audieras.
Per me lucem uideras
per me loqui noueras;
Ego cibum sumere
ego gressum ponere
Ego motum omnibus
dabam tuis artibus;

“For you sensed [things] through me; you heard through me, through me you saw light; through me you knew how to talk; I compelled you to eat food, to take steps, gave motion to all of your limbs.”

³⁷See for instance the poem *Soul and Body* where the body’s inability to respond serves as a segue into the description of putrefaction; and *Vercelli IV* where the good soul addresses the heavenly host, rather than its body, because the latter wouldn’t be able to hear or understand it.

renaissance of interest in Aristotelian logic.³⁸

Avoiding the catalogues of sins and *ad hominem* attacks that introduce the soul's speech, the body seizes upon the crux of the argument—not sin, but *agency* for sin—and with feigned innocence turns our attention towards the soul's speech:

Cur exprobras omnia
 tua michi uitia
 Annotasque misera
 tua michi opera?
 Quasi tu innocua
 insons & iustissima
 Fueris per omnia
 uite nostre spatia;
 An sic tui sceleris
 totum onus poteris
 Super me imponere
 & a te excutere?³⁹

By employing reason (*ratio*) in its complaint, the body promises to correct the lies advanced by the soul, so that their suit may be judged equitably (1503–1506). As one might expect in the opening statements of an attorney, the body claims that it will, over the course of its speech, reveal the soul to be worthy of tortures for its shameful acts (1517–1520). The body will not enumerate sins one-by-one; instead, its account will be guileless, so that reason will attest it to be without lies (1523–1530). From the beginning, the body is conscious that its speech will be compared to that of the soul. It adopts a veneer of sincerity and simultaneously implies that the accusations of the soul are fundamentally untrustworthy.

The body's first defense is syllogistic. The Lord, it argues, arranges all rewards and punishments equitably. Whatever punishment the soul

³⁸For discussion of Aristotle and dialectic in cathedral schools, see James Jerome Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A history of rhetorical theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley 1974) 102–106; Jean Châtillon, "La Bible dans les écoles du XIIe siècle" in *Bible de tous les temps* (Paris 1984) 186–193; and Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode : nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen*, 2 vols. (Graz 1957) 2.17ff.

³⁹"Why do you reproach me with all of your vices and attribute your wretched works to me? As if you had been harmless, innocent, and most just through the entire space of our life; or would be able to impose the entire burden of your wickedness on me and exonerate yourself?"

experiences certainly was imposed by the Lord. Therefore, whatever torments the soul experiences must be just. But the body does not place its faith exclusively in God's justice; it also develops the Aristotelian notion that all deeds are carried out by the body but initiated by the soul. The body, as executor of the soul's thoughts, has no choice but to obey its commands. As the soul puts it,

Velle tuum: iussio
 erat michi misero.
 Cui nullo tempore
 poteram resistere; (1559–1562)⁴⁰

In developing this argument, the body refrains from blaming the soul entirely for their damnation and even describes how it participated in sinful behavior. In contrast to the soul's vituperative rebuke, the body is emotionally restrained and self-deprecating. The body, in short, maintains that its chief sin was in following the advice of its companion, the soul, rather than the commandments of God:

Sicque desiderijs
 tuis. & imperijs.
 Obsequens: innumera
 perpetravi scelera;
 Peccaui. nunc penitet.
 sed tarde.nam scilicet
 Ista penitentia
 caret indulgentia;
 Adam primus hominum
 numquam erga dominum
 Egisset. si proprio
 stetisset arbitrio;
 Verum quia coniugis
 adqueiuit monitis
 Quam serpens deceperat
 iure ergo exulat;
 Sic & ego misera
 caro fetens. tabita
 & inutilissima
 morte sum dignissima;
 merito terrificam
 prestolor sententiam.

⁴⁰“Your wish was a command to my wretched self, which at no time was I able to resist.”

que plus tibi parui
quam meo opifici; (1567–1592)⁴¹

The body's comparison of itself to Adam is somewhat incongruous with the rest of its argument, since the comparison lends the body a degree of volition that it elsewhere denies. Later, for instance, the body states that it had no choice but to follow the commands of the soul and assigns to itself a much more passive role in their relationship. Nevertheless, the body's rhetorical strategy at this point is perfectly clear: it acknowledges a degree of responsibility, in order to ascribe the lion's share of guilt to the soul. The reasonable nature of this admission contrasts sharply with the uncompromising tone of the soul. It is no longer a question of innocent or guilty, but of which party is more to blame:

Nos ergo culpabiles
& inexcusabiles
tua tamen grauior
culpa. quia promptior
ad effectum sceleris
fuisse dinosceris;
Tu uires ad impia
michi dabas opera
Atque tuis stimulis
incumbebam uicijs. (1639–1648)⁴²

In demonstration of the soul's responsibility for sin, the body draws attention to a time before their union when it was incapable of sin (1711–1716). In the Old English address tradition, we find this same argument, but it is employed by the soul. For instance, the soul from the *Junius* address claims that it was fashioned as the daughter of God and the sister of angels before the body made it a child of the devil.⁴³ In the soul's address from the *Worcester Fragments*, the soul was sent to the

⁴¹“And thus obeying your desires and commands, I committed countless wicked [deeds]. I sinned, now [the soul] is penitent, but too late, for certainly this penitence will lack remission. Adam, first of men, would never have acted against the Lord if he had used his own judgment. Indeed, since he acquiesced to the advice of his wife, whom the snake had tricked, he is in exile. And thus I, wretched and stinking flesh, am most worthy of this decaying and most useless death. Deservedly I await this terrifying sentence, since I obeyed you more than my creator.”

⁴²“We are therefore inexcusable and guilty; your guilt however is more serious, since you were discerned to be more resolute in effecting wickedness. You gave me the strength to [perform] impious deeds and I depended on your stimulus.”

⁴³Willard, “Address” (n. 4 above) 962.

body clean from God, but the body has ruined them both with its wicked deeds.⁴⁴ In the thirteenth century debate *Noctis sub silentio* the soul will once again employ this argument,⁴⁵ echoing the sentiment as it had appeared in the addresses. In the *Royal* poem, however, the body recalls its own pristine innocence, in support of its claim that the soul carries the larger burden of guilt. Its woeful lament follows naturally from this line of reasoning:

Ó deus. ó utinam
dedisses cuiuspian
me fuisse uolucris corpus.
uel quadrupedis; (1718–1720)⁴⁶

Clearly, the body loses track of its forensic purpose as it imagines these other, more desirable existences. But after acknowledging that such fantasies will not improve its situation (1769), the body once again resumes its train of thought by comparing the relationship of soul and body to that of a rider and his horse (1789–1804), a sailor and his ship (1849–1872), and the sentinel and his stronghold (1873–1900). All of these emphasize the greater authority of the soul and assign to the body a role of passivity or obedience.

In the last hundred lines of its speech, the body assumes a posture of indifference to the present contest. It dwells on the torment that both of them deserve (2052) and observes, once again, that verbal abuse will in no way benefit either of them.⁴⁷ Because *ad hominem* attacks of character offer no real benefit, they are useless; indeed, such cursing is the revenge of women (*mulieris ultio*) and would be unconscionable, given their former friendship:

⁴⁴Douglas Moffat, *Soul's Address* (n. 16 above) 71.

⁴⁵Wright, *Poems* (n. 7 above) 96.25–29.

⁴⁶“Oh God, would that you had made me the body of any bird or quadruped.”

⁴⁷Previously when the body observed that argumentation is pointless, it was clearly a rhetorical tactic, since the body resumed its argument immediately afterwards:

Sed qui uidet omnia
antequam sint condita:
Nouit & considerat
cuius culpa superat; (1937–1940)

“But he who sees all deeds before they are performed knows and considers whose fault is greater.”

Because of the subsequent veiled insults, it seems to me that this apparent truce is also a criticism of the soul's argumentative tactics.

Cum recordor pristinae
 nostrae amicitiae
 & de nostra gloria
 recurrit memoria:
 Impium & facinus
 reor in te acrius
 Amplius insurgere
 teque maledicere; (2105–2112)⁴⁸

Avoiding any direct criticism of the soul's speech, the body presumes to have controlled its antagonistic feelings. But by articulating in precise detail the irrational behavior that it avoided, it draws attention to the curses of the soul's speech. The body, in short, is a remarkably crafty verbal opponent, trained in the art of dialectic, and, despite its claims to the contrary, vehemently determined to win the debate.

In its final speech, the soul makes no attempt to monitor its cursing, but the emotional and sacrilegious attack that it mounts is directed at God, rather than the body. The soul's final speech, therefore, is not part of the debate *per se*; instead it serves as a homiletic explanation of God's ways to man. In this and many other respects the *Royal Debate* never loses sight of its homiletic origins. In addition to the soul's final speech, long passages towards the end of the soul and body's arguments have nothing to do with a forensic contest, yet clearly endeavor to explain, instruct and admonish the reader. As the body aptly observes:

Nam si notum fieret
 nobis: nil proficeret;
 Illis scire liceat
 quos uite uis uegetat.
 Qui ásuo scelere
 queunt resipiscere; (1947–1952)⁴⁹

In other respects the poem is radically different from the preceding address tradition. The invective against the body is personalized where it had previously been abstract; in response, the body mocks the soul's pretentious use of language; and both speeches are replete with allu-

⁴⁸“When I recall our former friendship and my memory retraces our glory, I consider it wicked and treacherous to antagonize and curse you further.”

⁴⁹“For if [the truth] becomes known to us, there will be no benefit; let it be known to them whom the force of life still animates, who might seek to recover from their wickedness.”

sions to the *Vulgate* and classical mythology. More important, by adding a reply from the body to the tradition of the soul's address, the *Royal* poet begins to break down the opposition of soul and body, as it had existed in the addresses. The soul is no longer an innocent victim to the worldly desires of the flesh, and the body succeeds in disclosing a sinful impulse within the soul. Each endeavors to demonstrate how little agency it possessed, relative to the other; and the more vehemently they defend themselves, the more farcical the debate becomes. In subsequent versions of the debate, the soul will employ arguments that previously belonged to the *Royal* body, and the body will employ arguments previously used by the *Royal* soul.⁵⁰ The drama that ensues from their interaction provides several entertaining moments in a fundamentally instructive narrative.

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⁵⁰In the *Noctis sub silentio* for instance there are at least twelve verbal echoes of the *Royal*, for which the speaker has been changed from soul to body or vice versa. See Henningham (n. 6 above) 40–42, for a list of verbal echoes between the two texts.