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Bride swap: The Medieval Afterlife of Anna Perenna's Bed Trick in the Pseudo-Ovidian 'De vetula' and Boccaccio's *Novella* VIII. 4

Ovid's account of Anna Perenna's festival in 'Fasti' includes a comic vignette in which the aged goddess plays the role of a go-between, who is asked by Mars to help him woo Minerva. However, Anna manages to substitute herself for the virgin goddess in the wedding bed and then laughs (ridet) at Mars for having been tricked. The article tracks the influence of Anna's bed trick in 'De vetula', a thirteenth century pseudo-Ovidian Latin narrative poem, in which an old procuress exchanges places with a virgin who is the object of the narrator's passion. Anna's bed trick later reappears in Boccaccio's 'Decameron', namely in the novella VIII. 4 about the lustful provost of Fiesole and Monna Piccarda, a widow who tricks him into bed with her unsightly servant Ciutazza.

In these medieval works female characters take on many of the characteristics of Ovid's aged Anna. At the same time, these medieval narratives rework the traditional motif of the bed trick by harnessing the peculiar social situation of the medieval widow, as a type of woman endowed with a degree of independence. These medieval versions of Anna's bed trick conserve the memory of Ovid's early picture of the goddess and her festival in which other rules of social interaction were allowed, while offering alternative perspectives upon power structures of medieval patriarchal society.

Keywords: Anna Perenna; Boccaccio; 'De vetula'; female laughter; go-between; Ovid; widow

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Подмена невесты: средневековое бытование уловки Анны Перенны

В «Фастах» Овидий описывает следующий комический эпизод: Марс просит престарелую богиню Анну Перенну помочь ему сосвататься к Минерве. Анна подменяет собой богиню-девственницу и восходит с Марсом на брачное ложе, а затем смеется (*ridet*) над обманутым богом. Настоящая статья прослеживает влияние этой хитрости Анны в «*De vetula*», латинской поэме XIII века, ошибочно приписываемой Овидию; в ней пожилая сводница меняется местами с девственницей, к которой пылает страстью рассказчик. Уловка Анны возникает и в «Декамероне» Боккаччо, а именно в новелле VIII. 4 о похотливом настоятеле Фьезоле и монне Пиккарде; вдова, не желающая отвечать на ухаживания настоятеля, подкладывает ему в постель свою невзрачную служанку Чутаццу.

В этих средневековых произведениях женские персонажи перенимают многие черты престарелой богини, описанной Овидием. В то же время в этих нарративах традиционный мотив постельной хитрости переосмысливается при помощи особого социального положения, которое занимала вдова в Средние века. Эти средневековые версии постельной хитрости Анны, с одной стороны хранят память об изображении богини у Овидия и об ее праздниках, на которых можно было нарушать привычные правила социального взаимодействия, а с другой — предлагают альтернативный взгляд на властные структуры патриархального средневекового общества.

Ключевые слова: «*De vetula*»; Анна Перенна; Боккаччо; вдова; женский смех; Овидий; сваха

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ

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Anna Perenna's bed trick

In his calendar poem 'Fasti', Ovid bestows a lavish treatment on the goddess Anna Perenna, framed by a description of her mirthful festival (*festum geniale*), held yearly on the Ides of March, the first full moon of the year in the original lunar calendar. When referring to the manner of the Roman commoners' customary celebration of the goddess, Ovid recalls having once encountered a procession and witnessed a drunk old woman lugging an equally drunk old man home from the festivities (Fast. 3.541–42: *senem potum pota trahebat anus*)¹, a scene the poet considered worthy of record (*visa est mihi digna relatu*), perhaps because they are both tipsy, but only the man cannot walk. In Newlands' view,² this elderly couple may well illustrate a comic ritual inversion of the dignity of Roman elders, and thus would be an example of the carnival associations of the public performances and rites held in Anna Perenna's honour on her feast day. Whether described as a rowdy New Year's festival, a female fertility cult, a drinking bout of the plebians, or a day of merrymaking, devoted to the pleasure of love, dancing, and revelling, Anna Perenna's celebration represents an instance of symbolic transgression and defiance of social norms, hence Ovid's emphasis on the crossing of boundaries and the blurring of differentiation by age or gender during the festival.

As Ovid described it, the festival certainly seems to have been very much a plebeian celebration marked by the temporary misrule and the relative license extended to the lower classes. The poet draws particular attention to female protagonism; a disruptive

1. The majority of Latin citations and English translations are taken from *Ovid. Fasti* / trans. J.G. Frazer. London, 1931. When another translation is used, it will be duly indicated.

2. *Newlands C. Playing with Time: Ovid and the Fasti*. Ithaca, NY, 1995. P. 60–61.

femininity unleashed during Anna Perenna's festival day is reflected in the references to its celebrants. The early mention of the drunk old woman may be interpreted as a foreshadowing of that elderly, defiant femininity associated with Anna herself in 'Fasti'. Through the abundant and varied aetiologies and mythic stories connected with the goddess, Ovid's Anna turns out to be a multi-faceted and extremely varied character. However, the figure of the old woman stands out among Ovid's cumulative conjectures as to who Anna was.

In Ovid's account Anna is depicted either as a maiden or as an old woman. She plays the role of a virgin in distress, namely the sister of Dido who is transformed into a nymph by the river Numicius (Fast. 3.543–656). Then, she features as the old woman of Bovillae (Fast. 3.661–74), who is said to have given cakes to the starving during the secession of the plebs to the Mons Sacer. Finally, Anna plays the role of a celestial procuress, apparently following her own erotic desires (Fast. 3.675–696).

While Anna Perenna represents a kind of femininity which is extolled and dignified in all these stories, the last vignette is of particular relevance. The promotion and defence of women's freedom is stressed in the final farcical anecdote added by Ovid, where the lovelorn god Mars, longing for a union with Minerva, begs Anna to intercede for him before her. Having tricked the god with hollow promises and nourished his foolish hopes with the uncertainty of delay, the aged Anna pretends to have gained Minerva's consent. When the wedding night comes, Mars raises the bridal veil and, just when he is about to kiss the deity, he recognizes, to his dismay, not Minerva but Anna, who laughs at the duped god.

Anna's trick takes on great significance in the context of the Ovidian corpus, as the only occasion on which a woman assumes such a degree of power in taking sexual advantage of a god, apparently to his dismay.³ Her trick also represent one instance of female laughter and mockery clearly subverting male authority, a kind of laughter that is not heard very often in Roman literature.⁴ Moreover, the section ends with the portrayal of those girls (*puellae*) of the festival, singing obscene songs with shameful

3. Beek A. E. Always Look on the Bright Side of Death: Violence, Death, and Supernatural Transformation in Ovid's Fasti. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2015. P. 42.

4. See Beard M. Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up. Berkeley, 2014, P. 157. Beard regrets the lack of instances of truly subversive female laughter in Roman literature. Carefully policed in Roman literary representations, female laughter 'does not seem to represent, as a specifically gendered form, much of a threat to male egos or to male traditions of laughter and joking, or at least the rules and regulations, implicit or explicit, were intended to ensure that it did not'. Nevertheless, 'Fasti' 3.675–696 can be read as a good example of the liberating and counter-hegemonic force of female laughter and mockery.

lyrics (*certaque probra*), and telling old jokes accompanied by dirty remarks (*ioci ueteres obscenaque dicta*), in memory of the elderly Anna's trick played on the lustful Mars.⁵ For Ovid the indecorous and impertinent performance of those young girls is as worthy of narration as the scene of the old woman dragging along a drunken old man described earlier. In both cases, actual women resemble the goddess in whose honour they have become either inebriated or otherwise uninhibited.

The repetition of allusions to female celebrants of opposite ages, at the beginning and the end of Ovid's account of Anna's festival, not only provides coherence and meaningful structure to the passage, but also highlights the deep bond between elderly and youthful femininity pervading Ovid's treatment of the goddess, a connection especially noticeable in Anna's bed trick. Whatever its motivation, the core of Anna's trick relies on women's body-swapping/age changing and the consequent confusion or merger of female roles and status. Given this, the trick can be interpreted as both a variation of the theme of the metamorphosis, and, more precisely, as a way of rendering the boundaries between ages and stages of women's life porous through mockery and laughter. In a sense, with her trick Anna Perenna would be honouring her role as a personification of the Revolving Year or the Moon-Year, also alluded to by Ovid in a fleeting aetiology (Fast 3.657: *Sunt quibus haec Luna est, quia mensibus impleat annum*). By alternating waxing and waning phases, as Ovid himself asserts, the moon fills up the measure of the year. Anna Perenna is known as the deity of the circle or 'ring' of the year, suggesting the connection of its beginning and its end. And, similarly, the bed trick can hint at the goddess' ability to serve as a liaison of women's stages of life, as a ring of women's years. The bed trick restores Anna's youth, since she appears 'like a new bride' (Fast 3.690: *Anna tegens vultus, ut nova nupta, suos*), echoing her role as a goddess associated with the renewal of the year.

The following will focus on the further development of Anna's trick in two medieval narratives which are in dialogue with 'Fasti' 3.675–696. The last vignette about Anna Perenna had a significant impact on the literary portrait of the old woman featuring in a wealth

5. In 'Fasti' 3.693–6, we read: 'The new goddess laughed at dear Minerva's lover. Never did anything please Venus more than that. So old jokes and obscene sayings are sung [*ioci veteres obscenaque dicta canuntur*], and people love to remember how Anna choused the great god.' Some scholars have related *puellae's* foul language at Anna Perenna's festival with the *aischrology* (cultic obscenely joking) in other ancient worships to fertility goddesses and their corresponding festivals, such as the Thesmophoria in honour to Demeter. Ovid would be attempting to apply an aetiology akin to the myth of Iambe, Demeter's obscenely joking female friend, to the aischrology of Anna Perenna. The explanations for the *aischrology* in Demetrian worship focus on delighting the goddess. To that end, female worshipers reenact the paradigmatic deed of Iambe, whether her obscenities in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* or the pulling up of her dress and exposure of her vulva attributed to Baubo, the equivalent of Iambe in the 'Orphic' version of the myth. For his part, Ovid tells us that Anna's trick on Mars pleased Venus and, therefore, girls utter crude jokes and sing ribald songs during Anna Perenna's day. See Hultin J.F. *The Ethics of Obscene Speech in Early Christianity and Its Environment*. Leiden, 2008. P. 31.

6. 'De Vetula' was also translated into

of medieval texts, who is often merged with the figure of the go-between. One notable example is 'De vetula', an influential thirteenth century pseudo-Ovidian Latin narrative poem,⁶ wherein an old go-between takes the place of the virgin who is the object of the first-person narrator's passion. As will be argued through this article, the closest medieval literary relatives of Ovid's Anna are found in 'De vetula', but one additional interesting case of the bed trick scene with a slight variation is found in Giovanni Boccaccio's 'Decameron', in the fourth story of Day Eight: the *novella* of the lustful provost of Fiesole and the widow, Monna Piccarda, who tricks him into bed with her unsightly servant Ciutazza.

As Newlands has noted, in 'Fasti' Mars himself identifies Anna as a kindly old woman (*comis anus*) who is skilled at bringing people together⁷; for her part, Anna commits herself (seemingly at least) to help the god woo Minerva. Serving as Mars' go-between is nevertheless a significant aspect of Anna's characterization that has been often overlooked by scholarship on Ovid's medieval reception. Generally, the prime Ovidian candidate considered to be the source behind the medieval procuress is Dipsas, the ancient hag who teaches the courtesan how to get more money and gifts from her current or potential lovers in *Amores* 1.8.⁸ This old woman is usually described as a *lena*, a stock character of the Roman comic stage, variously translated as 'bawd,' 'procuress,' 'brothel-keeper,' or 'madam'. However, Dipsas does not explicitly act as a go-between for two lovers, much less one trading on the man's infatuation as Anna actually does. Furthermore, the recurrence of the scene of the bed trick and the motif of females swapping bodies and roles in a number of medieval narrations featuring the old woman, seems to suggest that Anna Perenna should share the credit with Dipsas as the Ovidian source behind this medieval character.

In addition to Anna Perenna's role as a go-between, both 'De vetula' and Boccaccio's *novella* exploit her role as a trickster who turns Mars' infatuation into an occasion of self-indulgence, by using deception, either because she aims to attract a well-built and sexually aroused man into her bed, or merely because she finds delight in beholding Mars' astonishment once he has found

French in the fourteenth century by Jean Le Fèvre and can be considered a 'medieval bestseller'. Nearly sixty manuscript copies survive, mainly held in libraries across Europe. The first printed edition appeared in about 1475. *Bellhouse D.R.* 'De Vetula': a Medieval Manuscript Containing Probability Calculations // *International Statistical Review*. 2000. № 68. P. 126.

7. *Fast.* 3.683–4: *Effice, di studio similes coeamus in unum:/ conveniunt partes hae tibi, comis anus.* [Facilitate the union of two deities alike in their interests; this type of job suits you, kindly old woman] Translated by *Newlands C.* Op. cit. P. 141. See *Newlands C.* *Infiltrating Julian History: Anna Perenna at Lavinium and Bovillae // Uncovering Anna Perenna: A Focused Study of Roman Myth and Culture / ed. G. McIntyre, S. McCallum.* London, 2019. P. 141.

8. See for instance *Fleming J.V.* *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Fleming describes Dipsas as 'the Great Mother of all medieval literary bawds', given that her speech encompasses a complete catalogue of techniques to trick men, which will clearly supply her medieval literary relatives. Another Ovid's old woman who actually goes between is Myrrha's nurse in *Metamorphoses*. Rouhi suggests that, as a model of affection and loyalty overriding moral concern, Myrrha's nurse acts as the prototype of medieval go-betweens who elaborate strategies of mediation around this conviction. Rouhi is nevertheless thinking of the tradition of the idealized romance go-between. See: *Rouhi L.* *Mediation and Love: A Study of the Medieval Go-Between in Key Romance and Near-Eastern Texts.* Leiden and Boston, 1999. P. 54. Mieszkowski identifies two opposing traditions of the medieval go-between: the one, pandering for idealized love – which is the keynote of the intermediary in several romances – and the other pandering for lust – which in my view is the customary role of the old women who go-between in medieval narratives in dialogue with Ovid's Anna Perenna. See *Mieszkowski G.* *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus.* New York, 2006.

9. Fantham has investigated the influence

himself in bed with an undesirable old woman who laughs in his face. Finally, on the basis of 'Fasti' 3.675–696, Ovid's medieval reception may have interpreted Anna's trick as an attempt to ward off the rape of a virgin bride; instead of seeking to cajole Minerva, a young virgin goddess who categorically rejects sex, Anna would have taken her place to foil Mars' lustful interest on her⁹. Certainly, a possible role of Anna Perenna as a patron of women's free will is developed in both 'De vetula' and Boccaccio's *novella*, where the bed trick is employed either for self-indulgence or for preventing rape and punishing sexual harassment. Thus, in these two later works the trick retains many characteristics already found in Ovid's account, offering alternative perspectives upon power structures, as well as the image and position of women in a patriarchal society.

Along with pursuing medieval echoes of 'Fasti's' Anna's last narrative, a secondary thread of this article is how medieval narratives adapted Ovid's model, with reference to the figure of the widow within the traditional division of women's stages of life in the Middle Ages. It is not by chance that widows well befit the role of the aged Anna and often re-enact her bed trick in medieval narratives, since widowhood particularly stands out as an ambiguous social category¹⁰, usually rendered as endowed with a significant amount of power and independence.

Virgin into vetula

The pseudo-Ovidian poetic narrative 'De vetula' (On the Old Woman), composed in France at some point in the thirteenth century¹¹, introduces itself as Ovid's last work, an autobiographical poem unearthed on the shore of the Black Sea, in a tomb with an epitaph engraved on it which reads 'here lies Ovid, the most gifted of poets'¹² (*Hic iacet Ovidius ingeniosissimus poetarum*). Presented with this fictitious discovery, medieval readers were supposed to be ready to continue the poet's life story from the point where it was left in his works of exile, and cognisant of the legend of the pernicious *carmen* which caused Ovid's banishment, often identified as the *Ars Amatoria*.¹³ The guilty *carmen* appears coupled with a mistake or fault that Ovid failed to disclose during his lifetime.

of mime in three episodes of frustrated rape in the 'Fasti'; one of this is 'Anna Perenna's frustration of Mars' attempt on the virgin Minerva by substituting her own aged body under the blanket – the same false-bride trick used to foil the lecherous Lysidamus of Plautus' *Casina*.' See *Fantham E. Sexual Comedy in Ovid's 'Fasti': Sources and Motivation // Harvard Studies in Classical Philology. 1983. Vol. 87. P. 185–216. Scholars have established a connection between Anna-Mars-Minerva episode in 'Fasti' and the prior-existing mime by Decimus Laberius, from which remains only few words. On that mime and its fragments, see Panayotakis C. Decimus Laberius: The Fragments. Cambridge, 2010. P. 115–119. For the influence of the Roman stage and, in particular, mime on Ovid's works, see Wiseman T.P. Ovid and the Stage // Unwritten Rome / ed. T.P. Wiseman. Exeter, 2008. P. 210–230.*

¹⁰. According to *Mirror*, medieval attitudes towards widowhood range from regarding it a state that freed widows to act on the wanton, whorish, and unprincipled tendencies ascribed to women in general by misogynistic writers, to praise widows for their renewed potential for achieve special grace. In fact, widows qualified to devote themselves to God in a way they could not as married women. And, freed from carnal cares, they could almost approach virgins in holy status. *Mirror L. Upon my husband's death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe. Ann Arbor, 1992. P. 1.*

¹¹. Traditionally dated around 1250, *De vetula's* composition must fall between 1222 and 1268. See *Hexter R. Ovid in the Middle Ages: Exile, Mythographer, Lover // Brill's. Companion to Ovid / ed. B. Boyd. Leiden, 2002. P. 439 n59.*

¹². Latin citations from *The Pseudo-Ovidian De Vetula / ed. D.M. Robathan. Amsterdam, 1968. The translations are mine.*

¹³. *Tristia* 5.12.67–8. See also *Ex Pontio* 2.9.75–6. Goldschmidt observes that *Tristia* became the master text for medieval Ovidian biofiction. *Goldschmidt N. Afterlives of the Roman Poets: Biofiction and the Reception of Latin Poetry. Cambridge, 2019. P. 33.*

In 'De vetula', however, Ovid's famous mistake turns out to be the use of the services of a mischievous old procuress.

The story, delivered through a narrator adopting Ovid's voice, is arranged into three parts. As we are told in its verse preface, the first book tells the days of 'Ovid's' youth, when he was devoted to amusements and love affairs (*quando vacabat amori*); the second book addresses how he changed his ways (*quare mutavit*). The anonymous old woman, from whom the poem gets its title, carries the honour of being the catalyst for the poet's metamorphosis (*pro qua fuerat mutatio facta*). Later in Book Two, we learn that the *vetula* was a go-between hired by 'Ovid' to help him seduce a young lady. Instead of doing that, she ultimately spoils all his erotic fantasies about young girls, leading him to the renunciation of worldly pleasures and the embrace of celibacy. Finally, the third book explains in what manner the poet lived afterwards (*et quomodo postea vixit*). As we shall find out later, this transformation led the former poet of love to become entirely devoted to philosophical studies and the sciences, especially astral sciences. Having become a sober scholar, Ovid predicts the birth of Christ from an extraordinary conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter and becomes convinced of the truths of Christian faith.¹⁴

'De vetula' not only brought Ovid back from the grave in a medieval fashion, but also drove Anna Perenna into the medieval chamber. Considering that the text is explicit that the poet's beloved is a beautiful virgin *puella*, and that the *vetula* apparently tricked him into having sex with her, the Mars-Minerva-Anna triangle is renewed in this pseudo-Ovidian work. In the best style of the bed trick played on Mars by the aged Anna in 'Fasti', the *vetula*, who is described as a revolting hag, manages to secretly take the place of 'Ovid's' true love. The presence of this device, among other thematic parallels and resonances, suggests that 'De vetula' should be read and interpreted in dialogue with 'Fasti's' last vignette about Anna Perenna.

Book Two tells how 'Ovid' has become infatuated with his neighbour's virginal daughter, whose beauty he describes in sensuous detail. However, there are many obstacles to be overcome in the fulfilment of his desires, especially the tight control exerted

14. According to Fritsen, the scholarly value of Ovid's 'Fasti' in the Middle Ages lied in its adscription to the didactic genre of astronomical poetry. The presence of zodiacal compositions in 'Fasti' manuscripts suggests that Ovid could impart erudition regarding star lore and, in this regard, his calendar poem presented a model to emulate. *Fritsen A. Antiquarian Voices. The Roman Academy and the Commentary Tradition on Ovid's 'Fasti'*. Columbus, 2015. P. 9. This adscription of the 'Fasti' is suggestive since the Pseudo-Ovidian poet of *De vetula* highlights the astronomical knowledge of Ovid, who is credited with the astronomical prediction of the birth of Jesus (DV 3.613–15).

by the *puella*'s parents (DV 2.346–7: *...locus et tempus non concurrere loquendi/ Presertim quia nimirum materque paterque*). For this reason, the poet is compelled to look for the only person capable of breaking into such an impenetrable fortress: a go-between (DV 2.351: *Querenda fuit mediatrix*). The chosen one is an old woman of pitiable appearance, who used to beg for scraps, but who had nevertheless also worked as nurse of the beloved *puella* (*fuerat quondam dilecta sedula nutrix*), making her the perfect candidate for the scheme.

Despite her initial reluctance, the old woman ends up yielding to the many gifts 'Ovid' promises to her. Soon the procuress brings good news to her client, having succeeded in arranging a tryst with the girl, the result, in her words, of a pious deception (*fraude pia*).

The *vetula* will persuade the maiden to wash her hair; and later, under the excuse of combing her hair, she will keep the girl in a chamber far from her mother's purview (*extra maternos thalamos*), so that 'Ovid' can meet her unhampered. The go-between guarantees him that the girl will be there lying naked on the bed (*In lecto nudam invenies*), whereon all the poet must do is seize the opportunity and force her to have sex with him.

When the time has come, after a bumpy walk through the *puella*'s dark and labyrinthine house, 'Ovid' sneaks into the room where his beloved is sleeping. In the darkness, his *explorante manu* sweeps along the bed. Naturally the girl must remain silent, 'Ovid' thinks to himself, silence being appropriate for a modest virgin (DV 2.481: *Virginis artari sic vult pudor et sibi parci*). By contrast, the man must take the lead in bedroom skirmishes of this sort. However, his initial delight is marred upon discovering the old woman lying there next to him. Under the impact of such a great disappointment, the burning torch of love abruptly fades out (DV 2.489: *moritur fax, ignis amoris*).

In his apocryphal biography, the pseudo-Ovidian narrator shares the same fate as Mars in 'Fasti'; he must recognize that he has embraced an old body instead of the younger more attractive one he expected. At first, 'Ovid' is in a state of perplexity, wondering: who could believe that a virgin, who has just fulfilled four Olympiads (DV 2. 493–4: *...quatuor implens nuper olimpiades*) — that is,

she is 16 years old — could have become old so quickly. A rose has never faded in such a short time (DV 2.495: *Numquam tam modico rosa marcuit*).

In 'Fasti' the armed god was torn between shame and anger at the sight of an old dame instead of the virgin he expected (Fast. 3.692: *nunc pudor elusum, nunc subit ira*). Upon discovering the truth, 'Ovid' confesses that his initial intention was to attack the old woman with a dagger. However, concerned about the possibility of causing scandal and tarnishing the *puella's* reputation, he rises from the bed and refrains from taking revenge. This renewed vignette of the bed trick ends up with 'Ovid' bitterly complaining because he cannot find a punishment proportional to the crime of the *vetula*.

In his description of the beloved's substitution, the pseudo-Ovidian narrator resorts to language borrowed from Ovid's own 'Metamorphoses', which is both striking and consistent. 'I have sung of forms changed into new bodies', states 'Ovid', in a clear reference to the two opening lines of the Roman epic of transformations (DV 2.495–97: *In nova formas/ corpora mutatas cecini, mirabiliorque/ Non reperitur ibi mutatio quam fuit ista*). Brought back to life by medieval fiction, the Roman poet has a chance to find out that no change is more amazing than that one he witnessed that night, when, in so short a time and in such mysterious fashion, such a beautiful girl turned into such a disfigured old hag.

Change is the main theme of 'De vetula', hence the importance of Pseudo-Ovid's sexual failure that changes him forever. However, on closer inspection, a specific topic running through this pseudo-Ovidian narrative is the mutability of the body. The body is constantly changing, and this is likely the most amazing metamorphosis to be sung in a poem. 'Ovid' himself cannot escape this fate.¹⁵ However, my focus here is on the meanings of the mutation of virgin into *vetula*.

As Miller has cogently explained, this transformation can be best described as the transition from an enclosed, constrained, and proportionate body to another characterized by its openness and instability.¹⁶ By the same token, the beauty of the virgin's mouth is depicted in terms of smallness and stillness, barely disturbed by moderate smiling (DV 2.290: *Bucca brevis, sola brevitare notanda*), in a stark contrast to the *vetula's* excessively and sono-

15. Pseudo-Ovid's castration is insinuated in *De vetula* 2.6–20. For an analysis of this motif see Miller S.A. *Medieval monstrosity and the female body*. London, 2010. P. 14–19. The report of Ovid's castration as punishment for his sins appears to have enjoyed certain credibility between medieval intellectuals, since it was reproduced in Jean Le Fèvre's *Book of Gladness*. Le Fèvre, who also translated the Latin text of *De vetula*, was probably the source Christine de Pizan had in mind when writing in *City of Ladies*: '[Ovid] body was given over to all kinds of worldliness and vices of the flesh: he had affairs with many women, since he had no sense of moderation and showed no loyalty to any particular one. Throughout his youth, he behaved like this only to end up with the reward he richly deserved: he lost not only his good name and possessions, but even some parts of his body! [...] So finally he was castrated and deprived of his organs because of his immorality'. It seems that the legend may be rooted in medieval reception of Ovid's actual interest on the figure of the eunuch, as it may be seen, for instance, in *Fasti* 4.223–46, when the poet addresses the Roman cults of Cybele. In this regard, Sharrock notes Ovid's own curiosity about the fact that Cybele cults were celebrated by 'virile Romans', within a 'manly culture' that, nevertheless, worships 'a goddess whose priests are eunuchs'. The answer is the myth of Attis, 'a Phrygian boy loved 'chastely' by the goddess Cybele. He promised to remain a virgin, but broke his promise with a nymph, whom Cybele killed in vengeance. Attis castrated himself, in remorse for his broken pledge and the death of his beloved'. See Sharrock A. *Gender and sexuality // The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* / ed. P. Hardie. Cambridge, 2003. P. 103.

16. Miller S.A. *Medieval monstrosity and the female body...* P. 3.

rously opened mouth in laughter. It is interesting to note that laughter appears as a particular attribute of the aged women in 'De vetula' which is in line with Anna Perenna's laughter in 'Fasti'.

The aged *puella*'s laughter

Like the unnarrated aftermath of Anna Perenna's trick on Mars, 'De vetula' is elusive regarding the details of Ovid's fateful encounter with the old procuress. We are not informed about any motivation behind the go-between's treachery. Therefore, we can only surmise as to whether she was moved by willingness to defend the virgin from rape (perhaps with her complicity, as will be hinted later) or by no other reason than to indulge her own pleasure at having a man of her choice lie next to her and submit to her will. Unlike Anna's trick on Mars, however, the *vetula* does not crown her bed trick by laughing at the duped lover.

Anna's laughter is not entirely absent from this pseudo-Ovidian work, as we later find out; though, in an unexpected twist, this time we find the virgin laughing at her suitor's expense. Here lies one of the most significant variants of 'De vetula' compared to Anna's trick in 'Fasti'. 'Ovid' says that the young girl was forced to marry a noble knight and leave the town. However, some twenty years later, the *puella* returns, having become a widow. We learn that they meet again, and 'Ovid' takes the opportunity to clear up some past misunderstandings. The *puella* hints at the possibility of her co-participation in the *vetula*'s scheme or, at least, that she knew about the plan of her former nurse. What is certain is that she disagrees with the version given by the narrator and confesses that she believed that 'Ovid' actually consummated his encounter with the *vetula*.

*Et brevibus verbis ex ordine singula pando.
Subridens dixit, 'memini certe satis horum,
Excepto quod anum te subposuisse putabam'.
Me testante deos quod anum non subposuissem,
'Sed quid' ait «meminisse iuvat modo talia? Numquid
iam sumus ambo senes quasi nec complexibus apti?» (DV 2.572–577)*

[And, in a neat nutshell, I reveal each and every fact to her. She smiled and said, 'I remember it very well, except that I thought you had had sex with the old woman.' By the gods I solemnly swore that I had not had intercourse with the old woman. Anyhow, she replied, what is the point of remembering those things now? Are not we both old enough for tender and playful embraces?']

Despite her words, 'Ovid' soon notices that the aged *puella* — as Miller deliberately and ambiguously brands her — has reappeared very much disposed to accept his advances. And much of this new courtship recalls the first. Without wasting time, he goes in search of another go-between. Though this time we are not informed whether the chosen one is old or not; all we know is that she is a 'faithful mediator' (*mediatrix fidelis*) and a maid servant (*ancilla*). This procuress arranges their new rendezvous and once again we attend to a darkened chamber scene, although this time the outcome will be different. Ovid walks through the dark room where the widow is waiting for him and willing to receive him. He has learned his lesson, so now shows himself more cautious and takes a moment to verify the identity of the person that lies on the bed.

... *ipsam*
Attrecto manibus, respondent sufficientur
Singula; frons, sedes oculi, nasus, labra, mentum.
Sentio ridentem, ruo totus in oscula. Quid plus?
Nudus suscipior cum mansuetudine multa;
Totus in antiqui delector amoris odore. (DV 2.662–668)

[I feel her with my hands, and everything seems to be in its right place: her forehead, the orbit of her eyes, her nose, lips, and chin. I feel her laughing and my entire body rushes into her mouth. What more can I say? Naked, I am received with much gentleness. I am fully delighted in the fragrance of the old love]

The go-between's bed trick had previously exposed the pseudo-Ovidian narrator to the sudden shifting of the pendulum from virgin to *vetula*, with his subsequent disappointment. At this second chance, however, 'Ovid' enjoys a moment of fullness in the company of his old love. The narrator acknowledges that it is a pleasure

to recall what she was like, despite her older age (DV 2.669–70: *Quod fuerat, meminisse iuvat*). Though marked by life — ‘Ovid’ especially alludes to marks of sexuality and childbearing (*post tot partus*) —, the aged *puella* still demonstrates how fine she was in her prime. The enchantment is nevertheless temporary. Shortly afterwards, the poet becomes aware of his own old age when hearing what people say about him: ‘See the foolish old man now’ (DV 728: *Vetulus iam desipit iste*). This way, ‘Ovid’ recognizes himself as *vetulus*. This moment of self-recognition makes him realize that ageing is an irreversible metamorphosis taking place over the course of time. But now his own pleasure with the widow is torturing him. The poet becomes increasingly anxious to keep intact the image of the one who, in his heart, should remain forever young. The victory came but too late, laments ‘Ovid’ sunk in reveries, while frantically questioning what Fortuna gave him and what chance has taken away (DV 2.681: *quid fortuna michi dedit et quid casus ademit*). Finally, he resolves to renounce his relationship with the widow, cursing the swift and inexorable approach of old age as the worst disease (DV 2.708: *Pessimus, irretinebiliter ruitura senectus*).

Whatever happens next, the pseudo-Ovidian account of his eagerly pursued and so much coveted union with his old love is described with feeling and tenderness.

The intercourse is described in a way that emphasizes its reciprocity (*unum venimus in lectum*) and peaceful nature (*cum pace receptus eram*). Most importantly for the subject at hand, Ovid tells us that the widow laughed. The gaping laughing mouth is a hallmark of the *vetula*’s body, though unbecoming to the *puella*’s portrait, according to Ovidian aesthetic criteria previously exposed in the poem. Yet, unlike her younger days, now the poet’s beloved can afford to emit such a triumphant chuckle. And he cannot help but feel pleased when rushing into her mouth.

‘Ovid’ must recognize that things have changed so much since his last failed attempt. The once silent object of his lust now expresses her amorous interest, takes the initiative in an act of consensual intercourse. Her laughter is an indicator for this change. Regardless of his later repentance, Pseudo-Ovid’s reencounter with his aged beloved reimagines women’s corporeality

and laughter also serves this end. If earlier he had praised the perfect virgin body, whose beauty consisted in its containment, stillness, and proper boundaries, consummating the long-awaited encounter will bring him to the realization that the virgin was becoming the *vetula* from the very beginning.

'Ovid' finds in old age the antidote to erotic love; it is ultimately the cause for which he ends up eschewing his life of love forevermore. 'De vetula's Book Two is often read in parallel with *Remedia Amoris*, as it dramatizes the cure for lovesickness prescribed by the *praeceptor*, consisting of turning the beloved's attractions into defects or possibly worse. In this regard, Miller points out that the *vetula* extinguishes love simply by revealing her true nature, in a manner similar to those women in *Remedia amoris* (vv. 347–50) that must be caught unarmed (*inermen*), not wearing any makeup or jewellery, to discourage repentant lovers.¹⁷ The female body stripped of its *ars* is also, in Ovidian terms, beyond the reach of artful concealment, graces of style and poetic embellishment. Eventually, women's true nature distresses the pseudo-Ovidian narrator, as he senses the sinister presence of the old woman lurking within beautiful young female bodies; they will inevitably become open, messy, leaky and transgressive. In this vein, female laughter appears loaded with monstrous connotations.

In Miller's view, the gaping female mouth, often coupled with ravenous sexual desires, discloses the alien nature and monstrous features of the female body.

Likewise, raucous female laughter entails the feared monster-evoking violation of boundaries.¹⁸ I would like to suggest, however, that the aged *puella's* laughter imprints a peculiar ambivalence upon the female transgressive body, obviating a purely negative interpretation. Rather, her laughter, which entices Ovid into a passionate kissing (*ruo totus in oscula*), should be seen as an indicator of the profound instability of such boundaries, allowing alternative viewpoints to emerge.¹⁹

As nostalgia over lost youth soon seizes 'Ovid', the *topos* of the ageing lover enables us to reassess his previous picture of the desirable female body: in reality, it has always been opened

17. Op. cit. P. 36.

18. The concept of monstrosity and its perturbing openness is central in Miller's approach to this pseudo-Ovidian narrative. The monster, which in itself is a mixture of contradictory things, troubles boundaries such as those between humans and animals, but also hierarchically organized categories, such as social categories based on class, age or gender, or the margins defining self-same, autonomous individuality. On the relationship between the concepts of openness and monstrosity, also see Shildrick M. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London, 2002. According to Shildrick, the fear of the monster in the Western imaginary is linked to the cultural contempt for fragility and vulnerability of subjectivity: the monster undermines the idea of self-sufficiency, exposing the confusion of form and the lack of singularity as the condition of all. That is why the openness is one chief feature of the monster. The openness and vulnerability of the human is what Western discourse has insisted in covering over by shaping idealized, proportionated, self-contained, and stable bodies and identities. Yet the monster is always lurking this facade, ready to traverse their tenuous boundaries, and recall us that, at the end, the monsters are us.

19. The openness of laughter can have positive instead of negative connotations when emphasizing ambivalence, hybridity, and semiotic multivalence over the concept of monstrosity in Western discourse. In his study of carnivalesque forms in literature, Bakhtin underscores the importance of the body's orifices in what he calls grotesque realism. Instead of being concealed, the mouth, the anus, the nose, the ears, the phallus, and the vagina are stressed and exaggerated, as points at which the body opens out to the world and to other persons. Bakhtin places the 'the grotesque body' at the core of a realistic representation since, in stark contrast to the idealized body, 'is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually being built,

and unfinished, for bodily life must be understood as an ongoing event, always in motion and transcending its limits. The widow's aroused laughter can be interpreted as a joyful assertion of this ostensible sense of greater bodily truth. The widow's laughter also transmutes the fulfilment of Pseudo-Ovid's desires from mere poetic fantasy to a living paradox. He has finally embraced the body long desired, albeit late, and embraces a body whose boundaries have become permeable and mobile; a body informed by deep ambivalence: an aged *puella*, a widowed virgin, a mixture of a young and an old woman.

In this way, both by blurring boundaries and underwriting a femininity endowed with special power, the aged *puella*'s laughter leads us close to Ovid's portrait of Anna Perenna in 'Fasti', while asserting the paradox that the virgin is the *vetula* and vice versa.

Thus, distinctions and boundaries between women set by age, especially those conceived in relation to their marital status and bodily circumstances, become blurred and exposed as artificial. Gendered structures defining roles, power relations and hierarchies are likewise disturbed as the former rapist becomes submissive and overwhelmed by the grotesque femininity of the widow. And, unlike Pseudo-Ovid's first failed attempt, when the *vetula*'s body caused horror in him, this second chance proves that monstrosity also has its charm and may be a delightful, though ungovernable, source of pleasure.

It is not by accident that, while the virgin's body appears as a passive object of the narrator's desire, framed by the eroticized violence to which the female body is culturally submitted, the *vetula*'s body is beyond control and manages to trouble the patriarchal power structure that allows sexual violence against women. In this respect, the pseudo-Ovidian poet behind 'De vetula' stays true to the original essence of Anna Perenna's bed trick in 'Fasti': on her own initiative, an old woman took the place of a virgin twenty years ago, which prevented her from being raped; now, having herself become an old woman, the former virgin willingly decides to be with 'Ovid'. What should be underlined is that within the logic of this device the old woman *must* take the virgin's place — the position of victim or sexual object — to trigger an unexpected

created, and builds and creates another body'. Bakhtin M. Rabelais and his world. Bloomington, 1984. P. 317. Likewise, the grotesque body becomes central to carnivalesque literature's ability to upset socio-political hierarchies and to enable a new view of the prevailing social order.

feminine agency. Thus, what started out as a snare set to catch a woman became a space of female self-indulgence at the expense of the rapist. If the motivations behind the old go-between's trick were only inferable from some textual clues, the aged *puella*'s laughter clarifies the message. Her laughter is the assertion of her control over both her body and the man shedrew to her side.

Nevertheless, consideration of the social context of '*De vetula*'s composition enables us to better understand why it is not by chance that Anna's laughter reappears precisely at the moment when the *puella* has not only grown older but has also become a widow. Unlike men, ranked according to their class or employment within society, medieval women were often categorized according to the stages of their private lives — virgins, wives, widows, or nuns.²⁰ Women were also ranked in terms of the state of their bodies and in accordance with their connections to men. As a maiden, she was under her father's protection; as a wife, control over her life moved to her husband. However, compared with the sharp-edged limits imposed over these states of medieval women's life, where the female body may be considered male property, widowhood is a particular status whose contours are diffuse.

According to Vasvari, widows can be considered a special class of women in late medieval society; wealthy or moderately well-off widows, especially if they were young, were able to exercise a freedom of choice that was not available to other women.²¹ They were free to remarry or to become devout and embrace chastity. Likewise, though each female state was clearly delineated by social and religious differences, in medieval literature widows often occupy an ambiguous and contested space. Closely indebted to '*De vetula*', the following tale by Boccaccio also presents widows as good candidates to impersonate Anna Perenna.

Do not mess with the widow

A distinctive feature of Ovid's Anna Perenna was her ability to merge and combine different phases and facets of women's life. Anna's bed trick, involving a seesaw pattern swinging from youth to old age, may have given rise to a Protean instability

20. Vasvari L. Why is Doña Endrina a Widow? Traditional Culture and Textuality in the Libro de Buen Amor // Upon my husband's death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe / ed. L. Mirrer. Ann Arbor, 1992. P. 262.

21. Hanawalt B. Widows // The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing / ed. C. Dinshaw, D. Wallace. Cambridge, 2003. P. 58–69.

in the representation of women in Ovid's medieval offspring, which may also have contributed to the representation of alternative perspectives on gender and power structures in medieval literature. 'De vetula' offers an updated version of this ancient motif by appealing to the ambiguous figure of the widow within the contemporary division of women's stages of life. Following the model of this pseudo-biographical work, medieval narratives reworking Anna's bed trick are usually comic tales concerning widows.

A good example of this can be found in Boccaccio's 'Decameron', namely the fourth tale of the Eighth Day told by Emilia, whose narrative scheme strikingly recalls 'De vetula'. In the role of the duped lover this brief *novella* features the provost of Fiesole, elderly in years but lecherous and presumptuous, who was determined to obtain the favours of a widow of gentle birth (*una gentil donna vedova*) named Monna Piccarda, whether she wanted to grant them or not (*o volesse ella o no*). Tired of the importunate and irrepressible demands of such an undesirable suitor, Monna Piccarda comes up with a plan to get rid of him. As Holmes has noted, the widow's plan follows the model of Boccaccio's *novella di beffa* — that is, stories that celebrate the triumph of cleverness and wit, by revolving around a practical joke, subtly planned to take revenge on an offender. In this case, the widow's *beffa* is expressly presented by the narrator in terms of corrective justice.²² Through her storytelling, Emilia stresses the loathsome misbehaviour of the parish priest of Fiesole and, from the very beginning, she justifies the stratagem devised by this highly intelligent widow (*molto savia*), both to punish him and to drive him off, by asserting that she treated the churchman in a manner that he deserves (*sí come egli era degno*).

Monna Piccarda's plan consists in duping the annoying priest into believing she reciprocates his lust and is willing to spend a night with him. Even though here we do not find a go-between as such — the widow arranges both the tryst and the prank — we do find a re-enactment of Anna's bed trick including the customary female body swapping. This time, the widow persuades her maid-servant (*fante*) Ciutazza to take her place in an amorous encounter with the elderly priest. We are told that Ciutazza was not too young

22. Holmes O. Trial by Beffa: Retributive Justice and In-group Formation in Day 8 // *Annali d'italianistica*. 2013. Vol. 31. P. 373.

(*non era... troppo giovane*) and was also fabulously ugly. Bettella has observed that in creating this character Boccaccio drew upon the figure of the old bawd as guardian and servant in 'De vetula'.²³ When writing his tale Boccaccio may well have had in mind the pseudo-Ovidian poem, instead of drawing directly from 'Fasti'. However, via 'De vetula', female characters of this *novella* inherited important features from Ovid's Anna, the mischievous old woman placed at the beginning of this intertextual chain of references, borrowings, and reworkings.

One important innovation introduced by Boccaccio is its exceedingly detailed description of Ciutazza with an emphasis on her extraordinary ugliness — in line with the *topos* of the *vituperatio vetulae*, which is often described in terms of a violent execration against elderly women who are depicted with repellent detail.²⁴ We are given a lavish list of her revolting traits, among which her crooked mouth (*la bocca torta*), with great thick lips and black rotten teeth, stands out. It should be noted, as well, that this hyperbolic description appears just before the sexual encounter the widow has secretly arranged between the maidservant and the provost.

This narrative structure is used to heighten the subsequent dishonour and disappointment of the vain churchman.²⁵ Furthermore, the duped lover is firmly convinced he had had intercourse with Monna Piccarda, and just realizes *post factum* that he had spent the night accompanied by the unsightly maid. All these elements give rawness to the plot, adding a degree of specificity and concreteness that were missing in the previous versions of the bed trick. Likewise, the transgressiveness associated with the bed trick (which was already suggested by Ovid in 'Fasti' and later exploited by the pseudo-Ovidian poet of 'De vetula') become much more explicit in Boccaccio's *novella*. Now the trick reappears clearly weaponized, both as form of self-defence a woman employs against sexual harassment, and as a trap set by a woman to get the man she wants.

Scholars generally agree in recognising the widow's relative independence to choose for herself, as well as her intelligence in ridding herself of an unwanted suitor while mocking his tyrannical

23. Bettella P. *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*. Toronto, 2005. P. 199.

24. Op. cit. P. 26. See also *Alfie F. Yes... But Was It Funny?* Cecco Angiolieri, Rustico Filippi, and Giovanni Boccaccio // *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* / ed. A. Classen. Berlin, 2010. P. 370.

25. Brown K.A. *Monna Piccarda, Ciutazza, and the Provost of Fiesole: An Absence of Beauty (VIII. 4) // The Decameron Eighth Day in Perspective* / ed. W. Robins. Toronto, 2020. P. 92.

desires. The role played by Ciutazza appears to be more contentious though. In this regard, some critical views concerning Boccaccio's *novella* might persuade the reader to temper an excessively pro-women interpretation, whether considering the strident caricature of Ciacuzza as grotesque, cruel and demeaning²⁶ or the fact that, in order to attain her goals, Monna Piccarda must soil the reputation of Ciutazza, 'making a woman's triumph from the degradation of the other women.'²⁷ On this matter, however, my view is closer to that of Brown²⁸ who has rightly observed that the narration gives hints at the various ways Ciutazza profits from her exchange with her mistress.

There is a clear complicity between the widow and her maid-servant, expressed in a formal agreement and a transaction behind the provost's back. Ciutazza is to be rewarded with a new smock (*camiscia*) for her services — which brings to mind the clothes and other textile gifts Pseudo-Ovid offers the *vetula* to convince her of serving as go-between for him and his virginal neighbour. And, most importantly, as Brown points out, Ciutazza is also the satisfied recipient of the sexual encounter so longed-for by the lecherous churchman.²⁹

The provost and the maidservant thus re-enact the roles of Pseudo-Ovid and the *vetula*, who in turn re-enacted the roles of the dreadful Mars and the aged Anna. As in 'De *vetula*', the encounter takes place in a darkened room, but now we are clearly told that the provost held Ciutazza in his arms (*si recò in braccio la Ciutazza*) and disported himself with her thinking he was taking possession of the prize he has so long coveted (*beni lungamente desiderati*).

We are also told that the old maid returned the compliment (*cominciolla a basciare senza dir parola, e la Ciutazza lui*). While the woman is mistaken by the suitor who cannot tell the difference in the dark, the intercourse is otherwise completely consensual on her part. It may be said that, in collusion with Monna Piccarda, Ciutazza manages to bring to completion the subversive potential suggested early in Anna Perenna's bed trick. Ciutazza retraces Anna's role as trickster who turns a man's infatuation and aggressive lust into an occasion of self-indulgence, while demonstrating

26. Baratto M. *Realtà e stile nel 'Decameron'*. Rome, 1993. P. 398.

27. Migiel M. *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*. Toronto, 2003. P. 59.

28. Brown K.A. *Monna Piccarda, Ciutazza, and the Provost of Fiesole...* P. 92.

29. *Op. cit.* P. 93.

both control over herself and the unwary man lying with her. At the same time, Monna Piccarda takes up Anna's role as patron of women's free will, since she defends her own right to make decisions over her body, categorically rejecting harassment by an overzealous suitor without exploiting or degrading her maid-servant in the process.

As noted above, Emilia, the narrator, presents her tale as one of retaliation by announcing that the widow treated the provost in accordance with his deserts. This significant innovation introduced in Boccaccio's *novella* deserves further consideration. In fact, the disappointment of the provost occurs in a much more embarrassing fashion than in its precedents and acquires the form of an exemplary punishment. This can be seen in stark contrast to Pseudo-Ovid's ambiguity on the motivations behind the *vetula's* bed trick — a characteristic already present in Ovid's 'Fasti'. The autobiographical narrator of 'De vetula' is also ambivalent when referring to his own relish amid his intercourse with the aged *puella*, which he only repents later. On the contrary, the provost of Fiesole just needs to discover the truth to instantly regret his outrageous conduct. Furthermore, the provost's shame is exposed publicly. Emilia describes how Monna Piccarda's brothers break into the room where the priest is lying with Ciutazza in his arms (*gli fu mostrato il Proposto con la Ciutazza in braccio*), causing him to be found by the local bishop. In addition to being severely reprimanded by his bishop, the humiliated provost becomes the laughingstock of the children who taunts him by reminding him of his intercourse with Ciutazza. Thus, the lecherous churchman 'gets what he deserved' and so does Ciutazza, who is duly rewarded with a fine new smock.

The provost of Fiesole did learn his lesson, though it was learnt too late: he should never have 'messed with the widow'. However, an important issue is to what extent widowhood grants Monna Piccarda a special power that should be feared greatly. According to Vasvari³⁰, widowhood constituted a category of relatively enviable legal, economic, and sexual independence compared to that of other medieval women, and hence one of potential threat to the patriarchal social order. In this regard, Boccaccio's *novella* shows Monna

30. Vasvari L. Why is Doña Endrina a Widow? P. 262.

Piccarda boasting about her sexual independence when, feigning interest in his advances, she communicates to the priest her decision to sleep with him whenever he pleases. For, as she herself states, she has no husband to whom she must give an account of her nights (*io non ho marito a cui mi convenga render ragione delle notti*).

While male fear of unbridled 'vidual' sexuality inspired much medieval antifeminist literature, where widow's wit is often depicted under a negative light, Boccaccio painted an amiable picture of a cunning medieval widow. She is praised for her ability to retain her *onestà*, that is, her virtue, but also seems to stand out for her keen sense of justice. In this regard, it should be noted that the bishop praises Piccarda and her brothers for having employed such a stratagem against the sinner priest. This authority figure seems to agree with the narrator that the provost was treated in the manner he deserved (*lui sí come egli era degno avean trattato*).

However, the bishop does not celebrate under any circumstances the widow's right to refuse the advances of an unwanted suitor. Rather, coming from him, feminine justice, and the feminine principle of revenge promoted by the widow are reduced to mere 'semblance of justice', as Holmes suggests.³¹ In reality, the bishop emphasizes that the viciousness was chastened without shedding ecclesiastical blood (*senza volersi del sangue de' preti*) and, thereby, celebrates a good compromise reached between honourable men.

Society, nonetheless, remains the same, without an actual change in the status of women as object of harassment or ill-treatment, and without removing the advantages that priests enjoyed and which allowed such abuses.

Despite the relative privilege of widowhood, Boccaccio's *novella* makes it clear that Monna Piccarda does not have complete independence. Notwithstanding her gentle birth, she is not economically independent (*la piú agiata donna del mondo non era*) and lives in a modest house (*una casa non troppo grande*) together with her two brothers. And, as she herself recognizes, she needs to have the approval of them to put her revenge in motion. In this regard, some scholars have observed that the widow's independence is constrained³² or even absent from the *novella*³³, since Piccarda ultimately must play by the rules and within the hierarchy of power

31. Holmes O. Trial by Beffa... P. 373.

32. Op. cit. P. 374.

33. Migiel M. A Rhetoric of the Decameron... P. 224.

of a masculinist society; after all, her stratagem cannot be spared of male acquiescence to be socially acceptable, as the unavoidable assistance of her brothers and the bishop's last words concur.

It appears clear that, to carry out her revenge, Boccaccio's widow cannot completely disregard male tutelage and surveillance. However, it should not be forgotten that Monna Piccarda not only concocts the plan on her own, but she directs both Ciutazza and her brothers to put the plan into effect. Even though it must bypass the traditional male gatekeepers to be socially accepted, the trick itself remains a women's issue. Moreover, in Boccaccio's *novella* the motif of the bed trick persists in opening a private space of female sovereignty somehow at odds with the outside. Female agency is exerted in the darkened chamber as though it were a world apart, troubling a social system that reduces women to objects, which somewhat conserves the memory of Ovid's early picture of Anna's trick allowing other rules of social interaction in the context of the goddess' festival.

As can be seen in all these examples, the influence of Anna Perenna's last vignette in 'Fasti' can be traced in medieval literature. In both Pseudo-Ovid's 'De vetula' and Boccaccio's *novella*, female characters take on many of the characteristics of Ovid's aged Anna.

At the same time, these medieval narratives rework the motif of the bed trick by harnessing the peculiar social situation of the partially independent medieval widow. These medieval versions of Anna's bed trick can still be understood as a form of resistance to social rules, while offering alternative perspectives upon power structures of medieval patriarchal society.

The extent to which medieval widows and single women could trouble a social system that reduced women to objects has been a recurrent subject of discussion in the few past decades.

In parallel with that, another recurring theme is the special articulation of agency and subjectivity that generally accompanied the literary portrait of medieval widows, as various as Chaucer's Criseyde or Doña Endrina from the *Libro de Buen Amor* by the Castilian writer Juan Ruiz; these characters feature in narratives largely linked to the Ovidian old woman and in which the figure

of the go-between plays a major role. Although a host of critics have already pointed out the disturbance linked to the relative autonomy shown by such widows, who act within a social backdrop which assumes women to be men's property, what has yet to be explored fully are the ways in which these medieval works could have seized the model of Anna Perenna's last narrative in 'Fasti'.

The group of works called by Garbáty 'the *Pamphilus* tradition' deserve further analysis in this vein³⁴. Drawing on the twelfth century Ovidian Latin comedy *Pamphilus de amore*, these works revolve around the trickery of an unscrupulous intermediary who assists a lovelorn man, typically leading to the rape and sexual assault of the wooed woman, usually a young and attractive widow. Such a pattern connects works as diverse as Juan Ruiz's *Libro* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. To some extent, the pattern underlying these works can be interpreted as a variation on Anna's last narrative in 'Fasti', reached by wondering what would have happened had Anna not betrayed Mars but Minerva. However, this inquiry will be the matter of a future article on the unnoticed presence of Ovid's aged Anna in medieval literatures.

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