Guillemette Bolens' intriguingly titled *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* is a revised version of her 2008 monograph *Le style des gestes: Corporéité et kinésie dans le récit littéraire*. The approach she proposes is refreshingly contemporary, placing medieval works in dialogue with later literature and also at the cutting edge of theoretical developments in the humanities. In short, the book examines the phenomenon of "kinesic intelligence" and, more particularly, the value of such intelligence in understanding literary works. Bolens bases her definition of "kinesic intelligence" on Ellen Spolsky's work, in which the phrase designates "the human capacity to discern and interpret body movements, body postures, gestures, and facial expressions in real situations as well as in our reception of visual art" (1). The basis of Bolens's readings of literary texts is "kinesic empathy," or the fact that, while we cannot experience another's physical sensations, we can imagine what they feel like based on our own experience. She blends insights from neurobiology, imaging, cognitive science, phenomenology, and the field of action comprehension with literary analysis in order to create a new way of reading texts that makes the narrated body and its movements central.

*The Style of Gestures* comprises four chapters, an introduction, and a brief conclusion. The first chapter, "The Body in Literature," tackles one of literature's more challenging texts, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. She uses the medieval concept of interlace to analyze the repetition of the words "teeth" and "hand" throughout the novel, arguing that these words pass from one body to another in such a way that they constitute bodies themselves as mutual and always in process. This approach allows Bolens to connect widely-separated incidents and weave a path through the text's unconventional narrative. The second chapter focuses on one episode from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the Middle English poem *Patience*, and the trope of Arthur as a breast-feeding king in Layamon's *Brut*. Bolens connects these somewhat widely-dispersed texts on the basis of their treatment of the body and figurality, especially as this is expressed through
Eucharistic discourse. Her main point is that all these texts trouble the boundaries of the literal and the figurative, rendering any strict dichotomy between the two impossible to sustain. The Tortgyth and Ethelburga episode in Bede's *Historia* is treated rather more briefly here than are the other works, occupying only one and a half pages of the chapter, which does necessitate a rather generalized approach. Bolens describes the *Historia* as a "series of ideological stories that present the body as a force to be tamed and dominated by means of privation, self-inflicted mistreatment, and submission to diverse predicaments and illnesses" (70). While this statement is provocative and interesting, it is almost impossible to do justice to such a broad claim in this restricted number of pages, and the reader is left wishing to hear more about Bede's treatment of the body and its relationship to contemporary models. In addition, the reader might be desirous of a little more direction as to why these three texts in particular, of the many others that could have been considered, are combined.

I found Chapter 3, "Verecundia and Social Wounding in the Legend of Lucrece" to be the most compelling of the four. Bolens reads the legend as it is successively presented by Livy, Ovid, Augustine, Gower, Chaucer and Shakespeare, and argues that *vergogne*, or shame, causes Lucrece to constrain her kinesic communication in what represents an agential act. This chapter has a tight focus despite its wide temporal reach, and Bolens's readings are sensitive and interesting. The final chapter analyzes Gawain of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* through the concept of "facework," or the effort required to make one's actions and face consistent. Although *Gawain and the Green Knight* is perhaps too obvious a choice for a study of gesture, which has already received extensive attention in this work, Bolens's approach to courtesy as "efficacious facework" provides a novel way to understand chivalry as an embodied practice. As with almost any consideration of this text, the weight of previous scholarship is difficult to carry, however.

In her conclusion Bolens considers the work of Jacques Tati, a twentieth-century French film-maker, as a way of reminding the reader that "[e]ach artistic medium, whether it be painting, film, text, or choreography, has its proper way of pushing the addressee to exploit her kinetic intelligence" (179). Bolens is a fine interpreter of visual media, and her analyses of painting and film are highlights of the book. Her reading in the introduction of the portrait of Auguste-Gabriel Godefroy by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, for example, insightfully demonstrates kinetic intelligence in action, as it is the reader's embodied knowledge of the gesture required in order to set a top spinning that allows him or her to unlock the meaning of the painting. Her points here are quite riveting, and perfectly enact the dynamic mode of reading that the volume as a whole proposes, in which the reader is the fulcrum that realizes the delicate balance between represented movement and narrative movement. That Bolens's analysis of Chardin's painting is so saturated with meaning, however, leads to a problem common in monographs, in which the best and most condensed example is often saved for the introduction. On one hand the fittingness of the method to Chardin's painting is advantageous, since it sets up Bolens's entire approach, but it simultaneously establishes a standard for the subsequent readings that is difficult to recapture. This opens on to a broader point about the nature of kinetic readings in general, which seem to
be most suited to the visual arts and to certain genres of literary texts, particularly those which are non-realist or what might be described as laconic in their explanation of character motivation. That the bulk of Bolens's volume is dedicated to medieval works is thus appropriate, as is her inclusion of *Ulysses*. The wide chronological and generic range of the primary texts is bold, and one of the merits of the book, but it is also difficult to manage. Bolens is not attempting a history of kinetic intelligence in literature, and yet some rationale is required for why the volume begins with one of the latest works examined, and why the bulk of the work concentrates on medieval texts in particular.

Important to this mode of reading is that it works outward from the body, attempting to resist "the body's liability to be reduced either to its organicity or to disembodied abstractions" (9). Or, to put that another way, Bolens's readings work against the tendency to treat the body either as inertly subject to consciousness or as symbolic of other concepts and categories. This, combined with Bolens's particular theoretical assemblage, would seem to place her work in direct dialogue with the emerging fields of new materialism, animal studies, thing theory, and object oriented ontology. All of these, in various ways, trouble the binaries of mind-body and culture-nature that underpin the definition of the human. For this reason I was surprised that Bolens's book does not robustly engage these discourses, not mentioning the seminal work of Elizabeth Grosz, for instance, until page 51 at the opening of her first chapter. It is not necessarily that Bolens need use all the work comprising these fields, as indeed they contain major points of disagreement. The reader does wish to know, though, how exactly her analysis sits in relation to studies in these disciplines, and where and why she diverges from them. Given that feminism has driven much of the work in new materialism, engaging with this field in particular would seem especially important to Bolens's analyses of gender, such as her comments on the breast-feeding Arthur of Layamon's *Brut* in Chapter 2, her analysis of shame and decency in the legend of Lucrece in Chapter 3, and even her reading of Gawain's seduction by the lady of the castle in Chapter 4.

*The Style of Gestures* is an innovative and pioneering work. Its combination of medieval and modern texts is admirable, as is its wide-ranging use of theory. If there is uneven-ness in the execution of the argument, no doubt this is due largely to the scope of the work undertaken, a scope which places medieval texts in the middle of an important conversation about the body.