

SEX, VIOLENCE, AND THE LAW IN JOHN GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

by

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(Under the Direction of Andrew Cole)

ABSTRACT

Sexual relationships between men and women in the Middle Ages were fraught with problematical theological, social, and legalistic implications throughout the Middle Ages. This paper examines John Gower's use of implied same-sex physical relationships in the *Confessio Amantis* in order to normalize and diminish the immorality of relationships between men and women. I suggest that Genius shows how moral gradations of desire, as imagined in penitential manuals and both natural and secular laws, open up a space where society can, if not permit, at least sanction and normalize transgressive heterosexual desires, which are essentially natural, by comparing them to the always *more* immoral and *more* dangerous possibility of same-sex attractions, which are always unnatural. Finally, I argue that Gower raises same-sex desire from a private to a public concern by linking it to fears regarding destruction of property and general lawlessness that were circulating in fourteenth century England.

INDEX WORDS: Same-sex desire, Sodomy laws, Penitentials, Middle Ages, John Gower, Edward II, Richard II.

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DEDICATION

Most simply, to my mother, for absolutely everything. But as well to Kirk for his love, patience, and support. Also to my brother Steven and my sister Marthe both of whom I love very much. Finally, to Bella who, for better or worse, is always there.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Heterosexuality in the Middle Ages was a confused category. It was, for instance, both natural and unnatural. Fornication, adultery, and incest were acts outside of man's higher, moral nature, which God had endowed with reason to prevent him from reverting to a beastlike state. These same acts were natural, however, so far as the instincts present in all members of the animal world, of which man is a part, motivated them. Yet the Church had a variety of sacramental resources that attempted, although not always successfully, to constrain these desires and sins – namely marriage and penance. For instance, according to the Church, any form of sex outside of marriage was sinful. Yet marital sex, while necessary for reproduction, could itself be spiritually dangerous if performed for the wrong reason -- for example, excessive lust.¹ Specifically, major manuals of penance viewed some reproductive sexual interactions as illicit because such acts went against the positive regulations of the Church.² Such strictures, of course, were man-made and subject to man's flaws, and hence mutable, but most of all, the very assumption of such manuals is that the sexual sins they describe are repeatable, ever ongoing.³ It stands to reason that, for the authors of penitential manuals, the sins themselves were ranked: some sins would be inevitably repeatable and so are, in that respect, venial; those that ought not

to be repeated, or ever committed in the first place, were typically deemed as deadly. Thus emerges what might be fairly called the “penitential spectrum” of sinful desires, moving from bad to worse.

Of course this brief overview is terribly simplified,⁴ but such an utterly vexed notion of heterosexuality, along with the “penitential spectrum,” is taken up by John Gower in his enormous English poem, the *Confessio Amantis*. Genius, the poem’s narrator-priest, presents a series of exempla within a confessional framework in an attempt to educate the penitent Amans on how to restrain his unruly desire for an unnamed lady. Throughout the exempla, Genius offers contradictory moralizations of sins pertaining to love revealing the conflicted ways in which Gower’s society viewed love and desire. Early in the poem, Genius justifies fornication, adultery, and incest as natural human inclinations. By the end, however, not only does he describe such acts as sins against man’s higher reasonable nature, but even sex within marriage is potentially jeopardizing to one’s spiritual and physical health, although not necessarily forbidden.

Yet Gower’s agenda in the *Confessio* is not, in the end, to repress such sexual deviance. Rather he reveals a pragmatic model for dealing with the post-lapsarian state of human nature undoubtedly taken from the ways in which medieval institutions regulated sexual desires. Genius shows, that is, how moral gradations of desire, as imagined in penitential manuals and both natural and secular laws, open up a space where society can sanction and normalize transgressive heterosexual temptations by comparing them to the always *more* immoral and *more* dangerous possibility of same-sex sodomy. While desires between men and women are naturally provoked, and therefore permitted because they are unavoidable, same-sex desires are not naturally occurring and represent an unnecessary break in both a natural and divine order.

Genius, in a surprising maneuver, even facilitates a direct comparison between sins that are sometimes natural and those that are ever unnatural by alluding to same-sex amorous situations through misdirected heterosexual desires, thereby inherently suggesting similarities between the two categories. Unlike any other perverse relationship, though, he never permits completely unnatural affairs to be consummated, and he always punishes them in a drastically violent manner. By examining Genius's consistency regarding the punishment of sexual sins and the violence with which he punishes them we can see hierarchies of immorality begin to emerge and desire begins to become somewhat less confusing a subject.

Unfortunately, Genius's consistency and violence take on an amplified importance when he begins to demonstrate how same-sex attraction, whatever its motivating desire, threatens not merely the health of the private individual but the welfare of the entire state. He reveals this menace by associating such unnatural sodomitical attractions with concerns regarding destruction of property and general lawlessness that were circulating in fourteenth century England. Chroniclers such as Jean Froissart, Thomas Walsingham, and Adam de Usk, contemporaries of Gower purporting to record historical facts and public opinions, all charged both Edward II and Richard II with threatening the stability of England on account of their unnaturally close relationships to their male favorites. These kings were deposed and their favorites, Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, Hugh Despencer the Younger, heir to the Earl of Winchester, and Robert de Vere, Duke of Ireland, were all threatened with assassination, a threat that for the first two men was realized. Genius subtly justifies such violent actions against these contemporary public figures, figures who nevertheless remain unnamed in the *Confessio*, by imagining similarly harsh punishments against his own fictional characters whose intimate unnatural preferences he also links to fears of invasion and chaos. Thus the *Confessio*, on

account of its dual themes of love and politics, becomes a virtual study of the dangers of the politicization of private life in the Middle Ages.

Genius is not merely content, however, with establishing the dangerous place of same-sex sodomy on a spectrum of desire. His goal is not just to punish sins, but, as would any good priest, he wishes to correct them and thus avoid serious retribution altogether. To this end, his reinforcement of laws and customs denigrating same-sex actions on account of misplaced heterosexual desires serves two functions: to persuade and to penalize. Divine laws, their derivative secular extensions, and advisors, who serve as reminders of these laws, such as Genius, provide motivation to turn away from sin to avoid punishment.⁵ Yet all laws are not equally motivational. Genius's punishment of sins accords to the precedents set by medieval secular laws governing sexual behavior, which inevitably provided lighter penalties for sins such as fornication, while reserving the harshest penalties, such as death and/or dismemberment, for same-sex couplings. The more violent threat, usually death, no doubt provides the greater deterrent, and one that is finally, truly prohibitive. The effects of such gradations between sins and their punishments, and how Genius imagines them through interpretations of historical, legal, and political conventions, are what I wish to explore in the *Confessio*.

CHAPTER TWO

Fornication, Adultery, and Incest: The Tales of Tobias and Sara, Mundus and Paulina, and Aruns and Lucrece

The buck, the do, the hert, the hinde,
The madle go with the female (4.1300-01)

The Madle is mad for the female (7.4215)

One of the ways in which we can begin to discover the complexity of the *Confessio*'s sexual politics is to examine how Gower structures his lessons on love throughout the poem. Shortly into the prologue, his eponymous narrator tells us “who that al of wisdom writ / It dulleth ofte a mannes wit,” and so therefore he will write “Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore” (Prol. 13-14 and 19).¹ One of the results of this “middel weie” combining pleasure and knowledge is that from the beginning of his Prologue he offers two possible modes of interpretation with corresponding hierarchical levels of wisdom for his poem. As Alastair Minnis has suggested, Gower “was almost certainly thinking that those pleasure-seekers would read *Confessio Amantis* on a relatively superficial level, whereas the ‘wise’ would go deeper and get much more out of it.”² The less critical, less wise, readers will gain a “superficial” lesson pertaining to love in

general, while the more critical, the wiser readers will gain a more comprehensive understanding of love as it pertains to Christian morality in particular.

We can see these dual levels of interpretation working throughout the *Confessio*, particularly within the tales dealing with erotic desire, and in the way Gower uses his narrator-priest Genius to interpret them.³ In these tales, we see Genius distinguishing between two natural methods of properly satisfying one's fleshly desires: a reasonable heterosexual desire fulfilled within marriage, and an unreasonable, immoral heterosexual desire fulfilled either within or outside of marital bounds. While Genius argues that the first method is moral because it corresponds to the natural reason that God bestowed upon man, man's animal instincts still motivate the second baser level of desire, despite the absence of reason's governance, and are not therefore unnatural. These natural desires often evoke the priest's sympathy. As such, if the reader chooses to follow the higher road, undoubtedly he or she will find many of Genius's interpretations of his exempla problematic; if one follows the lower road, however, the priest's occasionally questionable moralizations are more readily comprehensible. Opposed to either of these levels of nature, however, is an implied third level consisting only of same-sex desires, which are always prohibited as completely unnatural, and thus completely immoral.

Gower must have hoped that, ideally, his readers would take away the more complete moral wisdom that sexual desire is best expressed reasonably and naturally in marriage.⁴ Marriage, Genius says, is "that ilke fest, / Wherof the love is al honeste" (4.2483-4). This ideal is perhaps best exemplified in his tale of "Tobias and Sara" in which he emphasizes the benefits of a desire integrated with and restrained by reason. He describes how Sara loses all of seven husbands who, despite their legally being married to her, die because they have "that ilke fyri rage," an animalistic desire for her that exceeds the level of lust allowed even within marriage

(7.5352). Finally, the angel Raphael teaches her eighth husband Tobias how to be “honeste,” and Genius relates how he “his wille hadde; / For he his lust so goodly ladde, / That bothe lawe and kinde is served” (7.5359 and 5361-63). Genius explains that Sara’s eighth husband succeeds because is willing to control his lust and limit it to the laws of reason and an animal desire:

Bot to the mannes creature
 God yaf him reson forth withal,
 Wherof that he nature schal
 Upon the causes modefie,
 That he schal do no lecheries,
 And yet he schal hise lustes have.
 So ben the lawes bothe save
 And every thing put out of sclandre (7.5376-83).

Genius presents in this tale an actively controlled lust within marriage, just as he might have found in a pastoral handbook such as the *Fasciculus Morum*.⁵ The relationship between Tobias and Sara represents the ideal Christian way to deal with both worldly love and fleshly desire. Yet, at the same time, he acknowledges how truly difficult it is to satisfy desires in the appropriate manner. Even within the safety of marital bounds, there is an extremely fine line between animal and reasonable lust, one that it takes an angel to point out. If not for divine help in the form of Raphael, instead of finally having a happy wedding night, Sara would have had one more corpse on her hands. The priest realizes, though, that most men do not have access to the type of divine aid that Tobias did, and that they are probably not as easily trained. Either they do not learn “lore” as easily as he did, or they are just not as interested. This does not mean that one should not try for moral improvement, but merely that the educative process must be slightly less didactic and the rules less rigidly enforced. As such, Genius’s interpretations of sexual morality are not always so lucidly idealistic.

Much of the time Genius provides less complete, or even lax, moralizations that reflect the ways in which religious and secular English institutions mediated the Church’s strict sexual

laws in the fourteenth century. To begin with, sexual desire was not nearly as exactly regulated as the “Tale of Tobias and Sara” suggests that it should be. Rather, desire was controlled using a relativistic sexual ideology found in the penitential system on which Gower based the *Confessio*’s frame. Penitential handbooks such as the fourteenth-century *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and the *Fasciculus Morum*, just to name two, provided a sliding scale exhibiting different levels of severity for various sexual sins under the heading of “lechery,” such as fornication, adultery, incest, and same-sex sexual behavior, usually listed in the above order, moving from bad to worse. The author of *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, for instance, clearly states that “þe synne of lecherie is departed in many braunches as after þe staates of persones þat doþ it, and euere it clymbeþ vpper and vpper and alwey wors and wors.”⁶ Often, handbooks even subdivide the major branches of the sin. Adultery, for example, was an incredibly complex and varied category; its severity depending upon whether each partner was married, or whether neither was married but one had taken oaths of chastity. Typically, the more vows that were broken, the more penance one had to pay.⁷ Thus, unsurprisingly, plain fornication is the least problematic with other sins increasing in sinfulness depending upon what vows a person has taken, whether they are marital or religious, and/or increasingly close levels of consanguinity between the sinners.⁸

Also typical, however, is the placement of same-sex desire on this scale, which is usually at the farthest point away from rational love within marriage, both structurally and theoretically. According to *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, this desire is “so foule and so hidous þat [it] scholde not be nempned, þat is syne azens kynde.”⁹ This sin is so unnatural and so perverse that it can only be talked about in a coded language of prohibition: it is an “abhomyacioun to speke it.”¹⁰ Inside the confessional one had to at least allude to it, but only so that it might be

condemned. The paradigm that these penitential guidelines creates suggests that while the fulfillment of heterosexual desires outside of marriage may not be ideal, one could go much further outside the boundaries of natural behavior. Thus, on almost all scales of sexual behavior, same-sex desires ultimately serve to diminish the perceived immorality of heterosexual sins by providing an unfavorable point of comparison

This relativist sexuality was not just present in the private penitential spaces of the confessional, but it worked itself into the public day-to-day operations of the Church and state as well. The primary difference, however, was that if the pastoral handbooks broached any sin only to condemn it in some fashion, no matter how limited, in daily practice society actually raised the issue of some heterosexual sins in order to permit them. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this is the stews, or brothels, right outside of London in Southwark, where Gower almost certainly lived while writing the *Confessio*.¹¹ Not only did the London government sanction the stews, but the bishops of Winchester, specifically William of Wykeham during the later half of the fourteenth century, and other ecclesiastical organizations or their administrators, legitimized, owned, and even profited from them.¹² While such places were regulated, the laws governing them, according to Ruth Mazo Karras, were primarily issued for the physical, not spiritual, protection of citizens. In her study of English prostitution, she argues that in London, at least, the secular laws seem “more concerned with preventing crime and preserving public order, and with protecting women who were not prostitutes from sexual advances, than with upholding the morals of the community as a whole.”¹³ While Church courts were concerned with the upkeep of morals, their procedures relied upon compurgation, whereby the accused would prove their innocence based upon the testimony of sometimes as little as three other people, which seems not to have been very effective at preventing illicit sexual liaisons.¹⁴ This is not to say that London,

or even medieval society, thought of sex or love outside of marriage as ideal, but merely that it was an expected result of man's animalistic inclinations that society had to allow in order to prevent worse crimes from happening. Karras reminds us of the frequently quoted Thomist saying, "Remove the sewer and you will fill the palace with ordure; similarly with the bilge from a ship; remove whores from the world and you will fill it with sodomy."¹⁵ As we see reiterated in the theology, laws, and practices of the fourteenth-century society again and again, while it is never good to satisfy illicit desires, it was better to indulge in some than in others.

The ideology that we see in penitential literature and London society is very similar to the logic of man's hierarchical nature that we see Genius using to moralize even the most problematic instances of rape, adultery, and even incest within the *Confessio* as natural. Genius's treatment of sins, however, is less representative of theology, than it is a pragmatic, even realistic interpretation based upon public habits and customs.¹⁶ What we get in the *Confessio*, at the risk of sounding anachronistic, might be Gower's attempt at a sort of medieval realism. Or, even more simply, the inexorable influence of the larger social structures of society on its individual members, including poets. Either way, the end result in the *Confessio* is the normalization of even aberrant heterosexual behavior through Genius's lax punishments for sins falling between the two extremes of reasonably controlled marital relations and same-sex sodomy. While there are numerous examples that could be used to illustrate Genius's theologically incomplete or morally lax interpretations of his tales, I will limit myself to just a few instances that may stand in for the rest.

In the "Tale of Mundus and Paulina" Genius presents the lesson that "To love is every herte fre, / Bot in deceipte if that thou feignest / And therupon thi lust atteignest . . . Thou schalt it afterward repente" (1.752-57). In order to exemplify this, he relates how Duke Mundus

becomes enamored of the pious and chaste Paulina. Enlisting the help of two priests, Mundus counterfeits the god Anubus in order to convince her to sleep with him, thereby causing her to break her marital vows. Mundus goes to Paulina as Anubus and “he, that alle untrowthe meneth, / with blinde tales so hire ladde, / That all his wille of hire he hadde” (1.926-28). When Paulina realizes what has happened, she tells her husband, and they decide to take action against those who tricked her. Because the town’s judges exile Mundus, the tale seems basically to fulfill Genius’s earlier lesson that one should not use trickery to obtain love because it will eventually backfire.

This tale becomes troubling, though, when Genius interprets Mundus’s moral culpability as diminished because he has acted on account of “love,” or what might be less poetically called his animalistic sexual urge. Genius indicates that adultery and rape are lesser crimes by allowing Mundus to keep his life, but having the “wise jugges” order the deaths of the priests, who are guilty of religious hypocrisy for aiding him in his ploy (1.1031). The result is that Mundus is, as noted, merely exiled:

For he with love was bestad,
His dom was noght so harde lad;
For love put reson aweie
And can noght se the righte weie.
And be this cause he was respited,
So that the deth him was acquitted,
Bot for al that he was exiled (7.1049-55).

Mundus, we might observe, escapes the end of Sara’s first seven husbands despite his own unreasonable lust, and despite the fact that he and Paulina were breaking, not consummating, marital vows. Ironically, what in the other tale is a reason for death is here protection against it. Peter Nicholson, however, attempting to exculpate Genius and the concept of moral “love,” argues that “Mundus is not exonerated: his punishment is only relatively less severe, and there is

less sympathy for his passion here than a precise attribution of the nature of his fault.”¹⁷ But the more important point, I think, is that Genius suggests it is *because* the judges attribute his uncontrollable lust to nature that they *can* give Mundus the less severe punishment and allow him to live. Although the duke committed a crime by deceiving a married woman to sleep with him, it was his baser natural instincts overpowering his reason that caused him to do it, “his love put reason aweie.” Genius suggests that Mundus is a sympathetic figure for the judges: after all who has not at least *imagined* having sex with a beautiful woman without considering whether she would consent or not. The answer, Genius implies, is most heterosexual men, because it is in their nature.¹⁸ In a sense, the duke himself is a victim of his own animalistic urges. The judges, then, can be merciful and merely banish him. As Friar Laurence reminds Romeo, it is a benevolent justice that has “turned that black word ‘death’ to ‘banishment.’ This is dear mercy . . .”¹⁹ Mundus’s actions are regrettable, and society punishes him on account of them. But, he could have done worse; he could have acted hypocritically or perhaps committed an even more unnatural crime, and so his actions do not warrant capital punishment.

The wise judges’ refusal to condemn Mundus to death accurately reflects what the English legal system in the later Middle Ages used as a fitting punishment for crimes of this nature. While the two most serious sexual crimes here, adultery and rape, were not tolerated by English society, or the Church for that matter, they were not considered crimes worthy of capital punishment either. Brundage points out that as early as the twelfth century onwards, canonists drew on Roman and ecclesiastical laws to “[warn] cuckolded husbands that they must not slay their adulterous wives, no matter how great the provocation,” and that “if they did so the Church was prepared to punish them as murderers.”²⁰ Instead of giving a husband free reign to wreak his vengeance, the ecclesiastical courts offered the return of one’s wife and penance for the

abductors. As for secular justice, through English statutes passed in 1275, 1285, and again in 1382, husbands had recourse to royal courts to gain monetary compensation or other fiscal punishments for their wives abductors.²¹ Helmholz notes that husbands seemed to prefer the royal courts for obvious reasons.²² Rapists, too, could go free with the mere monetary burden of purchasing a pardon.²³ Neither court, however, viewed the crimes as offenses beyond repent and monetary reparations were, at least officially, sufficient reparations. The judges' refusal to condemn Mundus to death, then, probably would not have seemed particularly unjust or out of the ordinary for Gower's fourteenth-century audiences.

Genius, though, takes more into account than just the official response to the duke's crimes; he also presents Paulina as another side of the equation through which we can see the extent of the damage that Mundus has actually done. Despite Paulina's rape and her initial dismay at her loss of "honeste," her injury is limited (1.974-77). While I do not want to ignore the disastrous consequences of rape, even its effects on a fictional character, Paulina does appear to return to some version of her old life fairly easily, which suggests that the damage that Mundus has done is indeed not beyond repair. Her husband quickly assures her of his continued desire for her:

he hire in hise armes faste
 Uphield, and ofte swor his oth
 That he with hire is nothing wroth,
 For wel he wot sche may ther nocht (1.984-87).

Then, after a few days of being comforted, she is well enough to begin life again, although Genius does admit that she was only "somdiel amended" (1.1003). Her relatively easy reintegration into life (she allows herself to be comforted, she joins with other women to help bring her complaint against Mundus) suggests that as horrible as the experience was it has not

fundamentally changed her or made her an anathema. While she is distraught, Genius gives no suggestion that Mundus has robbed from her the opportunity to enjoy the rest of her life.

Paulina's healthy, reasonable reaction contrasts with the unreasonable response of Lucrece, who in Book Seven finds herself in an almost identical situation. Although Genius presents "The Rape of Lucrece" as an exemplum of chastity, the focus seems to be more on faulting the prince Aruns's chastity, or rather his lack of it, than on praising Lucrece's fanatical defense of hers. After Aruns has raped Lucrece, she waits until she has told her husband and father what has been done to her and then commits suicide. If we have learned anything from Genius's speeches on good counsel and pity that precede this tale, though, it becomes obvious why he is almost silent here as regards to Lucrece's actions: she ignores the good advice of her father and husband "to be stille" (7.5056).²⁴ Seeing how distraught she is

Hire housebonde, a sory man,
Conforteth hire al that he can
And swor, and ek hire fader bothe,
That thei with hire be noight wrothe
Of that is don ayein hire wille ;
And preiden hire to be stille,
For thei to hire have al foryive (7.5051-57).²⁵

Fearing perhaps that she might do something rash, or perhaps just seeing her so disturbed, her husband Collatin and father implore her to calm herself (Genius uses "prieden" here to indicate exhortative advising; cf. 5.3361), and they assure her that she has done nothing wrong.²⁶

Lucrece is in almost the same position as various kings throughout much of Book Seven. Counselors offer her advice, and she is in the position to take action, even if that action is only over the kingdom of her own body.²⁷ Yet, much like an unreasonable king, she not only rejects the wise and sympathetic counsel of her advisors, but she actively thwarts it. Her suicide, in this context, is just as unnatural (with regard to her ability to reason), if not more so, than the rape

itself. Refusing to show pity for herself, or to follow her family's heed to "be stille," she takes a hidden sword from her mantle and "sodeinly," as if afraid someone would attempt to stop her, "thurgh hire herte it throng" (7.5068-69). Her concern with chastity seems almost obsessive as Genius describes how in the throes of death she keeps hold of her clothes so that no one can see even below her knee. Yet, his only response is "Thus lay this wif honestly, / Although she deide woefully," and the shortness of his praise for her in an exemplum of chastity speaks volumes: her actions were not a reasonable or natural reaction to her defilement (7.5075-76).

Comparing the reactions of parallel characters to very similar cases of rape and adultery allows us to uncover the seriousness of these crimes in the *Confessio* as a whole. When viewed against Paulina's recovery and reintegration into life, Lucrece's self-slaughter appears unreasonably harsh. She refuses to listen to counsel and unnaturally despairs of what she perceives as her new sinful nature to an extent that, as we have seen in the happier example of Paulina, does not match the crime. The city of Rome does not even inflict such a severe crime on Aruns, who is only exiled despite the fact that he stands accused of not just lechery but tyranny as well.

In the following "Tale of Virginia" we see this paradigm repeated. The citizens of Rome choose to depose their king, Claudius, when he breaks the law in an attempt to force himself upon Virginia, who has been promised to another man. These very similar punishments of exile and/or deposition for the rapist and adulterer, or one who attempts such things, supports the original decision of the "wise jugges" in the "Tale of Mundus and Paulina," whereby the false priests were put to death but Mundus's "dom was noght so hard lad" because his uncontrollable natural desire took away his reason. Finally, shocking as it may be, we must conclude that in the *Confessio*, while a man's violation of a woman's sexual sovereignty and marital vows is

abhorrent, it is not completely unnatural, and definitely not a crime worthy of death for either party.

Turning to the “Tale of Canace and Machaire,” we see the *Confessio*’s version of penitential logic and Genius’s moral interpretation taken to an uncomfortable extreme by his validation of incest as natural. In what is one of the poem’s most tragic tales, Genius describes how two siblings, Canace and Machaire, fall in love while growing up together in a common chamber. After a while, they conceive a child, and Machaire abandons his sister out of fear that their father, King Eolus, might discover the relationship. His fear, if not his cowardice, eventually seems justified as Eolus has both his daughter and her baby murdered in an uncontrollable wrath, ignoring her pleas for mercy. In the end, it is Eolus’s wrath without pity that Genius denounces, arguing that it was he who did “so gret a felonie” (3.336). Confusion results for scholars, however, because Genius does not castigate the children at all. He instead excuses their actions by attributing them to Nature, who “is Maistresse / In kinde and techeth every lif / Withoute lawe positif, / Of which sche takth nomaner charge” (3.170-73). Nature does not recognize the positive laws of the Church, such as those regarding incest, so she has no problem bringing together the siblings. So here, again, we see Genius explaining away as natural what should be an illicit desire, although he does maintain some qualifications. Incest is natural within the bounds of heterosexual animalistic desire, males desiring females, but unnatural within the bounds of positive law, such as the reasonable “lawe of Mariage” that we saw in the tale of “Tobias and Sara” (7.5351).

Again, we might look at Genius’s moralization of his tales of incest to determine how depraved this sin is within the moral spectrum of the *Confessio*. Most critics tend to focus on the abhorrence and sinfulness of incest in the *Confessio*. María Bullón-Fernández, for instance, in

reference not to the clearly detrimental incestuous relationship between Machaire and Canace, but to an implied relationship between Canace and her father spurred on by her relationship with her brother, suggests that Eolus's "wrath and incestuous ownership of his daughter cause the total destruction and waste of the daughter, the narrative (the literary creation), and the child (or procreation)."²⁸ The first thing we might consider, then, is that Genius finds such a disruptive topic fit for discussion at all. The fact that he does shows him to be certainly more open-minded than at least the Man of Law in the *Canterbury Tales*, his literary contemporary, who despite his dislike of Chaucer, admits that at least he did not write "Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee," or of the story of Apollonius "That is so horrible a tale for to rede."²⁹ Especially shocking to those who tended to agree with the Man of Law's feelings on the subject must have been Genius's sympathetic handling of Canace's death.³⁰ As opposed to Mundus, Paulina, and Aruns, who all continue on with their lives, Canace and her child pay a pitiable penance by dying for hers. Yet, Genius argues that this punishment was unjust because "reddour oghte be restreigned / To him that mai no bet aweie, / Whan he mot to nature obeie" (3.348-50). Canace did not deserve to die. Furthermore, Machaire, who is just as guilty, escapes even the danger of death, as if to suggest that not only should one not be harshly punished for incest, but there is a possibility that one need hardly be punished at all.

To clear up any misunderstandings of Genius's problematic moralization of incest in Book Three, scholars have generally pointed to his condemnation of the sin in Book Eight. Georgiana Donavin, who provides perhaps the most complete study of incest within the *Confessio*, suggests that when Genius refers to the siblings' relationship as natural he offers a "misreading" of the tale because "he alludes to the 'First Age' when no code of human law existed and sibling alliances were necessary."³¹ Here, Donavin follows a well-established

argument that Genius matures with regard to his morality throughout the *Confessio* and that early in the poem his advice is not to be completely trusted.³² Thus in Book Eight, where Genius declares that “such delit is forto blame,” we encounter the tale of “Apollonius of Tyre” in which God smites Antiochus and his daughter for incest and thereby corrects his earlier moralization of the now abhorrent sin (8.165).³³ Even so, it is still only “forto blame” according to positive law and man’s higher natural rationality, but not according to his basic heterosexual animal instincts (8.144-46). My point, though, is not to quibble over the immorality of incest, but to emphasize that even the most heinous and taboo heterosexual acts, even when taken to an extreme, still have some starting point in theology for declaring them to be “natural” and therefore for Genius to punish them with some leniency. They still have a claim to being an understandable human desire, and thus have a claim on Genius’s compassion. Unfortunately, however, as we will see, he limits his compassion only to relationships between men and women.

The above discussion of fornication, adultery and incest is not to suggest that Gower views these sins as blameless; as we have seen, they are not. Only desire tempered by reason and expressed within marriage is without blame. Yet, when these transgressive sins appear in the exempla, they are almost always dealt with mercifully: exile, for example, instead of death. Sinful relationships between men and women almost never warrant capital punishment in the *Confessio*. As such, Genius recreates the ideology of gradations of sexual sins that we see in the pastoral handbooks and that secular society reinforced, and he is willing to portray transgressive sexual desires, as long as they are between men and women, as within humanity’s baser animalistic nature, if not within its higher, moral nature, which God tempers with reason. Therefore, he punishes such transgressions in a lenient fashion. This leniency, however, reinforces a heteronormative/ same-sex sodomitical divide by insisting that even when these

desires are the farthest from reason and from socially acceptable norms, such as incest, they are still more normal and more natural, as we will see, than desires expressed between those of the same sex and gender, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

Deadly Desires:

The Tales of Iphis and Ianthe, Narcissus, and Hercules

Bot of defense was no bote
So soffren thei that soffre mote (5.7550-49).

Genius normalizes the natural, permissible relationships between men and women throughout the *Confessio* by implicitly comparing them to the abject relationships in the tales of Iphis and Ianthe, Narcissus, and Hercules and Faunus. In these tales Genius presents the implication of dangerous same-sex desires, which he has surprisingly rendered heterosexual, although still unnatural. One of the ways in which he achieves such a startling fusion is through cases of mistaken identity. He allows one character to fall in love with another of the same sex whose gender is misunderstood. In a move that suggests intrinsic similarities between the natural and the unnatural Genius presents the possibility that what is intended as a natural desire between a woman and a man can become an unnatural one between two men or two women. The priest is no doubt influenced by Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* concerning the change in behavior of the women and men of Sodom:

for their women have changed the natural use into that use which is against nature, and in like manner the men also, having abandoned the natural use of the women, have burned in their lusts one towards another, men with men doing shameless things and receiving in themselves the fitting recompense of their perversity.¹

Genius recognizes the potential for a (dangerous) fluidity of lust found in the *New Testament* and expands it to show more specifically how same-sex relationships can become the ultimate perversion of heterosexuality itself.

Genius's re-orientation of same-sex sodomy obviously has its advantages. To begin with, confusion over the actual genders of the participants in sodomitical relationships was already an established conundrum in the Middle Ages, one that provides Genius's conflation of desires with some degree of cultural capital. The Gawain-poet in *Cleanness*, for instance, describes how the men of Sodom "fylter folyly in fere on femmalez wyse."² Undoubtedly, the effeminizing description results from the passive partner's loss of masculinity during intercourse, thus making the relationship potentially, and oddly, heterosexual, but not naturally so.³ A similarly adaptable heterosexual construction helpfully allows Gower's priest to raise the taboo subject of sodomy between men without ever explicitly talking about it in such terms, thereby employing a covert language such as penitentials recommend for discussions of this sin.⁴ Thus, even though he never allows such transgressive characters to consummate their relationships, he is still able to raise the issue and offer punishments through implications and imagined possibilities. What Genius does differently in the *Confessio*, however, from the Gawain-poet, is exploit the full potential of rendering same-sex desires as heterosexual by placing them into context on a penitential continuum with other intimate physical interactions between men and women.⁵ In this way he is able to demonstrate how, while both are technically wrong, unnatural even, one is more immoral than the other, as we can discern by the increased violence of his punishments.

His hierarchical differentiation between sins, then, results in one final, but significant benefit with tactical applications for moral reformation: if one views same-sex desires as nothing more than the worst of heterosexual perversions, as Genius suggests that they are, then one requires a much smaller alteration in the disposition of desire in order to move up and into the more appealing arena of significantly less immoral, natural sexual behaviors.

While Genius may not present notions of heterosexual and homosexual desires as necessarily discrete categories, as many modern people do, he does offer an important disjunction between the two in his method of punishment. Although he is willing to acknowledge that desire is fluid, he is not willing to condone its every variation. He establishes a point upon the sexual continuum where what was once immoral but acceptable becomes neither, and, after one crosses this theoretical point, the severity of one's punishment increases exponentially. The continuum, in other words, manifests a partition. At this point of separation, for all his complexity, his shades of grey, Genius becomes remarkably black and white. I believe that this may have something to do with the ways in which medieval legal systems treated same-sex amorous relationships. As I did in the previous chapter, I want to argue again here that Gower's priest relies not only on penitential practices, but also upon the secular government's application of penitential mores in every day life. A notable difference appears, however, when we recognize that while secular laws suggest a model for Genius's lighter punishment of sins committed between a man and a woman, they also provide a precedent for his violent and deadly persecution of sexual expressions between those of the same sex or gender, even when presented in tactfully heterosexual packaging. Physical relationships between men and women in the *Confessio*, as we have seen, rarely warrant death for either party; yet even the implication of physical desire expressed between two characters of the same sex, whatever the motivation,

results in a swift and violent reaction by Genius. The priest thus encourages transitions to less immoral, less dangerous desires by imagining his own violent prohibitions of same-sex sodomy through a number of exempla based upon classical narratives with perverse themes. He presents homosexual relationships as a perversion of heterosexual desire, which is not only “against nature,” as the saying goes, but the divine will as well, most clearly in his “Tale of Iphis.”

The tale begins with king Ligdus informing his pregnant wife, Thelacuse, that he will kill her child should it be a girl. Thelacuse gives birth to a young girl, whom she names Iphis and raises as a boy in order to protect her from her father. While such cross-dressing also appears in the tales involving Hercules, the narrative of this tale differs most notably in Genius’s treatment of Iphis’s gender as conforming to her misconstrued identity. As Diane Watt observes, Iphis “exhibits virtues constructed as masculine rather than feminine,” because of her steadfast nature in love.⁶ Genius, in fact, all but discards Iphis’s femininity through his repeated use of the pronoun “him” to refer to the child from a very young age onwards, “thus Iphis / Thei namede him” and “Him betake in mariage / A Duckes dowhter forto wedde,” a notable change of the original Ovidian source (4.467-68 and 4.476-77). Even in the version of “Iphis” told in the *Ovidius Moralizatus*, one of Gower’s source books, Berchorius consistently portrays Iphis as feminine.⁷ He acknowledges the confusion of Iphis’s gender for her father, but he makes the situation clear to the reader by his persistent use of feminine pronouns to refer to the daughter, at one point exclaiming, “a girl blazed with love for another girl.”⁸ Berchorius’s Iphis also clearly views her own gender as feminine. At one point he describes how she “sensed that she desired what was impossible naturally . . .,” since she and Ianthe were both girls.⁹ Genius, however, never portrays Iphis as acknowledging her own femininity. In fact, the only time that Genius refers to Iphis as “sche” is when Iphis is lying in bed with Ianthe, at which point he speaks of

them as “sche and sche” (4.479). Although the priest alludes here to possible future quandaries, at this point the situation is not necessarily problematic. He specifically refers to the girls as children, implying that they are too young to be engaged in sexual activity of any sort; they are merely “pleiefieres,” or playmates.¹⁰

Genius does allow a possible transgression to occur, however, a few lines, and a few years, later, when he tells us that

Nature, which doth every wiht,
 Upon hire lawe forto muse,
 Constreigneth hem, so that thei use
 Thing which to hem was al unknowe (4.484-7).

This allusive “thing” clearly refers to something sexual, and so scholars often view this scene as fraught with homoerotic desires as are the tales of Ovid and Berchorius. Ianthe, mistaking Iphis for a girl, begins to desire her, and the young Iphis returns her love. Watt, though, goes so far as to propose that since Genius’s Iphis does not bewail her situation, even though in Ovid her “desire for another woman is monstrous and unnatural,” we should view her lack of protest here as “implying perhaps that neither she nor Genius views it as such.”¹¹ I would suggest, however, that the reason Iphis and Genius are untroubled is not because homoerotic desire is not problematic, but because Genius already presents Iphis as masculine.¹² It is for this reason that Genius tells us how “accordant to nature” Cupid chooses to change Iphis, and not Ianthe, into a man (4.498). Genius’s attribution of their desire to Nature supports this reading, since physical interaction between the girls, as we will see, is something “which stant ayein the lore / Of that nature in kinde hath sett” (4.494-5). By linking their desire to Nature, then, Genius does not obfuscate natural and unnatural desires, as some scholars suggest, since the desire is naturally taking place between masculine and feminine genders.¹³

The problem does remain, though, that while their genders may be heterosexual their sexes are both female. Ianthe may desire her “husband,” but this unfortunately causes her to lust after what Genius and Amans know to be a female body. Genius deals with this dilemma by inserting Cupid into the narrative right at the critical point. The God of Love arrives immediately after the girls’ desires are acknowledged but before any serious unnatural physical acts have occurred: Cupid, “accordant to nature, / Whan that he syh the time best, / That ech of hem hath other kest, / Transformeth Iphe into a man” (4.498-501). Genius introduces Cupid into the narrative at the very moment they kiss, but before they have gone any further, in order to work a miracle and correct Iphis’s sex to match her gender. The priest imagines the potential for illicit behaviors, but he refuses to go so far as to describe them, suggesting that he does view same-sex physical relations as troublesome. Furthermore, while, as in the tale of Tobias and Sara, the necessity of divine intervention to fix their marriage suggests the difficulty of consummating any sinless union, the suggestion that even Cupid, the most sexually permissive of divinities (Genius tells of Cupid’s affair with his mother in Book Five), detests this form of sexual behavior emphasizes Genius’s abhorrence of the situation. In the end, though, there is no punishment dealt to the transgressive character because Iphis’s desire becomes completely natural. But this is only possible because, just as in Ovid’s version, Cupid has obliterated not only her physical female-ness, but her femininity as well. Her new biological sex now matches her gender, and her love can be naturally fulfilled. Genius can then report that the couple “ladde a merie life, / Which was to kinde non offence” (4.504-5). This tale leaves no doubt that two people of the same-sex amorously together in bed is a crime against nature and heaven, and is on the perverse end of any spectrum of sexual desire. On the opposite end, though, a physical relationship between a man and a woman can be a blessed natural union.

In similar cases, however, where a divinity does not appear to miraculously enable a perfect desire, the endings that Genius narrates are not so happy. Such an instance occurs in the unfortunate “Tale of Narcissus” in which he demonstrates the harsh penalties of a heterosexual desire gone terribly wrong. Right from the beginning, Genius alters the traditional Narcissus narrative in order to set up the title character as problematically straight:

[Narcissus] worthi to his liche,
 To sechen al the worldes riche,
 Ther was no womman forto love.
 So hihe he sette himselfe above
 Of stature and of beaute bothe,
 That him thoghte all wommen lothe:
 So was ther no comparisoun
 As toward his condicioun (1.2277-84).

There is no woman equal to Narcissus’s station, beauty, or “condicioun,” but the priest suggests that if there were to be one, he would certainly be capable of desiring her. At the same time, though, his narration also seems to suggest the unlikelihood of finding Narcissus a suitable mate by hinting at the tale’s traditional queer undertones, such as those found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and echoed in Berchorius’s *Ovidius Moralizatus*. There is simply no female with the masculine qualities that he truly desires in a romantic partner. The priest suggests such an impasse by playing off on the various meanings of the Middle English word “liche.” There are no women “liche,” meaning “equal,” to his worldly status, but there are also no women worthy to his “liche,” meaning “of his same nature,” that is his masculinity.¹⁴ The language insinuates that all women are loath to him because they cannot compare to his “condicioun,” with the context suggesting his “condicioun” to be his status and beauty, but also implying his maleness. More simply, there are no women worthy to his liking. Even in the altered narrative, then, the priest dooms Narcissus’s best heterosexual intentions because there is no woman who can fulfill his criteria.

After setting up this paradox, Genius is able to move forward with his revised narrative and warn against a misguided natural heterosexual love that can inopportunistically provide a gateway to the most dangerous unnatural end of the sexual spectrum. At the traditional moment of desire – that is, at the scene where Narcissus sees himself in a pool of water – Genius emphasizes his alteration of the story by describing how the young man falls in love not with his own image, but rather with what he perceives as a female likeness, “It were a womman that he syh” (1.2321). Narcissus, for all he knows, is in love with a woman. The young man’s mistake, however, is made abundantly clear to everyone else through Genius’s repeated emphasis that the image in the pool is actually the youth’s reflection, not the imagined woman: “For whanne he wepte, he sih hire wepe, / And whanne he cride, he toke good kepe, / The same word she cride also” (1.2326-28). Genius preserves propriety by referring to the image as “she,” but his description of how Narcissus’s actions are simultaneously mirrored in the water makes what is happening all too obvious. He has fallen in love with a masculine image. The confusion resulting from the image in the water diminishes the innate differences between manifestations of desire and suggests that heterosexual desires in the right (or perhaps wrong) conditions can become homosexual ones.

While theoretically differences between forms of desire are small, their consequences can be quite large. The priest suggests that Narcissus’s desire, regardless of his intentions, has led him too far in the wrong direction. As such he provides a didactic punishment for the “folie,” as he calls it, “which is contraire / To kynde” (1.2356-57). He describes how Narcissus, tormented and yearning for his doomed love,

axeth grace,
 There as he mihte gete non ;
 So that ayein a Roche of Ston,
 As he that knew non other red,

He smot himself til he was ded (1.2338-42).

While Narcissus kills himself at the end of the tale because of grief, Genius indicates the dangers of persisting on a path that is without “grace.” Narcissus’s love has led him into an unnatural realm where divine mercy is no longer possible, and Genius issues punishment. His ending to this tale, we should also note, is especially conspicuous because it is actively more brutal than either Ovid’s or Berchorius’s version, wherein the young man eventually just passes into death.¹⁵ This increased violence, then, stands in stark opposition to the lesser reprimands issued in other exempla. Genius’s penance allows no mercy for love misplaced outside of nature and implies that lovers would do well not to let their desires get so out of hand.

Genius similarly provides for the emergence and censure of a transgressive identity through heterosexuality within two of the tales involving Hercules. In the “Tale of Hercules and Faunus,” the second of two interrelated tales focusing on Hercules’s amorous exploits, Genius describes how the hero, madly in love with Iole, agrees to switch clothes with her, taking her wimple and mantel, and giving her his mace and lion skin coat. Irrationally, he willingly relinquishes the symbols of his masculinity in order to take on the purportedly weaker symbols of femininity and opens himself up to male lust. As a result when Faunus, who has earlier seen Iole and become infatuated with her, crawls into the cave with the intention of raping her, he gets into the wrong bed. Faunus sees the female clothing and thinking that Hercules is Eole “[h]e made him naked thanne, and softe / Into the bedd unwar he crepte, / Wher Hercules that time slepte” and “[a]non he profeth him to love” (5.6918-23). Although Genius is careful to allow Hercules to awake and prevent any sexual interaction from ever occurring, the priest nevertheless slyly brings to mind the image of the two men, Faunus and Hercules, “The myhtieste of all men,” lying in bed together in a compromising situation (5.6807). By foolishly taking Iole’s clothes,

Hercules has made himself into an object of male desire and implicated himself in a sodomitical relationship, however unwittingly, with the confused Faunus.

Aside from Genius's surprising move from heterosexual love to implications of same-sex desires, what is notable here is the violence with which he prohibits and punishes the result of this misplaced desire, much as he did in the "Tale of Narcissus." Genius has earlier mentioned in Book Two that this same cross-dressing episode is the reason for the hero's death. So, when we come across Genius's description of the exchange of clothes in the "Tale of Hercules and Faunus" in Book Five, we already know the horrific outcome that will result because of it. When his former lover, Deianira, hears that Iole, his new lover, has "made Hercules so nyce / Upon hir Love and so assote, / That he him clotheth in hire cote," she sends him a shirt that she had been told to give him should his lover ever stray (2.2268-70). He puts on the shirt and begins to burn with pain from a poison hidden within the garment. To stop the unbearable pain, he builds a fire, leaps in, and, Genius tells the reader, is burnt "bothe fleissh and bones" (2.2302). This episode is significant because, as Macaulay notes, Gower changes his primary source, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, to include the cross-dressing episode that eventually leads to Hercules's death.¹⁶ Carole Koepke Brown further points out that Gower, in a move that "consciously weakens and humanizes Hercules," also makes no mention of his twelve impressive labors, or of his deification, both of which Ovid relates at the end of his tale in the *Metamorphosis*.¹⁷ The changes are far from favorable. The inclusion of the cross-dressing scene allows Genius to tie Hercules's fiery death specifically to a misguided heterosexuality that leads to his being in bed with Faunus. The exclusion of the hero's merits focuses the tale's ending on his transgression and punishment, on what is essentially his slide across the penitential spectrum into the realm of inappropriate sexual desire. Genius leaves Amans, and the reader, with the image of Hercules

burning without any mercy, a punishment supposedly fitting for the most abominable of sexual sins.

A fate less drastic, but equally telling, awaits Faunus. Here, Genius seems to differentiate between liabilities. Faunus, unlike Hercules, did not foolishly and carelessly open himself up to the potential of being mistaken for a woman, and hence he is not deserving of death. Genius nevertheless uses Faunus's misdirected lust to demonstrate the hostility with which any sexual desire taking place between two men should be punished. When the hero feels Faunus naked above him, he

him threw to grounde
So sore, that thei have him founde
Liggende there upon the morwe
And tho was nocht a litel sorwe,
That Faunus of himselve made (5.6925-29).

The sexual aggression here is brutal and bruising. Faunus starts off as a powerful assailant, but his misplaced advances render him utterly impotent, a description suggested by the Latin side-note and the word *impotens*, when directed toward a man.¹⁸ Genius illustrates that he means this to be a public lesson on private vices by keeping Faunus in his debilitated position until the morning, when all the others gawk at him laughing. But it is an uncomfortable mirth. Hercules and Eole laugh because they are relieved to have both escaped unwanted violation. Their shared merriment at Faunus's expense, "thei were alle glade," seems an awkward attempt at reasserting Hercules's masculinity (5.6930). Then, upon hearing the noise of the reunited lovers, Faunus's cohorts come down and he further becomes a figure for mockery, for "whan that thei the soothe herde, / He was bejaped overall" (5.6935). Although both men keep their, albeit compromised, heterosexuality, Genius is still able to hold up the theoretical sexual interaction between men as an object of derisive scorn and of swift punitive retribution.

While Genius's suggestion that mistaken immoral heterosexual desires can lead to even more immoral same-sex sins appears to be an interesting and somewhat unexpected interpretation of the graded spectrum of sins found in pastoral handbooks, the violence with which he reacts to the latter evokes not so much penitential strictures as canon law working in tandem with secular laws. The Church of its own authority did not explicitly condone such violence and would only indirectly condemn sinners. Yet, in cases where the Church felt capital punishment was warranted, it would hand over the criminal to the secular authorities who would then enact the punishment.¹⁹ While it is unclear whether, or how often, this happened in Gower's England with regard to sexual violations, there is no question that death was recognized as a suitable punishment for same-sex sexual behavior in some parts of the legal community. At roughly the same time that areas of London had legalized heterosexual prostitution, two English legal treatises were in circulation, *Britton* and *Fleta*, which suggested burning and being buried alive for sexual interactions between two men.²⁰ In his study of the medieval English legal system, John Bellamy suggests that there are cases indicating that the king's court might have actually applied these punishments.²¹ Several other scholars, however, have suggested the statutes probably were not used.²² Gower, who most likely had some training as a lawyer and certainly moved in legal circles, may have been aware of these treatises and/or cases, or had friends who were.²³

Gower need not have relied, however, on a specific knowledge of his own country's legal practices, or suggested legal practices, to shape Genius's responses to this sin. Continental Europe provided more than ample precedent of sanctioning capital punishment for sodomitical behavior. The ancient Justinian laws, which Macaulay has shown that Gower knew at least in part, demanded the death penalty for same-sex sodomy and set the tone for much of Europe's

later laws governing sexual practices.²⁴ Olsson notes that the *jus naturae*, so integral to the *Confessio*, in parts descends from Justinian's legal code the *Corpus iuris civilis*.²⁵ In Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France records indicate that men were put to death for sexual relationships with other men.²⁶ While scholars suggest that individual cases of persecution were actually rare, and point out that confessors had the opportunity to temper the "draconian punishment laid down by the [secular] law," the facts remain that the laws were on the books, an ever present threat; that they were used; and that they made secular governments proponents of heteronormativity that were at least potentially as fierce as the Church, and certainly more immediately sadistic.²⁷ These secular laws, then, provide precedents that authorize Genius's emphasis on the fitting nature of death for those who exhibit the most unnatural of sexual crimes. I am certainly not suggesting that Gower necessarily drew upon any specific set of laws for his harsh-treatment of same-sex sodomy, but I do want to argue that medieval European laws provided him with a model for associating capital punishment with this "crime."

Gower was also, no doubt, influenced by his literary predecessors, such as Alan de Lille and, more specifically, Jean de Meun who similarly drew on anti-sodomy laws in his portion of the *Roman de la Rose*. Alan had already used the character of Genius to praise marriage and denigrate same-sex love in his *De planctu naturae* and set an example for Jean de Meun. As George D. Economou has pointed out, Jean's Genius is much less concerned with marriage or morality than his namesake in Alan's work.²⁸ Yet, he nevertheless carries on the powerful stigmatization of same-sex desire found in the earlier work but in terms that more clearly invoke secular moral legislation. Jean's Genius begins his sermon at the end of the *Roman* by praising the authority of Nature and offering a wide-ranging pardon for all those who obey her commands and confess in order that they might reach heaven. For those who neglect to procreate, however,

he urges that “[t]hese people should be buried alive for daring to neglect the tools that God fashioned with his own hand and gave to my lady.”²⁹ While at first he aims this condemnation at anyone who does not reproduce, his comments a few lines later seem pointedly aimed at those who neglect to do so because they would rather enjoy the company of their own sex. After specifically naming Orpheus, associated in the Middle Ages with homosexuality through Ovid, Genius cries out against those who scorn Nature:³⁰

may they also lose the purse and testicles that are the signs of their manhood! May they lose the pendants from which the purse hangs! May the hammers attached inside them be torn out! May they be robbed of their styluses, since they refused to write with them on the precious tablets fit for that purpose!³¹

Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran points out the similarity between Genius’s imagined punishments and the anti-same-sex sodomy laws that the city of Orléans established in the thirteenth century reminding us “that both Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun came from near Orléans.”³² It seems a strong likelihood that if Jean was not directly referencing the Orléans laws he was probably aware of them, or at least influenced by them in some manner. As such, when Gower borrowed the character of Genius from Jean, they would have influenced the English poet as well.

Gower refocuses Alan’s Genius’s preference for marriage and Jean’s Genius’s inclination for reproduction in general through the lens of the penitential tradition as it was interpreted by social institutions, such as the Church and secular governments. In doing so, he also interprets the penitential spectrum as a range of heterosexual desires and in doing so allows for a more direct comparison between all forms of physical sexual interaction. This comparison sets up a transgressive, but normalized and socially acceptable “middel weie,” between ideal marriage and unnatural same-sex sodomy, the latter of which Genius never characterizes but imagines as

possible and then isolates by repressing it with a didactic, deadly force. At first, no doubt, this heterosexual version of same-sex desire may seem only a small concern in the *Confessio*; it is certainly only dealt with in a handful of the tales. Genius's treatment of unnatural sins, however, begins to take on new levels of importance when we remember that Gower located the *Confessio* not only within the discourses of penitential literature and both ecclesiastical and secular laws, but also within the "mirrors for princes" tradition. A tradition he aimed squarely at the increasingly troubled Richard II, who will be the subject of portions of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Mirror for Richard II:

The “Tale of the Three Questions” and the Tales of Sardanapalus, Carmidotirus, and Cambyeses

Bot yit the world hath ofte accused
Ful grete Princes of this ded,
Hou thei for love himself mislede,
Wherof manhode stod behinde (7.4308-11).

Charges of same-sex sodomy that remain primarily in the realm of ecclesiastical and secular law throughout the *Confessio* begin to take on dangerous political implications in Book Seven, lending the topic a new kind of importance for the poem as a whole. Genius expands his penitential structure in order to demonstrate the relationship between a king’s sexual behavior and his ability to rule effectively, the latter of which is Genius’s primary concern in the penultimate book. Scholars have previously noted that much of his advice to monarchs can be related to political issues particularly relevant to the reign of Richard II. Judith Ferster, for instance, has demonstrated how Gower evokes the public’s anger over tax increases and the “loss of patronage and war profits” as a warning of deposition in tales such as those of Rehoboam and Apius.¹ Linking late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century chroniclers’ effeminization of Richard II to the tale of the ousted King Sardanapalus, Michael Hanrahan suggests that Gower

warns Richard II to curb his alleged sodomitical behavior or risk deposition, and that this warning eventually allies his poem with Lancastrian attempts to justify Richard's removal from the throne.²

In order to understand fully the *Confessio*'s treatment of sodomy, however, it is imperative that we look not just at how Gower plays off of contemporary imputations of this crime to Richard, but how he employs the larger discursive circle in which such charges moved. While Hanrahan does discuss a connection between sodomy and bad advice in the *Confessio*, I think that additional specific and pertinent connections can also be made between same-sex desire and more serious apprehensions over public concerns for property rights, fiscal irresponsibility, and abuses of the law. All these crimes were talked about in conjunction with the lecherous excesses of Richard II and his great grandfather Edward II, and such offenses could, and occasionally did, lead to convictions of treason (a capital offense) and deposition, which itself led to the deaths of these two kings. Gower, I hope to show, similarly constructs a relationship between same-sex sodomy and threats to the public health that justifies the death and deposition of a king. When we combine this connection with Genius's violent reactions in the tales of Narcissus and Hercules, we can begin to see how the *Confessio* draws on and aids in a dangerous politicization of same-sex desire in fourteenth-century England.

The early half of the fourteenth century onwards set quite a precedent for violent public reactions to same-sex sodomy in England. Despite medieval society's reticence when it came to naming sodomy, contemporary accounts impute it to the relationships Edward II had with two of his closest advisors, Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despencer the Younger. The author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* relates how when it came to Gaveston the king was "incapable of moderate affection, and on account of Piers was said to forget himself, and so Piers was regarded as a

sorcerer,” sorcery being a crime associated with abnormal sexual practices.³ Edward’s other nobles resented this close relationship and eventually assassinated Gaveston in 1312, after which similar accusations of unnatural relations were made against Edward II and Hugh the Younger. The French chronicler Froissart directly links charges of sodomy to Hugh’s brutal death. On the day Hugh died he was displayed high on a ladder so that all could see his punishment.⁴ First, his testicles were cut off and thrown into a fire, because, according to Froissart, of the public accusations that he was a heretic and a sodomite, who had separated the king from the queen by his seduction.⁵ After his symbolic castration, he was further tortured, decapitated, and quartered.⁶ Essentially Froissart relates a very public execution of someone close to the king for which the impetus is, in part, public accusations of same-sex sodomy. According to Katherine Royer’s study of fourteenth-century texts describing public executions, “the ritual on the scaffold did more than punish the criminal – it announced the crime.”⁷ The symbolic public castration, then, would only have served to fortify any public assumption of sexual improprieties between Edward II and Hugh the Younger. It would also have reinforced an association of sexual relationships between men with deadly acts of retribution.

Toward the end of the century, chroniclers launched similar allegations against Edward II’s great-grandson, Richard II, and his favorite Robert de Vere.⁸ Walsingham, for instance, describes the unnatural closeness of the two men as a “familiaritatis obscene.”⁹ Ultimately de Vere became so disliked that the Appellants, a group of magnates, so called because of their appeal against Richard’s closest advisors during the Merciless Parliament, were able to successfully accuse him, and the others, of treachery in 1388. During Richard’s deposition in 1399 sodomy charges again became a means of attack. The anonymous chronicler of a continuation of the prose *Brut* describes how Archbishop Thomas Arundel accosted Richard II

saying “Thow haste lived vnconuenyenteli and licherousli, and ‘with’ thi foulle and cursed ensauple, thow haste efecte thi courte and thi reame.”¹⁰ This account is particularly telling in its use of the language of disease, Richard has “infected” the court and realm, which was occasionally associated with political discussions of sodomy and linked to the downfall of nations.¹¹ Adam of Usk more specifically named sodomitical behavior, along with his refusal to uphold the laws of the land, as a reason for Richard II’s deposition, which eventually led to his death, as Edward II’s deposition led to his.¹² At the time of his deposition, the crime of sodomy was re-established as a reason for deposition.

After his 1399 deposition, however, public perceptions of Richard II seemed to have been less than stable. While some of the negative accounts imputing unnatural relations between Richard and de Vere were in circulation during his lifetime, such implications, as George B. Stow has shown, grew bolder as Henry IV came to the throne and began to consolidate his authority at the expense of the dead king’s.¹³ After the Lancastrian usurpation, the official take on Richard II, as Paul Strohm has shown, was altered several times. Henry IV attempted to distance Richard, or rather his body from any sense of its inherent majesty, while Henry V “rejoined it to the symbolic representation of his royal dignity,” thus reasserting a positive perception of Richard to the public.¹⁴ Yet, despite the public changes in perception of the dead king, the chronicles maintained the violent political associations with the crime of same-sex sodomy that were circulating in fourteenth-century England.

The majority of the *Confessio* attempts to prevent such horrendous consequences of death and the deposition of the king by demonstrating the benefits and means to control unruly desires and disorder. Under the rubric of Chastity, Genius makes it abundantly clear which of the *Confessio*’s two possible moral levels Gower intends for the king. He repeatedly underscores the

necessity for a monarch in particular to temper his desire with wisdom in order to bring stability to himself and his subjects. After diplomatically admitting that nobody may be completely chaste, the priest nevertheless goes on to argue that because of

A kinges hihe astat,
Which of his ordre as a prelate
Schal ben enoight and seintefied,
He mot be more magnified
For dignete of his corone,
Than scholde an other low persone,
Which is noht of so hih emprise (7.424551).

Since the king embodies both God's laws, having been anointed by the Church, and the secular laws, symbolized by his crown, he must represent both to a higher degree than anyone else in all aspects of his life. This is necessary, as we see time and time again in Book Seven, and indeed throughout the entire poem, because a kingdom runs best when the king rationally avoids extremes and follows the just laws of God, society, and nature. Genius warns that unless a king wants to avoid destruction he must avoid changing for "womanhede," and all of its medieval associations with irrationality and perverse desires, the innate "worthinesse of his manhede" (7.4255-56).¹⁵ The best way to avoid this, he argues, is by submitting oneself to the law of marriage, that paradigm of temperance. Genius thus fittingly re-establishes the penitential spectrum with regard to politics, implicitly suggesting its two poles of marriage and same-sex sodomy. A chaste married king brings order and political stability; a king with unnatural desires creates only disorder and instability bringing about his justified undoing.

Genius, however, rarely discusses a ruler's sexual activity without political overtones. Larry Scanlon has argued persuasively that "Gower continually presents monarchy as a form of exemplary self-restraint whose overriding purpose is maintaining first its own privilege and then the privilege of those who share his power," and we see this with regard to sexual behavior as

well.¹⁶ Genius often uses a ruler's unrestrained sexual whims to critique his improper restriction of other desires, such as greed, which can lead to political disorder. The king who exhibits such restraint over his amorous urges earns the trust and love of his people by ensuring the security of their rights, possessions and livelihoods. Genius forefronts these materialistic concerns in the section on Chastity by referencing them in the first ten lines through the use of a plow metaphor taken from his predecessor in the *Roman*. In doing so, he suggests that they are inextricably intertwined with the restriction of the king's desire. When the king manages his lust by submitting himself to the law of marriage, Genius implies that he likewise ensures his nobility's property rights:

For whan a man mai redy finde
 His oghne wif, what scholde he seche
 In strange places to beseche
 To borwe an other mannes plouh (7.42189-21).

Genius suggests that if a man has his own wife at home he will not chase after the wives of other men. His sudden insertion of "plouh" where one would logically expect "wif," however, alerts us to his concern not just with a man's property as embodied in his wife, but to his property rights in general, and hence his wealth and his nobility. By restricting his desire to his wife through the laws of the Church and society, the king provides his "trouthe," or assurance, both to his wife and to his people, that he can respect the property and traditional rights of those under him, and thus remain in power (7.4228).

As we move along the penitential spectrum, however, Genius's association of a chaste king with good governance serves to highlight the social problems inherent to monarchs who lean toward the end of the spectrum farthest from marriage. If the king's body is anointed and sanctified as the embodiment of the law, his misuse of that body is a powerful symbol of his disregard for the law that governs his subjects and protects them from disorder and chaos. By

allowing such a power vacuum, the unchaste king risks not only his individual soul, but places the material goods and even the lives of his subjects in jeopardy. Genius thus reinforces the need and the righteousness of punishment for a king who does not remain within the bounds of the law (see 7.1704-10, 2722-36, 3073-74).

By Book Seven, however, the connection between the king's desire and his treatment of his subjects' property is not new, but one that Genius has demonstrated as early as Book One in the "Tale of the Three Questions" through his association of marriage with political stability. While Genius ostensibly uses this tale to praise humility, its undercurrent of how a king's marriage leads to his respect for his subjects' property is unavoidable.¹⁷ Envyng the wisdom of Petro, one of his knights, the Spanish king Alphonse poses three questions and declares that if the other man fails to answer them correctly he shall "lese hise goodes and his hed" (1.3116). The distraught knight goes home worrying not just about his own life, but about his wife and his children, who may loose not only their father but also their financial support. When his youngest daughter Peronelle hears him weeping and asks why, he tells her the situation, and she convinces him to put their fate in her hands. When she appears before the king, she successfully answers his questions and assures her family's fortunes. But, it is not only her wisdom that earns the king's favor. Seeing her wit and beauty, Alphonse's attraction to her becomes a condition of the property's return, "Of thin ansuere and ek of thee / Me liketh well, and as thou wilt, / Foryive be thi fader gilt" (1.3332-34). Lamenting, the king admits that he would like to marry her but cannot, since Spanish custom requires that he marry the daughter of a peer. So, instead of marriage he offers Peronelle any worldly good. She asks Alphonse to reward her father with more land, and the king gives Petro an earldom. At this point, Peronelle points out that she is now the daughter of a peer and the king can marry her, which he does.

Here, Genius demonstrates how the restraint of a king's desire leads him to respect his nobles and ensure political stability. The gift of the earldom comes about only because the king checks his desire to marry Peronelle but, nevertheless, wants to please her. While the end result does satisfy Alphonse himself, it serves the more important function of stabilizing his role as king. His marriage to Peronelle enables him to ensure the continuation of the royal line while respecting the political bounds that govern the Spanish monarchy and the rights of his nobility. The combination of the gift and the knight's new status as father-in-law to the king also reverses Alphonse's original cruelty to the knight by threatening him and his family; as Genius says, the king "Acordeth him, as it is riht" (1.3386). The king moves from bad to good governance by rewarding the knight's wisdom, instead of envying it. Alphonse thus anticipates such exemplary rulers as Darius and Julius in Book Seven who follow Aristotle's advice to Alexander to dispense gifts to those of "astat and of merite" (7.2051). Finally, his marriage assures his continued access to Petro's wisdom, as well as Peronelle's, to which he can avail himself for advice on governance.

If the "Tale of the Three Questions" presents an early example equating good marriage with good kingship, it also provides a means of comparison for the disasters accrued by a king whose desires are at the opposite end of the penitential spectrum. Genius illustrates such disasters specifically with regard to kingship in what Macaulay labeled the "Evil Example of King Sardanapalus," the first exemplum under the rubric of Chastity, and, we might note, the farthest exemplum in this section from Tobias's and Sara's idealization of marriage. This tale relates the story of Sardanapalus who becomes so besotted by women that instead of attending to the governance of his realm, he "duelte evere in chamber stille, / And only wroghte after the wille / Of women, so as he was bede" (7.4325-27). When the neighboring King Barbarus hears

the news, he gathers together an army and attacks killing the effete king and overturning his kingdom.

While on the surface Genius declares that Sardanapalus's fall comes about because he loved women too much, rather than not at all, there are strong undercurrents of an even more subversive desire throughout this exemplum. Michael Hanrahan argues that in this tale "[a]lthough unspoken, a loudly implied allegation of sodomy attends Gower's depiction of the unnatural transformation effected by lechery."¹⁸ Genius ensures this by several not-so-subtle references to the tales of Hercules and Narcissus, and hence an implicit reminder of the deadly result of their misplaced heterosexual desires. Instead of surrounding himself with advisors who will help him to protect his kingdom, as do more exemplary kings, such as Alexander or Darius in the tale "King, Wine, Woman, or Truth," Sardanapalus spends all of his time with women who counsel him on braiding, weaving, and threading. He relinquishes his masculine duties as a ruler, exchanging the customs of men for those of women, and opens himself up to invasion by a foreign power, much as Hercules had opened himself up to Faunus' sexual attack. Surrendering his reason and his chivalry for "womanhede," Sardanapalus is unable to protect himself or his nation, which becomes "undon," presumably annexed to the lands of Barbarus forever.

When placed in context with the story of Hercules, we can also re-evaluate Genius's description of Sardanapalus's behavior as "ayein kinde" in comparison with Narcissus's sin, which was also "contraire to kynde," with traditional and contextual connotations of same-sex desire (1.2356-57). Again, Genius uses the trope of heterosexuality gone too far to suggest unnatural behavior. The danger in Sardanapalus's obsessive love for the women comes not just from his craving to accustom himself to their household habits, braiding, weaving, and so on, but from their bedroom habits as well. His actions point to yet another way in which an individual's

natural romantic tendencies, when taken too far, much like we saw in the tales of Hercules and Narcissus, become troublesome by opening oneself up to unnatural desires. By subtly invoking the earlier tales in that of Sardanapalus, Genius can indirectly use their punishments as a warning to a king, such as Richard II, who would relinquish himself to unnatural desires.

Indeed, the violent threat inherent in this tale (that effete kings lose their lives and kingdoms) becomes especially pertinent when we realize how closely it evokes contemporary fears that Edward II's and Richard II's relationships to their favorite advisors threatened national territory. Hanrahan usefully points out how Walsingham's disparaging description of the king's courtiers as mostly "knights of Venus rather than of Mars, showing more prowess in the bedroom than on the field of battle," is remarkably similar to Genius's Sardanapalus who "abandons masculine, chivalric pursuits in favor of effete pastimes," with the result that Barbarus invades his kingdom.¹⁹ What Hanrahan does not mention, however, and what seems to have been overlooked by other critics as well, is how closely the tale of Sardanapalus relates to doubts about national security during the reigns of Edward II and Richard II. Fears of invasion mingle with doubts about the abilities or the willingness of the king and his favorite advisors to defend the nation in both fiction and history. Edward's close relationship with Hugh the Younger led to his alienation from his wife Isabella who sought asylum in France. Having been sent to France in 1324 to mediate territorial disputes, the queen refused to return to England until Hugh left her husband's side. The people feared that if, or when, she returned it would be with French troops who would plunder the kingdom.²⁰ Despite his subjects' concerns, Edward was loath to separate himself from Hugh.

Fears that sexual improprieties at court threatened the nation's ability to defend itself resurfaced during the reign of Richard II, around the same time that Gower was writing the

Confessio, from about 1385-1390.²¹ In order to ensure support against the magnates, Richard II began secret negotiations with France. Richard offered the French land in Scotland and in Gascony in exchange for military support in England, presumably at the urging of Robert de Vere.²² English citizens feared that should French troops arrive they would loot the kingdom.²³ In the tale of Sardanapalus Genius realizes England's deepest fears regarding the influence of unnatural desires upon their king by presenting them as a threat to national security. This tale serves as a reminder that unnatural relationships between men no longer just threaten the individual soul, but the public's wealth and safety as well. By placing the story in the context of his "bok for Englonde's sake" Gower helps raise interest in the repression and punishment of same-sex sexual relationships from a private religious concern, or the concern of legal treatises, to a very public concern.²⁴ Finally, the presence of such a story in a public poem ensures that the dangers of this unnatural desire and its association with the Richard II remain in public memory, thereby effecting a perpetual justification for the removal and assassinations of Richard II, his great-grandfather, and their various favorites.

Insinuations of same-sex sodomy, however, were not always tied to such grandiose concerns as the fall of the nation; sometimes they were linked to the mere refusal to uphold the laws of the realm.²⁵ Contemporary accounts connect both accusations of sodomy and defiance of the law to both Gaveston and de Vere. Charges against both men imply that they used their influence, sexual or otherwise, with the king to prevent the enforcement of just laws for their personal gain at England's expense. The Ordinance banishing Gaveston in 1311 indicted him for "not permitting good ministers to enforce law and removing good ministers," while encouraging the king to appoint friends of his who "violate justice and the law of the land."²⁶ Gaveston was also accused of supporting various felons and murderers as well as "receiving lands and

tenements against his homage to the crown” from which he grew quite wealthy.²⁷ According to the author of Edward’s *Vita*, in fact, Gaveston’s arrogant refusal to submit to anyone but the king himself was the primary reason for the nobles’ opposition towards him, while the king’s immoderate preference for him above all others was the second.²⁸ Most likely, the peers would not have been quite so scandalized by Gaveston’s relationship with the king had he not used it so blatantly for personal gain, as well as to defy any sort of control.

Gaveston’s eventual capture and death at the hands of the earls was almost undoubtedly called to mind by similar events concerning Richard II and Robert de Vere in 1388.²⁹ The Appellants charged de Vere with abusing his post as justice of Chester, as well as exploiting laws to grow rich at the expense of the kingdom by means of extortion and bribery.³⁰ They even accused de Vere, among others, of advising Richard to make de Vere king of Ireland, thereby forfeiting lands and traditional feudal ties that belonged to the English crown.³¹ The charges indicate that citizens feared Richard was rejecting ancient English rights and customs in order to support his favorites financially to the detriment of the common good. This fear factored into the charges of treason against de Vere, which were confirmed by the Merciless Parliament. Although the Duke of Ireland escaped with his life, several of his similarly charged fellow courtiers, such as Nicholas Brembre, were not so lucky, and the Parliament sentenced them to death.³² Clearly, the battle for internal order and stability was one of utmost concern and was fought with the most deadly of consequences.

Gower seems to have had similar concerns regarding instability due to a lack of respect for state laws while writing the *Confessio*. Genius offers a small but poignant cluster of tales and commentary on the importance of a stable national legal system in his third point of policy,

Justice. He starts by arguing that all of society depends upon proper obedience and use of the law

What is a lond wher men ben none?
 What ben the men whiche are al one
 Withoute a kinges governance?
 What is a king in his ligance,
 Wher that ther is no lawe in londe?
 What is to take lawe on honde
 Bot if the jugges weren trewe? (8.2695-01).

Without proper regulation, society cannot exist, Genius says, and there will simply be “no lawe in londe.” Yet, the law itself is not enough to bring about stability. The king and those whom he picks as his judges must properly interpret, apply, and enforce the law equally for all people and without personal gains for themselves in order to bring about national prosperity and ensure the king’s continued rule. To illustrate the importance of his point, Genius provides examples such as that of Carmidotirus, a Consul of Rome, who unwittingly breaks his own law that no armed person could enter the council house. When his people refuse to execute the penalty for his crime, which is death, he kills himself in order to enforce the law, crying that “Rome scholde nevere abreide / That here Ancestre brak the lawe” (7.2882-84). While there are several points that Carmidotirus could be proving – for instance that the law must be consistently, equally, or even quickly applied – his final words seem concerned primarily with what type of precedent he will set, a fear that Genius highlights in his next tale, the “Example of Cambyses.” The king Cambyses discovers “a jugge laweles” and has him flayed (7.2897). He then nails the skin onto the chair of the corrupt judge’s son in order that he might remember to dispense justice correctly. Both kings attempt to prevent any future abuse of the law by establishing a clear precedent of respect for the legal process.

The tales of Carmidotirus and Cambyses provide a justification for the removal of problematic kings and their associates, much as does the tale of Sardanapalus. The process in these tales differs from Sardanapalus's, however, in that these tales seem situated to diffuse not potential but realized threats to stability in England within the fictional world of the *Confessio*. Edward II, Richard II and their counselors were not actually overthrown by foreign powers. Rather, they were removed by their own subjects and countrymen in violent political acts that surely did as much to destabilize society as did the original instigating disregard for English laws and customs. Although, these two tales do not deal directly with the deposition of kings, the concerns they express for the future interpretation of laws appear to induce fears similar to those resulting from the Merciless Parliament, which Gower evokes but never explicitly mentions. The Appellants carefully attempted to craft their appeal in a manner that it should punish the present criminals, de Vere and associates, but not sanction future capital punishments for government officials or the nobility based upon their use of Parliament as a judiciary.³³ May McKisack argues, however, in a rather damning proposition, that nevertheless some sort of guidelines for the future were set:

The authors of these savage punishments must bear some responsibility for the long tale of violence and judicial murder which darkens so much of the parliamentary history, not only of the last years of Richard II, but also of the succeeding century.³⁴

The Appellants, though, cannot bear the blame of this alone. Their cause found massive support both in Parliament and in the general public, most likely on account of the frustration in the lack of good government and the failure of a fair legal system.³⁵ The parliament, then, found itself in the difficult position of risking either the establishment of dangerous standards for the ability of the government to execute accused traitors, or of allowing a continued lawlessness to pervade society.

Genius's legal theories, in a move consistent with Gower's increasingly sympathetic view of Henry, Earl of Derby, one of the Appellants, could reflect a general attempt to off-set any responsibility on the part of the Appellants, whom he never directly names, or Parliament for the creation of any ill-advised precedents in 1388.³⁶ While not concerned with the same issues of parliamentary procedure, Carmidotirus and Cambyses, similarly to the Earl of Derby, do take a strong stand against the more general concern over lawlessness. In doing so, they also establish a standard of summary and merciless judgment. Carmidotirus, especially, dismisses any possibility of mercy by swiftly rejecting his own subjects' pleas for pity. Although Genius will go on to praise the virtues of pity in his fourth point of policy, he nevertheless argues in these tales that it is preferable to set a precedent of righteous vengeance than one of pity and a destabilizing disregard for the law. While neither of these two tales deal explicitly with desire, we have seen how concerns over both the king's and his advisors' disrespect for established sexual laws and customs are never far from accusations of their disrespect for the law and the nation in general. Chroniclers' accounts link the two in both proximity and in theory and such charges often share similar punishments. Genius's potential justification, then, of the harsh punishments that the Merciless Parliament dealt out to de Vere and Richard's other favorites also helps to justify any harsh penalties against sodomitical behavior as well.

As we have seen, Gower offers the *Confessio*, and Book Seven in particular, as a moral and political guide for the king. Genius insists that the monarch who tempers his passions with chastity and Christian love, or the divine law of marriage, will rule successfully. Similarly, the king who obeys the law of marriage is more likely to submit himself to the guidance of just secular laws and customs. This argument linking the king's sexual desire to his ability to rule wisely allows Genius to shape his political tales according to the sexual penitential spectrum

required, in part, by the confessional frame, and thus place Book Seven in context with the rest of the poem. More invidiously, though, this link inherently allows for the association of same-sex sodomy with general lawlessness and the death and destruction of both a king and his realm. This association, in turn, elevates the problem of unnatural sexual behavior from a private concern to a much more serious public one by suggesting that it terrorizes not only the sinners but the public and private wealth of others as well. Gower powerfully reinforces, then, a connection of unnatural desires and violence by including tales reminiscent of the precedents set during the rule of Edward II and resembling the fresh accusations of sodomy and bad governance associated with Richard II in and around 1388. While originally Gower may have included such tales as that of Sardanapalus in order to provide a warning for Richard, by the beginning of the fifteenth century the *Confessio* merely seems to provide a reminder of the righteousness of violent aggression against same-sex sodomy that repetitive historical enactment had already legitimized.

CHAPTER FIVE

Love and the Law:

The Tales of King Lucius, Rehoboam, and Aruns; Amans; and Venus's Court

Bot in this point myself aquite
 I mai riht wel, that nevere yit
 I was assoted in my wit,
 Bot only in that worthi place
 Wher alle lust and aller grace
 Is set, if that danger ne were (8.2034-39).

After having set up the dangers of what can happen to those moving too far in a direction opposite of marriage on the penitential spectrum, Genius does not merely leave the reader with the consequences. He provides not just punishment for sinful desires, but solutions for overcoming them in order avoid punishment altogether. Throughout the poem he demonstrates that God and society, working in tandem, have set up a system of laws and advisors in order to help members of society to curb their excesses. In Book Seven, he shows how these tools of reason work for kings, but at the end of Book Eight he argues that the same system of laws and advice can work just as effectively for the common man as for the king, if they are applied before one's will gets the upper-hand.¹ Throughout several exempla, the priest establishes the potential for law and order to triumph over even the most powerful of humankind's innate desires. Although oftentimes, for educative purposes, Genius will allow his characters to ignore

reasonable laws and advice in favor of their baser instincts and suffer, he also presents counter-examples of those rulers who rationally use these tools to subdue such instincts and thrive.

Yet the law, as Genius promotes it in his own advisory role throughout the *Confessio*, is not a universally effective means to counter desire. As we have seen, crimes that he declares natural in some exempla are unnatural in others, and he issues lighter or heavier penance respectively. Such an inconsistent application of the law and its penalties undercuts much of the prohibitive or persuasive power that laws usually rely upon to maintain order. Indeed, for many of the lesser sins that Genius portrays in the *Confessio* he allows for the possibility that one may break the law, pay the penance, and then continue on with his or her life. Mundus, for example, must leave his home, but he survives and the possibility remains that he might break the law again. Lot and his daughters continue to live with the children from their incestuous unions. In these instances, whether to break the law or not becomes a cost/benefit analysis, with the cost only in the rarest of cases being one's life. Only, then, in the cases where Genius consistently and without fail affects his most violent punishments, often deadly ones, can the law truly serve to either dissuade one from committing a crime, or prevent any possibility of recidivism.

At first any solution for overcoming one's desire might seem hypocritical, as it goes against Genius's testament to the overpowering effects of natural desires: "What nature hath set in hir lawe / Ther mai no mannes miht withdrawe" (3.355-6). Yet while the priest acknowledges that at times men have no recourse against what they desire naturally, be they avaricious desires or sexual, he also warns that desire need not necessarily lead to action. James Simpson suggests that Genius, towards the end of the *Confessio*, begins to "insist on the possibility of a 'constitutional' compromise between the demands of the body and those of reason," both qualities with which God has endowed mankind.² When reason "compromises" with the bodily

will, desires can be restrained. Genius, in other words, maintains a philosophy of mind over body, at least for those who use their wisdom to fight off their baser nature.

Man, however, need not necessarily rely on his own wisdom to keep from straying from the path of virtue. There are two sources that can guide him besides his own reason: the law, both divine and/or just secular ones, and advisors who uphold such laws. Genius takes particular care to illustrate the benefits of wise advisors and the just laws that they uphold throughout Book Seven with regard to the king. One of the advantages of surrounding oneself with such advisors, he argues, is that many men can change the will of one (7.4160-66). In “The Courtiers and the Fool,” for instance, Genius describes how King Lucius successfully moves from vice to virtue based upon the godly advice of his fool. Wondering how his people view him, Lucius questions two counselors who mislead him by telling him that his subjects love him, although one admits that they dislike his counselors. Upon hearing such flattery, the king’s fool advises him that if he truly wishes to know what other people think of him, he must examine his own conscience. The king admires the fool’s wisdom, which “was of goddes grace enspired,” and takes on new virtuous counselors (7.4003). The new counselors, in turn, help him to amend the kingdom’s unjust laws so that “The vices thanne gon aweie, / And every vertu holt his weie” (4015-16). Only after the wise counselors and the new laws are in place, however, is the king able to fix the moral destitution of himself and his kingdom. With the help of these guiding tools the king eases the lives of the people and pleases God.

Yet the monarch who follows bad advice and endorses unjust laws ends up deposed and banished, as Genius illustrates with the negative example of king Rehoboam, which follows that of King Lucius. Soon after his coronation, Rehoboam’s citizens ask their new king to repeal the harsh tax laws that his father, King Solomon, originally had enacted to build God’s temple.

They reasonably argue that now that they have the temple and the king is rich there is “no maner nede . . . To pilen of the poeple more” (7.4051-3). The tax that had existed for just purposes is now no more than pillage. Unsure whether or not to relinquish the tax money, Rehoboam seeks advice and turns first to his “wise knyhtes olde,” who concur with the wishes of the people and suggest that by giving up the unneeded income he will be able to rule more effectively (7.4067). The king, though, chooses to maintain the taxes in holding with his foolish younger counselors who taunt him that

it schal be schame
 For evere unto thi worthi name,
 If thou ne kepe noght the riht,
 Whil thou art in thy yonge myht,
 Which that thin olde fader gat (7.4079-83).

These advisors play off of the king’s desire for wealth, power, and strength, which, when encouraged, overcome the initial wisdom he showed by seeking advice. Instead of helping him to create and then follow just laws, they persuade him to abuse his position as law-giver. Following their advice, the king decides not only to keep the taxes but raise them. Furthermore, he increases the penalty for those who would disobey his laws. When he informs the people of his decision, they drive him from his throne.

The king is banished, but Genius can still use his tale to illustrate the potential power of laws and advice to conquer even innate desires, if used in a timely fashion. During his description of Rehoboam’s deposition, Genius compares his immoderate greed and power to a “wilde wode rage” that riles up his formerly calm and law-abiding people like “wyndes” that “makth the See salvage” and that places him in “defalte of grace and lawe” (7.4111-14). Genius’s imagery suggests that the king’s greed is as powerful as a force of a nature. Perhaps it is even a natural force in man’s fallen nature. The important point of his tale, however, and one

that ties Book Seven's tropes of advice to discussions of natural desire in the *Confessio*, is that even such a powerful force did not have to triumph over his reason. Genius implies that the king's unwise actions were not dependent solely upon his innate desire. His greed did not start out as a "wode rage"; yet his avarice grows, when bad advice encourages it, until it rushes in during the second half of the tale like a tide that cannot be turned. But, the tale begins with the possibility that the king could have subdued his desire before it got out of hand, if only he listened to the wise knights. The key is to provide oneself with and then use tools to check desires while they are still in their incipient phases. Both the tales of Lucius and Rehoboam illustrate the need for the king to surround himself with advisors who will govern themselves according to just laws and serve as a system of checks and balances against the royal will. These counselors, then, much like king Lucius' fool, can effectively guide the king back to the path of virtue should he go astray.

In the section on Chastity, Genius takes particular care to emphasize the necessity to restrain sexual desire with advice and the law. The priest explains, for example, that when a man permits thoughts of women to fill his mind, then "[w]ithinne himself the fyr he bloweth" (7.4273). The spark of lust is always within us, according to Genius, but it is only when we allow ourselves to dwell on it that it becomes a flame beyond control. This is, after all, what Aruns lets happen before he rapes Lucrece and loses his kingdom. Upon first seeing Lucrece he desires her, but he does not decide to rape her until after he has lain in bed imagining her womanly beauty, her hair, her clothes, her voice, and so on, until Genius says, "thus this tyrannyshe knyht / Was soupled, bot noght half ariht, / For he non other hiede tok" (7.4889-91). His thoughts seem to compound building up his desire to the point where he has no choice but to attempt to satisfy it in any way possible. When one is alone, of course, it is difficult to restrain

one's thoughts or find distractions. Knowing this, Genius advises that "where honour is remuable / It oghte wel to ben avised" (4896-97). But, as Aruns is a tyrant, a characteristic that the priest points out twice in this passage, he never bothers to seek advice, or consider the laws that might prevent him from thinking about raping his cousin's wife. Disregarding all of the checks and balances available to him, he inflames his desire until it controls him completely and presents the impetus for his banishment. Sardanapalus presents a slight variation on the same theme except that his immoral desires lead him to actions even more immoral than those of Aruns. While Aruns's will only causes him to disobey the laws of reason, Sardanapalus fails to be guided by the laws of nature altogether. He chooses inappropriate advisors who help him to overthrow his natural "manhede" in exchange for "womanhede." As he fails to abide by both rational and natural laws, his punishment of death is much worse than that of Aruns's mere banishment.

Although in Book Seven Genius presents proper counsel and just laws as guidance for rulers in charge of the public good, he makes it clear that they can also guide the common individual. While the common man may not have access to the same types of advisors as a king, counsel is nevertheless always present for him, too. Genius, in his role as priest, provides just such counsel for Amans, and the reader, throughout the *Confessio* guiding him away from sin and toward virtue. He even shapes his last words to Amans in the form of advice saying "I schal / As for conclusion final / Conseile upon thi need sette" (8.2069-71). His advice, as might be expected, is in tune with the type of counsel that he argues should guide kings: "set thin herte under that lawe, / The which of reson is governed / And noight of will" (8.2134-36). Of course, since the common man is not a king, and therefore is not above the secular law, allowing the law to guide him should be even easier than for the king. In part, this is because the law can be used

punish the common man, if it does not guide him, and even the mere threat of punishment can in itself be a form of guidance. Both types of men, king and common, however, are under God's commandments, which serves the same dual purposes of guidance and punishment.

Genius highlights the two-fold function of the law at the end of his final speech to Amans. He reminds the lover that his entire confession, tales and all, has demonstrated the dangers of refusing to submit oneself to the law: "to be lerned, / Ensamples thou hast many on" (8.2136-37). He has spent the majority of the last eight books advising Amans by structuring his didactic tales according to the penitential spectrum and corresponding secular laws. In doing so, he has acted much as a proper priest should, advising the lover on the Church's regulations and using some form of them to punish immoral characters within his tales, each as their degree of sin warranted. Now, though, in Book Eight, Genius temporarily attempts to flatten the graded spectrum that he has used previously and present himself as adhering to the same high-moral standard as the angel Raphael from his tale of "Tobias and Sara." Much as the angel swooped down from heaven to advise Tobias on how to serve God's commandment to love reasonably within the bounds of marriage, and thus avoid death, so Genius now tells Amans to abide by the higher natural law of reason, and not just animal instinct, confidently declaring "I can do to thee nomore / Bot teche thee the rihte weie: / Now ches if thou wolt live or deie" (8.2146-48).

Having taught him the Christian laws of love, Genius advises Amans accordingly to take the wisest course: he should let the law rule him and avoid all punishment.

Yet, Genius is neither as persuasive nor as rigid as he presents himself to be. While he reveals the law as a solution for aiding in the repression of transgressive desires, it is not always a necessary solution within the *Confessio*. Time and time again the priest has demonstrated that the question of whether "to live or deie" does not consistently apply to natural relationships, that

is relationships between men and women. One could even plausibly argue that his inconsistency is necessary, since he readily admits that, barring special grace, there “[i]s non that chaste maiben all” (7.4244). If the standards applied in the tale of “Tobias and Sara” were applied everywhere, there would be a substantial drop in the population. As such, Genius, and both the Church and State, make the best of a bad situation and provide lighter punishments for the less immoral, and more common types of relationships. Thus, despite their immoral behavior, the question for men and women in love is merely one of how much punishment, almost always exclusive of death, they are willing to undergo. If one chooses to accept only the “middel weie” of the penitential spectrum then theoretically one could keep satisfying his/her desires forever if he/she is only willing to accept the continued punishment.

Eventually even Genius admits that a lover has the right to engage in the less immoral sins, if he so chooses, abandoning his dictum that if Amans wants love he must find it within a Christian marriage. After the tale of “Tobias and Sara,” Amans thanks his confessor for his instruction, but admits that it has not helped him to restrain his love. Still acknowledging the potential of advice, though, he asks Genius for further exempla so that he “myhte amende that is mys” (7.5429). When Genius provides them only to insist again that Amans must adhere to the highest moral of love in which there is no sin, the lover snaps. He argues that his love is excusable and that, in fact, others in his position might do worse. Eventually, he convinces the priest to yield his moral high-ground, and Genius, as if grudgingly acknowledging Amans’s argument, agrees to carry a letter containing the lover’s suit to Venus herself. In over thirty thousand lines of poetry, from the beginning of Book One until Genius takes Amans’s plea to Venus, the lover has never once given any indication that he wishes to marry his lady. He merely wants satisfaction for his desire. Genius realizes that Amans has chosen to pursue his

suit regardless of the laws of marriage and by taking the letter the priest tacitly agrees to help him.

In the end, both the law's advisory and prohibitive functions, as portrayed in the *Confessio*, are only at their most persuasive when it comes to preventing unnatural physical interaction between two lovers of the same sex or gender. After all, it is only in such unnatural situations that one could consistently apply Genius's logic that a desire for life should reasonably counter a desire for sex. The priest, in effect, equates the desire for life with a natural heterosexuality. According to his sexual politics, if a lover does not follow the law's guidance toward natural physical relationships, he, or possibly she, ceases to live, and hence desire, altogether. Gower's priest might as well rephrase his ultimatum to lovers of "live or deie" to "perform heterosexuality naturally or die." As such, his solution for repressing one's will, as it is consistently presented through the poem, is substantially less persuasive for fornicators, adulterers, and those who commit incest, because they have the possibility of perpetually indulging their desire, since they will almost certainly be left alive to do so. On the other hand, it is at its most persuasive for those languishing on the lowest rung of the penitential spectrum.

As if to illustrate this solution in action, Gower presents what might be considered two "success stories" in the reappearance of Hercules and Narcissus, two characters whom, as we have seen, he links to same-sex desire, during the final scenes of the *Confessio*. Having both been killed as punishment for allowing their heterosexual desires to mislead them beyond the bounds of natural behavior, they now appear rehabilitated in Venus's court, which "takth nought into retenue / Bot thing which is to kinde due, / For elles it schal be refused" (8.2347-49). In this other-worldly, life-after-death court, Hercules has regained his "grete mace" and labors to play with Eolen, happily no longer risking misdirected advances. His experience has certainly

encouraged him to resume his traditional masculinity and actively reassert where his romantic interests lay. Narcissus is there too, alone. Unlike Hercules, however, he follows Venus lamenting, most likely still unable to understand why he could not make things work with the girl in the water. In this figure of Narcissus, it is unclear whether Gower presents one final covert warning against the most deadly of desires by associating them with misery even after death, or if he finally gives some indication that, while he believes an overwhelming desire for life, especially an eternal life, can persuade one to give up transgressive tendencies, he realizes that this solution is not always a happy one.

CONCLUSION

The *Confessio Amantis* and the Modern Reader

What a modern day reader might find surprising about Genius's interpretation of medieval regulations of sex and desire, I think, is not necessarily his normalization or licensing of a heterosexuality that is essentially immoral, although this is certainly unusual for the poetry of the Middle Ages. For twenty-first century readers, at least, the desire for normalcy -- not to be a saint, but not to be wholly outside of nature either -- can hardly be shocking. Rather, what might be more revelatory is the priest's overt implication that variations of desire maintain an inherent continuity and that human sexuality may, for all intents and purposes, be mobile. After all, Genius relies on the laws of God and man throughout the *Confessio* in an attempt to motivate Amans to eschew incest, adultery, and love in general by suggesting that he can ascend from such base desires and attain a reasonable Christian love within the bounds of matrimony. A reverse movement is possible, too, however, and the priest demonstrates how perverted heterosexual desires can even lead to same-sex attraction, such as Narcissus falling in love with an image that he no more recognizes as male than as his own, or Iphis and Ianthe desiring each other. What is more recognizable for us, regrettably, is Genius's tendency to demonstrate how such relationships between two lovers of the same sex or gender must never be consummated.

All too familiar is his belief that if lovers do attempt to consummate same-sex affairs they should be punished with deadly violence. In the United States, one need only think of the all too recent Mathew Shepard murder in Wyoming in 1998.¹ Or, more subtly, the violent language used in conjunction with terms connoting same-sex desire heard across college campuses today, which assumes and reinforces a publicly understood “us versus them” mentality.

What the *Confessio* gives to modern readers, then, is a willingness to look at desire and sexual attraction as existing outside of present day boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Its formulation of a penitential spectrum posits that under certain circumstances “we” can turn into “them” from either direction. It presents us with a step on the road to modern day formations of two distinct public sexual categories by suggesting a fluid sexuality but forcefully refusing to allow all possible physical manifestations of desire to occur between two consenting adults. As such, Gower’s poem challenges us to ask what role a historically constructed threat of imminent violence, as much as any religious belief, plays in enforcing modern day public boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality regardless of what views on the subject one has in private. Public personas of a virulent heterosexuality are undoubtedly maintained in today’s society by the fear of public humiliation or worse, just as homosexual rigidity is assured by a very real threat of increased violence should there be any fracture in a sense of communal solidarity, and hence a dangerous diminishment in the cultural and political pressure for the right of such a category to exist.² Depictions of a third category, bisexuality, which is the closest modern term for the way in which *Genius* portrays human desires, are notably scarce in American cultural popular culture, at least. For those of us who do not use a Christian morality to determine the worth of our sexual behavior, the tearing down of historically constructed barriers would lead to a widening of options and the unrestricting of

individuality. In all camps, what may be seen as common ground for dialogue, such as even the mere communal potentiality for different desires, presently gets lost between divisive barricades of dogmatic ideology. Finally, as a secularly minded agnostic, I do not necessarily want to discount deeply held religious notions of morality, but I do wish to suggest that we take a closer look at how and why those beliefs came to make themselves felt in today's society.

References

Chapter 1: Introduction

¹ John Gower reveals the problem of intentions most succinctly in his *Mirour de l'Omme*, trans. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, Inc., 1992), lns. 17437-49, wherein he writes, "A man should cherish his wife in order to avoid lechery, not in order to commit lechery. For great troubles may befall whoever takes her in wanton desire . . ." According to Chaucer's Parson, however, intentions were not a problem, since any sex act, no matter what, was sinful: Marriage "chaungeth deedly synne into venial synne bitwixe hem that been ywedded." See Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), ln. 919.

² Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonio* (Rome, 1603; rpt. Farnborough: Gregg Press, 1967), 3.5.42, pp. 474-75, states that the only appropriate manner of sexual intercourse is "between men and women in an orderly way in the appropriate vessel," essentially meaning a "missionary style" position, and, of course, within marriage. I have used Karma Lochrie's translation, see Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 183.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, "Law and Political Theory" in *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries*, 60 vols., trans. and ed. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 28.31 [q. 91, a. 4]. All subsequent citations are to this edition and will be given with the question number, article number, and, for clarity, the page numbers specific to this edition. Thomas makes several points about the mutability and limited nature of human rationality. One of his reasons explaining why humans need divine law is representative: Divine law is necessary "because of the untrustworthiness of human judgment, notably on contingent and particular issues, different people come to differing decisions about human conduct, with the result that diverse and conflicting laws are passed. That men may know without any doubt what should or should not be done there was required a divinely given law carrying the assurance that it cannot be mistaken." Clearly, however, interpretation of this divinely given law still remains up to interpretation.

⁴ One need only throw in the category of gender and who should be the dominant figure in a relationship for a discussion of heterosexuality to spiral out of control. In marriage, a man was supposed to be dominant. Consider, the allegorical relationship, though, where men were part of a Church commonly portrayed as the bride of Christ.

⁵ Just human laws, according to Aquinas, are derivative of divine law and the two work in tandem: "A human law has the force of law to the extent that it falls in with right reason: as such it derives from the Eternal Law" (Aquinas, q. 93, art 3, p. 61).

Chapter 2: Fornication, Adultery, and Incest: The Tales of Tobias and Sara, Mundus and Paulina, and Aruns and Lucrece

¹ *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay 4 Vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901). All further quotations of the *Confessio Amantis* will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Alastair Minnis, "'Moral Gower' and Medieval Literary Theory," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. Alastair Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), p. 55.

³ Here I am building off of work by Hugh White, "Nature and the good in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989); Kurt Olsson, "Natural Law and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Peter Nicholson (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 1991); and R. F. Yeager, "Learning to Speak in Tongues: Writing

Poetry for a Trilingual Culture,” in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1991) – all of whom have previously shown the complex and hierarchical way in which Gower uses the concept of man’s nature.

⁴ Minnis, p. 66, writes that “[f]or Gower, love outside marriage, or without reference to marriage, need not be devoid of ‘honeste’, yet married love is, as it were, ‘honeste love’ at full maturity, anything else being at maximum a kind of second best which has much in common with the best and highlights it.”

⁵ The author of the *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), pp. 713-15, suggests that “[i]n order to acquire the virtue of continence, we must . . . abstain from immodest touching, immoral conversation, lewd words, and shameful gestures, and devote ourselves fully to honorable behavior.” This advice follows several exempla promoting marriage, the most notable of which is of a woman whose husband, after several people rebuke him for bad-breath, asks his wife why she had never mentioned the problem to him. She replies that she had “thought that all men’s mouths smell that way.” The author notes approvingly that “[s]he had obviously never tasted another man’s mouth!” The author provides the perfect example of a restrained desire within the bounds of Christian marriage.

⁶ *The Book of Vices and Virtue: A Fourteenth-Century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d’Orléans*, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS os 217 (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 44.

⁷ Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 20-23 and 132-33.

⁸ *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p. 44, for instance, notes that when a married person commits adultery the sin is much worse than mere fornication because the sinner also commits sacrilege.

⁹ *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.46.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ In his biography of Gower, John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 48-60, discusses the poet’s long engagement with, including his tenancy in, St. Mary Overeys Priory in Southwark, which was in close proximity to the stews of Southwark. In the *Confessio*, Gower refers to stews in the tale “Apollonius of Tyre” in a rather peculiar context. When Genius describes how the people of Tyre mourn Apollonius, who flees to avoid the wrath of Antiochus, he notes how Apollonius’s subjects “losten lust, they losten chiere . . . For unlust of that aventure / ther was noman which tok tonsure, / In doleful clothes thei hem clothe, / The bathes an the Stwes bothe / Thei schetten in be every weie ; / There was no lif which leste pleie / Ne take of eny joie kepe,” and he continues on describing how the subjects miss their lord (8.476-87). Genius describes the closing of the stews and bath-houses, that is to say the brothels, in the same breath as he talks about people leaving religious orders and generally loosing a lust for life. In this context, the closing of the stews is a *negative* occurrence. Both stews and religious orders represent a properly working social order.

¹² For a brief overview of the life of William of Wykeham, a prominent figure in both English politics and the English church, see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols., ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 60.637-40. For a discussion of the stews of Southwark see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 31-33. More specifically, see Derek Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester: Part I*, 2 vols., (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 390-91, who lists the abbot of Hyde and the warden of Trinity Chapel, both in Winchester, as at least two clerical landlords whom city courts ordered to remove prostitutes from rented cottages. Keene also suggests that “it was probably out of a conscious regard for civic solidarity and respectability that the warden of St. John’s Hospital [in Winchester], who owned many cottages in disreputable areas, was never named in the court rolls as the landlord of a whore” Carlin, Martha, *Medieval Southwark*, (London: The Hambleton Press, 1996), p. 214 n. 28, lists surviving records from the late fifteenth century that show churchwardens of St. Margaret’s as renting to brothel-keepers as well.

¹³ Karras, *Common Women*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67 and 99, notes that although some prostitutes were subjected to public shame, they were still let back out on the street to return to their professions.

¹⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, “De Regimine Principium ad Regem Cypri,” 4.14, in *Opera Omnia* (1864; reprint, New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950), 16.281; quoted in Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 185 n. 7.

¹⁶ Here we should remember that, as Russell Peck points out, while theology influences his poetry, “Gower is not a theologian.” Russell A. Peck, “The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower: Ideas of Kingship and Real Kings,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), p. 217.

¹⁷ Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 134.

¹⁸ Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 41-42, notes the play on the duke’s name and the Latin word “Mundus,” meaning world. Peck notes that the duke “behaves hypocritically like *mundus*, the world; he operates under the guise of purity to deceive the innocent.” I would suggest that *Mundus* also represents worldly behavior in that he acts hypocritically in order to get what every man desires.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, “Romeo and Juliet,” *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publications, Inc., 1997), 3.3.27-28.

²⁰ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 208.

²¹ See 3 Edw. I (West. I), c. 13; 13 Edw. I (West. II), c. 34-35; 6 Ric. II, st. I, c. 6 in *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by the Command of His Majesty King George the Third in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain* 11 Vols. (London, 1810-28; rpt. London: Dawsons, 1963). See also R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 109.

²² Helmholz, p. 109.

²³ John G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 195. Bellamy also notes that legal treatises do contain “references to castration and blinding in connection with both rape and felonious wounding, but in practice, like lip removal, they had probably ceased by the turn of the century” (p. 181).

²⁴ While Genius does not offer much praise of Lucrece in book seven, the narrator does include her at the end of book eight as one of four virtuous women highlighted in Venus’s Court (8.2632-39). In book seven, however, with Genius’s themes of justice, pity, and listening to counsel, excessive praise of Lucrece, who follows none of the priest’s advice, would be out of place.

²⁵ Here it is useful to note the similarity between the speeches of Paulina’s husband to her “he with hire is nothing wroth, / For wel he wot sche may ther noght” (1.986-87) and of Lucrece’s father’s and Collatin’s speech to her “[They] swore . . . That thei with hire be noght wrothe / Of that is don ayein hire wille” (7.5053-55). The similarities in the words of the men help heighten the similarity of the situations, and thus the differences in the actions of the two wronged women.

²⁶ Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 125 and 35, notes that the word “prieden” was also used in parliamentary contexts when advising the king.

²⁷ Elizabeth Porter, "Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis Responses and Reassessments*, ed. Alastair Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), p. 138, points out that in his *De Regimine Principum*, from which Gower relied upon for book seven of the *Confessio*, Giles of Rome "begins his treatise with a systematic exposition of the individual's need to acquire ethical self-governance, or personal kingship." Gower presents the same idea in book eight: "every man for his partie / A kingdom hath to justefie" (8.2111-12).

²⁸ María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio Amantis: Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 171.

²⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale," *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), lns. 78 and 84.

³⁰ Helmholz, pp. 77-87. The disgust the Man of Law displays toward incest most likely was not uncommon. Helmholz notes several cases dealing with the lower and middle classes that suggest that consanguinity was a strong preventative to marriage and that medieval society took it very seriously. Yet at times the Church actually preferred that an incestuous couple, once married, stay married, depending upon the degree of consanguinity, in order not to let positive laws override the sacrament of marriage. A further exception to the rule was the upper-classes, who were occasionally able to obtain dispensations to marry distant family members. Of course, I am not trying to suggest that Canace and Machaire's relationship might have been seen as anything other than the most unnatural sort of incest, which is first-degree consanguinity. I only want to point out that Genius does have a contemporary precedent for treating the category of incest in a "natural" manner, even if he takes his precedent to the extreme by the closeness of Canace and Machaire's kinship.

³¹ Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1993), pp. 35-6. Gower himself refers to the First Age in book eight, discussing how nature caused Adam and Eve's children to procreate with each other "Forthi that time it was no Sinne / The Soster forto take hire brother / Whan that ther was of chois non other" (8.68-70).

³² See Donavin, pp. 35-38, see also Benson, p. 106, and for perhaps the best discussion of Genius's change over time see also James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 215-16.

³³ Even in book eight, however, death as a punishment for incest is hardly assured. Genius does describe God as punishing Caligula with death for raping his three sisters, who are subsequently banished (8.208-10); but if it was not God who decided to take Caligula's life, one could assume that he was no guiltier for his crime than was Canace or Machaire. In the tale "Apollonius of Tyre," Genius relates that God smites Finally, Absolon kills Ammon for incestuously raping their sister. While this is not divine justice, the priest does seem to think it is a type of justice, "thus thunkinde unkinde fond" (8.221-22). Overall, in the five tales wherein incestuous relationships are clearly acted upon, Genius's logic is confusing and anything but consistent.

Chapter 3: Deadly Desires: The Tales of Iphis and Ianche, Narcissus, and Hercules

¹ "The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Translated from the Latin Vulgate" in *The Holy Bible: Genesis to Ruth, Job to Sirach, and the Prophets*, 4th ed., ed. Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, trans. Catholic Biblical Association of America (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), p. 211, [Romans 1.26-27].

² "Cleanness" in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 4th ed., ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), ln. 696.

³ As Allen J. Frantzen, "The Disclosure of Sodomy in *Cleanness*," in *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 111, no. 3 (1996): p. 456, notes that "The phrase 'on femmalez wyse' comes close to telling the poet's readers what it is that sodomites do: when they fornicate, at least one of the men acts like a woman. This description makes pointed use of female sexuality though the act seems to exclude it."

⁴ Many penitential handbooks recommend using covert suggestions to question penitents on sodomitical behavior. This system is probably most dramatically symbolized in the *Fasciculus Morum*, pp. 686-89. In a discussion that also suggests that same-sex desires are analogous to heterosexual ones, the author cannot even bring himself to talk about same-sex desire as such, but uses a heterosexual allegory to describe the horror of this sin. This substitution imagines a peculiar type of violence as it strips same-sex desire of the right to exist even for the sake of its own condemnation.

⁵ Frantzen, p. 457 and 460, argues that although the author of *Cleanness* “reassures his readers that heterosexual practices are not only acceptable but also hidden, having been taught “derne” ‘secretly,’ as God says (679). Putting the forbidden act in full view, the poet keeps the other act in the dark: heterosexual intercourse “vnstered wyth sy3t” ‘undisturbed by sight’ because it is private, protected from the temptations of the eye that can contaminate intercourse and turn it to pleasurable ends.” Frantzen further points out that the poet avoids mentioning the sin of incest, which is also closely associated with the story of Sodom on account of Lot’s relationship with his daughters. Genius, however, goes to great lengths to bring natural sexual relationships into the light, including incest.

⁶ Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 75.

⁷ See Peter Nicholson, ed., *An Annotated Index to the Commentary on Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Binghamton: Center For Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989), pp. 24-5, for a brief discussion on Gower’s use of Berchorius’s *Ovidius Moralizatus* and Ovid in general.

⁸ *Ovidius Moralizatus of Petrus Berchorius: A Translation and Introduction*, ed. and trans. William Reynolds (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1971), p. 343.

⁹ *Ovidius Moralizatus*, p. 343.

¹⁰ Age was a consideration for the handing out of punishment in the penitentials. Children who were of a younger age were not necessarily considered completely responsible for their sins, including sexual sins. See Payer, pp. 41-44 for a discussion on age and male homosexuality, as well as pp. 129-134 for a short discussion on the factor of age and penance in general.

¹¹ Watt, p. 74.

¹² Yeager, p. 120, suggests that “[b]ecause his mother and all the servants are part of the deception, Iphis is kept unaware of ‘his’ true sex.”

¹³ Lochrie, p. 214-216, see also Watt, p. 74.

¹⁴ *Middle English Compendium*, s. v. “liche.”

¹⁵ *Ovidius Moralizatus*, p. 194

¹⁶ Macaulay notes that this “story is mainly taken from Ovid, *Metam.* ix. 101ff., but probably Gower was acquainted also with the epistle *Deianira Herculi*”; there is, of course, no mention of cross-dressing in the *Metamorphoses*’s relation of Hercules’ death, see *The Complete Works of John Gower*, vol. 2, p. 489

¹⁷ Carole Koepke Brown, “The Tale of of Deianira and Nessus” in *John Gower’s Literary Transformations in the Confessio Amantis: Original Articles and Translations*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), p. 18

¹⁸ The Latin side-note describes Faunus as “*impotens*,” after Hercules throws him to the ground. See *The Complete Works of John Gower*, vol. 3, p. 135.

¹⁹ Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York: Wiley, 1976), p. 391, states that “the medieval church never burned anyone; those people who were burned in the medieval period were burned by the state, although the Church might well have found them guilty and turned them over to the state for punishment. This pious hypocrisy of allowing the state to execute the condemned kept the Church officially from shedding blood or executing anyone.”

²⁰ Britton, ed. and trans. Francis Morgan Nichols (1865; reprint, Holmes Beach: W.W. Gaunt, 1983), pp. 41-42, [Book 1, Ch. 10], and Fleta, ed. and trans. H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1955), p. 90 [Book 1, Ch. 35].

²¹ Bellamy, p. 63. Bellamy, unfortunately, does not give any indication of what he saw in the records that lead him to make this statement.

²² While Bellamy’s assumptions might be correct, ultimately we are left with the fact pointed out by Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, “‘Ut Cum Muliere’: A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London” in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 113, that “we do not know what the law of sodomy [in England] actually was . . . [because] actual legislation does not survive, nor do any examples of enforcement of such legislation (Richardson and Sayles 1955, 2:90; Nichols 1865, 1:42; Boswell 180, 292-93).” This lack of information includes the results of the case of the male transvestite prostitute that they discuss in their article.

²³ Scholars tend to assume that Gower was a lawyer at some point in his professional life. However, I have only found two studies that attempt to give this claim any substantial support. Fisher, pp. 58-59 and 61-2, suggests that Gower may very well have been a lawyer due to his sophisticated handling of a legal case in his life records. He carefully qualifies his theory, though, by saying that “the data in hand are sufficient to indicate that Gower had some sort of legal connection,” not that he was a lawyer.

Candace Barrington, “John Gower, the ‘*Confessio Amantis*,’ and the Rhetoric of Omission” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1998), pp.152-176 and *passim*, strengthens Fishers claim by outlining portions of Gower’s poetry that seem to have been influenced by the legal rhetoric and courtroom practice of the fourteenth century. She argues that while Gower does not directly deal with lawyers in the *Confessio*, as he did in the *Vox* and the *Mirour*, “the profession continues to haunt his poetry, most particularly in the form of legal discourse” in a way that “permeates and molds” his poetry. Even if Gower was a lawyer, however, there is no way to know for certain that he was personally familiar with either of these treatises. He need not necessarily have been, however, as continental practices were wide-spread enough that it seems likely, especially as he had a circle of legally minded friends, that he may have heard about the severe legal consequences for same-sex sodomy from indirect sources.

²⁴ See *The Complete Works of John Gower*, vol. 2, p. 480. While Macaulay only suggests that Gower references the law entitled “De lege Furia Caninia sublata,” this does indicate at least a passing familiarity with the Institutes. See also Bullough, pp. 333-5 and 382, for a discussion of Justinian’s specifically harsh condemnation of same-sex sexual behavior, as well as the integration of these laws into canon and penitential law through Gratian.

²⁵ Olsson, p. 182.

²⁶ Brundage, p. 473.

²⁷ Michael Goodlich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1979), p. 88, provides a comprehensive outline of various European laws designating capital punishment for same-sex interactions between men. Bullough, p. 391, points out that Orléans had laws for the burning of sodomites, but he argues that “there is no evidence that sodomists were in fact burned. Rather, the statutory provision for burning was probably a *pro forma* one based on the provisions of late Roman law codes and transmitted into Europe through the Carolingian legislation of the ninth century.” Claude Courouve, “Sodomy Trials in France,” *Gay Books Bulletin* 1 (1978): pp. 22-23, notes seven known cases of convicted sodomites in France from 1317-1372. Three people were burned, one’s sentence is unknown, one escaped, one was fined only, and one was sentenced to reclusion for life in a monastery. One case in 1343 did not lead to a trial because the man fled, obviously with good reason.

²⁸ George D. Economou, “The Character Genius in Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower,” in Nicholson, 1991, p. 113, points out that “[l]ike the Goddess Natura whom he represents, Genius is concerned with procreation, with the battle against Death on a level that does not take into account the moral demands expressed by Alan’s Natura and Genius or by Jean’s own Raison.”

²⁹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 302.

³⁰ Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 14.

³¹ De Lorris and de Meun, p. 303.

³² Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran “Literature and the Medieval Historian,” *Medieval Perspectives* 10 (1995): p. 5. The Orléans laws were echoed elsewhere in Europe. Brundage, p. 473, points out that “thirteenth-century Portuguese practice, adapted from the *Fuero real* of Alfonso the Wise, prescribed castration for male homosexuals, followed (three days later) by hanging by the legs until death; Siena also prescribed hanging, but ‘by the virile members,’” and we have already seen that the English *Fleta* suggests being buried alive for same-sex crimes.

Chapter 4: The “Tale of the Three Questions” and the Tales of Sardanapalus, Carmidotirus, and Cambyses: A Mirror for Richard

¹ Ferster, pp. 124 and 133-34, has previously demonstrated how in book seven of the *Confessio*

² Michael Hanrahan, “Speaking of Sodomy: Gower’s Advice to Princes in the *Confessio Amantis*,” *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14, no. 2 (2002): pp. 430-38.

³ *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second*, rev. ed. and rev. trans. Wendy R. Childs (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 29. Bullough, p. 389, notes that “increasingly, in the later medieval period, there was a tendency to identify those individuals who refused to conform sexually with those who practiced heresy and witchcraft.”

⁴ Jean Froissart, *Chroniques: Livre Un, Le Manuscrit D’Amiens*, ed. George T. Diller (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1991), p. 34.

⁵ Froissart, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Katherine Royer, “The Body in Parts: Reading the Execution Ritual in Late Medieval England,” *Historical Reflections* 29, no. 2 (2003): p. 329.

⁸ George B. Stow, “Chronicles Versus Records: The Character of Richard II,” in *Documenting the Past: Essays in Medieval History Presented to George Peddy Cuttino*, ed. J. S. Hamilton and Patricia J. Bradley (Wolfboro: Boydell, 1989), pp. 155-176, has observed that while modern historians are rightfully dubious of the motivations and driving intentional forces behind chroniclers’ accounts, official public records, supposedly less biased historical accounts, often confirm the chroniclers’ depictions of various facets of Richard II’s character, such as his profligate spending, public displays of anger, and arrogant temperament. Although, Stow does point out that the records do dispel suggestions that Richard showed no interest in “manly” pursuits, such as hunting and war. I am not, of course, suggesting that because chroniclers accuse Richard of unnatural relations that he was a sodomite; I am more concerned with public opinion here than of any specific, and most likely indiscernible, truth. Still, the coherence between official records and the chroniclers’ accounts of aspects of Richard’s character does lend credibility the popularity and currency of the chroniclers’ accusations.

⁹ *The St. Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. and trans. John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss, vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 799.

¹⁰ *An English Chronicle: 1377-1461*, ed. William Marx (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 23.

¹¹ See Jordan, p. 57 n. 54, for a brief discussion and sources of where same-sex desire is compared to plagues and disease. Bullough, p. 333-34 notes that Justinian issued laws suggesting that homosexuality brought diseases and plagues to cities, whereby same-sex desires “become a matter of not only legal concern but also of community concern, since homosexuals caused God to be wrathful and threatened everyone.”

¹² *Chronicon Adæde Usk: A. D. 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. Edward Maunde Thompson, 2d ed. (London: H. Frowde, 1904), p. 29.

¹³ George B. Stow, “Richard II in Thomas Walsingham’s Chronicles,” *Speculum* 59.1 (1984): pp. 83 and 86, suggests in the case of Walsingham that the opinion of Richard in his chronicles changed over time with his more dramatic insinuations against the king coming after Henry IV had ascended to the throne. Walsingham’s suggestion that Richard promoted Robert de Vere because of their “familiaritatis obsoenae” was as early as 1386.

¹⁴ Paul Strohm, *England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 13-99-1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 103-06 and 115-18. Strohm explores Lancastrian portrayals of Richard II through his two burials: first in 1400 at Langley with little pomp and circumstance, and then again in 1413 with splendor at Westminster Abbey, the traditional burial place for royalty.

¹⁵ For the perversity of the feminine see Lochrie, p. 192-99.

¹⁶ Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 286.

¹⁷ María Bullón-Fernández, pp. 69-70, also explores this tale’s economic implications but primarily from the point of view of the knight’s daughter. While my argument focuses more on the responsibilities of the king to maintain his loyal subjects’ rights, she concentrates on the daughter’s specific concern with preserving her own privileges. As I see it, our arguments are complimentary. Bullón-Fernández, pp. 43 and 67, also follows Donavin in seeing in this tale a displaced incest between the knight and his daughter due to similarities between Gower’s garden scene and the garden scene in the *Roman de la Rose*. See Donavin, p. 54.

¹⁸ Hanrahan, p. 437.

¹⁹ I have used the English translation of this passage found in *The St. Albans Chronicle*, p. 815. Hanrahan, p. 435. Hanrahan also quotes this passage from Walsingham and as well others from Adam of Usk and Henry Knighton to establish the similarity between Sardanapalus’s turn to femininity and the effeminization of Richard II.

²⁰ See *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, pp. 243 and 245-7. The chronicler includes what he says is a copy of the “[s]ingularum uero litterarum communis [the one text common to all the letters]” that the king’s council had asked the bishops to write the queen asking her to leave France and return to England. The copy of the letter states that “the people living in our land fear that many evils will occur, because you refuse to return. They fear the arrival of foreigners and the plunder of their good;” and it repeats the sentiment a few lines later, “[t]he English people has a foreboding from these threats that foreigners will come, and says that, if the French come, they will plunder the land,” and then the chronicler notes briefly that Isabella nevertheless refused to come. The queen refused to return until Hugh the Younger was banished from court. She declared “that marriage is a union of a man and a woman, holding fast to the practice of a life together, and that someone [Hugh] has come between my husband and myself and is trying to break this bond”

²¹ For the dating of the *Confessio* see Fisher, p. 116.

²² The 8th and 29th-30th articles of the Appeal that the Appellants announced against Richard de Vere, Michael de la Pole, Robert Tresilian, and Nicholas Brembre, accused Richard of giving up English territorial holdings in Scotland and especially France to England's enemies and adversaries. See *The Westminster Chronicle: 1381-1394*, ed. and trans. L. C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 247 and 263. Interestingly, Walsingham, in comparison to Richard's unwarlike courtiers, touts the military prowess of men such as the earls of Arundel and Nottingham who in 1387 were antagonizing the French. Then, shortly afterwards, he, too, mentions fears "that the enemy were ready to invade England because of the slaughter they had suffered a short time before at the hands of the earl of Arundel," and describes how the Henry Percy, son of the earl of Northumberland, bravely repelled the enemy threat despite Richard's advisors refusal to give him the appropriate support. He seems to argue that although Richard's courtiers would be unprepared in case of an invasion, there luckily were those who could defend England, even if, ironically, some of those warriors, such as Arundel, were the ones inciting the threat in the first place. See *The St. Albans Chronicle*, pp. 813-17.

²³ The 15th Article of the Appeal also notes that de Vere and associates were guilty of "seeing the imminent ruin of the king and of the realm by the perils and mischiefs abovesaid and that the king had forsaken the council of the realm and applied himself entirely to the counsel of the said misfeasors and traitors, and also for that the French king with all his royal power was embarked on the sea ready to have landed in England and to have destroyed all the realm and nation of England, and there was no ordinance nor governance then made for the safety of the king nor of the realm . . ." (*Westminster Chronicle* 251).

²⁴ Theoretically, Gower's proposal that the king's same-sex desires threaten the state would be true for the same desires in the common man. Porter, p. 139, points out that Gower borrowed the concept of a microcosm and macrocosm, the interrelation between an individual and the world in which he lives, from Giles of Rome and that he used it to explain "the crucial relationship between individual ethical self-governance and the well-being of the state." The denigration of one man's morality would then affect his entire society.

²⁵ See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 63-68, for a discussion of how sodomy was often linked to crimes other than property loss and treason, such as heresy and simony.

²⁶ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Gaveston was considered to be a minor noble and thus his wealth, perceived to be ill-gotten, and his overwhelming influence seemed to have been particularly irksome. The chronicler of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 27, notes that "Set Petres iam comes Cornubie olim se fuisse Petrum et humilem armigerum noluit intelligere [But Piers, now earl of Cornwall, was unwilling to remember that he had once been Piers the humble esquire]". See also the included copy of the Ordinance banning Gaveston in which his detractors describe near the beginning of the text how he "led the lord king astray, advised the lord king badly" and in which they accuse him of "gathering to himself all the king's treasure" to make himself rich. See the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 35. For the similar unsuitability of Hugh the Younger see *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 193-4.

²⁹ The Author of the *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 201 and 201 n. 2, suggests that the events of Edward II's reign were certainly on at least Richard's mind in 1387 when the king asked a powerful group of justices and members of the legal community "How ought he to be punished who in parliament moved that the statute be sent for whereby King Edward [II], son of King Edward and great-grandfather of the present king, was in time past adjudged in parliament." Here the reference is to Edward II's response to the election of the Ordainers, who were aggravated in part by Gaveston. See also Ferster, pp. 26 and 70, who argues that the deposition of Edward II, which of course stemmed from his misrule, including his blatant favoritism, "haunted" his royal heirs.

³⁰ See Article 22 and Article 7 of the Appeal against Robert de Vere, Alexander archbishop of York, etc. in *The Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 237-9 and 257.

³¹ See Article 11 in *The Westminster Chronicle*, p. 249 and 249 n.1.

³² May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307-1399* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 459. McKisack notes the “Merciless Parliament well deserved its name” not only because of its bloodthirsty proceedings, but also because parliament sentenced so many of the courtiers to death on what were, she argues, “flimsy pretexts.”

³³ McKisack, p. 456.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

³⁶ Even before Gower’s rededication of the *Confessio* to “myn oghne lord, / Which of Lancastre is Henri named” in the Prologue of the third recension, Richard II had shared the dedication of the poem with Henry in several versions of the poem that Fisher has dated as “before June 1392” (Prol. 82-83). See Fisher, p. 123.

Chapter 5: Love and the Law: The Tales of King Lucius, Rehoboam, Aruns; Amans, and Venus’s Court

¹ Here I adapt Porter’s contention that the *Confessio Amantis* functions as many “mirrors for princes” do, in that they are presented to kings but they pertain to the common man as well, see Porter, p. 135-36.

² Simpson, p. 215.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: The *Confessio Amantis* and the Modern Reader.

¹ We should also keep in mind that many hate crimes based upon sexual orientation in American society are never officially reported, see Gregory M. Herek, Jeanine C. Cogan, and J. Roy Gillis, “Victim Experiences in Hate Crimes Based on Sexual Orientation,” *Journal of Social Issues* 58, n. 2 (2002): 332-35.