'AL WAS OF ARMES AND OF LOVE': SEXUAL/TEXTUAL VIOLENCE IN JOHN GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

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ABSTRACT

The *Confessio Amantis* is a multivocal work stemming from contemporary discussions of sexual love which were themselves not monologic. In Gower's poem, the governing theme is *divisioun*, and while the overt power structure it advocates is hierarchical and patriarchal, the poem's many voices nevertheless challenge traditional ideas of authority. Modern feminist and post-Freudian thought illuminates the ideologies of the poem's voices, most of which derive from a scheme of binary opposition which is gender-asymmetrical. *Divisioun*, or "overdifferentiation," is a state in which the "Other" is perceived as an object that either thwarts or satisfies the self's desires, rather than as a subject in its own right. This view of the "Other" is the basis of violence, which is itself an attempt to shore up weakened authority.

In courtly love poetry the male poet/lover seeks to control the m/Other, though he can only do so effectively as voyeur; the relationship of Gower's Amans to his lady is modelled on this psychology. Genius too occludes the feminine Other. He speaks in two often contradictory languages: that of moral didacticism and that of narrative symbolism. The discrepancy between Genius's *moralitates* and his *narraciones* creates gaps through which Gower allows feminine voices to be heard. Within Genius's tales, women

sometimes speak or act out against male domination, though Genius attempts to ignore instances of feminine wilfulness and aggression in favour of models of feminine passivity. Within the poem, inferior "feminine" textual layers speak against superior "masculine" layers. Gower thereby posits woman as a second subject rather than as the Other, a positioning which is essential to the necessary balance of reason and passion.

To Kevin,

for his patience and generosity.

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INTRODUCTION

It is an ironic and powerful feature of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* that while Amans is learning to be a virtuous and courteous lover in order to obtain his lady under socially acceptable conditions, Genius is telling him some of Western culture's most blood-drenched stories of lovers. Thus the poem is noteworthy, not so much for its "tone of mellowness," as one critic has asserted,[1] as for its bloodshed and brutality.

At some point, one is tempted to question the purity of Genius's motives in narrating these tales. Does he tell them for entirely educational purposes, solely as a method of teaching by negative example? Or is he revelling in vice to preach virtue? Is there in fact some level on which Genius actually upholds the behaviour in these stories? I will demonstrate that while Genius overtly criticizes male behaviour in the tales, he shares with these characters an unconscious investment in a patriarchal system founded on a scheme of gender-asymmetrical binary opposition and a desire to occlude the feminine. I also suggest that Amans, as a courtly lover, shares this ideology, which fears the feminine Other, and which leads naturally to violence.

Thus while Gower superficially depicts a priest conveying moral wisdom to his penitent, he simultaneously demonstrates

the underlying cultural ideologies held by the social and literary influences from which his confessor derives. Significantly, through the gaps left by this pedagogue is sometimes heard the voice of the Other, a voice that is so often silenced or restricted in these traditions. Genius might thus be viewed as a superego, a repository of cultural values, and Amans as the ego, the initiate learning, questioning, and sometimes refuting these values, but always seeking a balance between the moral restraints of the superego and the irresistible impulses of the id. Gower's text as a whole represents a dynamic discussion of love that is unique to late fourteenth-century society and to an author concerned with social structure and politics.

In this paper I work under two premises. The first is that any meaning that can be derived from this text is to be found in the relation between the parts rather than from a single voice of ultimate authority. Meaning in the *Confessio Amantis* is not found by privileging one element of the text over the others. Considered in isolation, neither the narrator's theory, nor Amans' quest, nor even Genius's dogma offers a vision of the "truth" about love. To the extent that they interrupt, question, and refute one another, the multiplicity of voices in the text makes a monological reading of the poem impossible. In Chapter 1, I will situate the poem in a historical context of plurality, and look at

how this external reality is reflected in the many voices and the many structural levels at work in the poem.

The second premise is that Gower wished to treat love as an important topic. When Gower links love with the Seven Sins, it becomes a legitimate subject for serious, systematic thought--not simply a pleasantry to balance *lore*, but one of the most fundamental drives of the human psyche. "[T]he scheme of the sins," says J.A. Burrow, ". . . facilitates that psychological analysis with which the French poets were also concerned."[2] Most of the stories in the *Confessio* are mythical--derived from classical mythology, Biblical stories, or folklore. Distant in time and place, dramatic, passionate and bloody, they often appear to have little to do with the courtly love ethos with which, it has been assumed, the poem is concerned. While some conclude from this that the *Confessio Amantis* must be about something other than love,[3] I propose instead that Gower is concerned with the psychology of love evinced by the archetypal stories he compiles.

A poem about the psychology of love, as opposed to a poem about the conventions of love, will examine the darkness, too. Love is intrinsically linked to a second fundamental drive, violence, though we are continually shocked by and resistant to this reality. In this paper I wish to examine why there is so much brutality in the *Confessio Amantis* and what the patterns of love and violence reveal about Gower,

his culture and, by extension, our own. The difficulty of examining violence in the *Confessio*'s love relationships is that, while violent urges play a large role in the unfolding of tale after tale, violence is not a topic Gower himself addresses explicitly.[4]

What Gower *does* discuss, both explicitly and implicitly, is *divisioun*. This is the central motif of the text, and the key to the link between violence and love. In the Prologue, the narrator presents a theoretical framework that establishes division, or factionalism, as the basic problem for humankind because it causes discord and strife, the struggle for control. This struggle may assume a variety of forms, of which violence is but the most extreme, and it is shown to be an integral part of the way men and women relate. The narrator's theory is then seen at work throughout the rest of the poem, on and between all structural levels.

Using as a guide modern feminist and psychoanalytical theories that intersect with Gower's themes of *divisioun* and strife, I will examine in Chapters 2 and 3 how the need to control operates in the poem and how control and violence intersect with the supposedly opposite theme of love. In doing so, I also draw on Carolyn Dinshaw's study of Chaucer's works, in which she observes that "writing is a masculine act, an act performed on a body construed as feminine. . . ."[5] This metaphor and the modern theories of

gender which I incorporate proceed to a theory of the *Confessio* in which the violent struggle for control exhibited in the tales resonates at all levels of the poem. Control, violence, and interpretation are acts symptomatic of the gender-asymmetrical binary thought that informs the text's various levels of "male" voice.

In discussing the ideological underpinnings of the *Confessio Amantis*, I will discuss the narrator's monologue and the nature of Amans's confession. Most of the poem's contents, however, originate from Genius, whose wisdom is imparted in two very distinct forms: explicitly, in the form of moral lessons, and implicitly, in the form of illustrative tales.

The stories in the *Confessio Amantis* may be categorized according to any number of criteria: the sin exemplified; love stories versus non-love stories; the type of violence involved; the pattern of violent behaviour, including the response to it; the punishment of violent deeds; the moral drawn by Genius. In the discussion of sin, approximately two-thirds of Genius's stories are about love,[6] for a total of approximately 57 tales.[7] Of these 57 tales, only eleven do not contain acts of violence. Six such stories occur, not surprisingly, in Book Four, which treats the sin of Sloth, and the remaining five occur in Book Five on Avarice. The rate of violence in the love stories is comparable to that in non-love stories. What interests me here is not whether

one type of story can be said to be more violent than another, nor whether Genius's tales can be described as either more or less violent than Gower's society, but rather what are the patterns of violent behaviour within stories about love.[8]

I believe it is significant that Gower chose to have Genius begin with the stories of Acteon, Medusa, and the Sirens, archetypal stories that portray the danger inherent in the act of loving and that set the tone for the stories to follow. I will therefore look at them in detail, despite their relative brevity.

I will discuss the remaining love stories in terms of their patterning of violence. I am interested in the motivation of the aggressor, the response of the victim, and what discernible judgments--if any--are made by Genius, Amans and Gower himself. In selecting from the large number of stories about love, I have chosen four significant tales representing a range of both controlling strategies and responses to such actions, regardless of which sin the tale exemplifies.[9]

In Chapter 4 I apply the theory culled from modern analysts, from the *Confessio*'s narrator and from Genius's dogma, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and show how it may be seen working in the stories themselves. Surprisingly, what appear at first to be stories that are diametrically opposed to the ideal of the courtly lover, stories in which

men act in decidedly *un*chivalrous and *un*courtly ways, and which describe the very behaviour Genius warns Amans *not* to engage in, actually share many of the values inherent in Genius's code of morality and many of the attitudes Amans has revealed. And yet, as I will elaborate in Chapter 4, the stories also pose the poem's only significant opposition to Genius's voice as moral authority.

As Paul Strohm has said, the poem is about "the shriving and reordering of the unruly passions of a representative lover. . . . "[10] While I agree with Strohm's analysis, I believe this statement does not go far enough. The *Confessio* is about reordering on many levels. It is about struggle and the will to control. In this essay I will attempt to enumerate the many competing voices in the text and to determine how they seek to exert control over other elements while at the same time sharing a fundamental investment in the patriarchal system. However, I will also examine the response of that "Other" element, which turns out to be the one voice to significantly challenge the "one in many" voices in the text.

CHAPTER 1: MANY VOICES

The Voices of Gower's Context

Gower wrote against a background of change and upheaval. He witnessed three kings on the English throne and the concomitant struggle for power. He also experienced the by turns jubilant and devastating effects of a protracted war with France. If we assume the 1330 birthdate set forth by John Fisher to be correct,[11] Gower would have been just 18 years old when the Black Plague devastated England, and he would have witnessed additional deaths and suffering in the ensuing plagues of the 1360s and 1370s. It has been estimated that they reduced the population of England by 40 to 50 percent.[12] Gower would have been about 51 years old by the time the effects of the plagues reached fruition in the infamous Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

While this particular historical moment was perhaps no more conflict-ridden than any other, it may also have been less stable and less dependent on monological authority than is generally thought. The debate and factionalism evident in the political realm were also a part of the social milieu. Then, as now, there was much discussion about love and sexuality. This was an issue of concern to theologians, scientists,[13] and courtly love poets alike. In this chapter I will look briefly at love and sexuality as a topic of

interest in these circles, and then move on to see how the structure of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* reflects this multitude of voices.

The ideas presented by the theologians, natural scientists, and courtly love poets were often conflicting, both between and within groups. The model presented by the Catholic Church and its followers, for example, is not one of simple authority and obedience. From its original inception as a cult poised in rebellion against the status quo, the Church has depended on the discussion and debate of the great thinkers who built the institution. Elaine Pagels, in the conclusion of her investigation of the early Church and the gnostic gospels, rejects the notion of "a 'golden age' of purer and simpler early Christianity". Instead, she says, the "real Christianity"

> was not monolithic, or the province of one party or another, but included a variety of voices, and an extraordinary range of viewpoints, even among the saints. . . . From a strictly historical point of view, then, there is no single "real Christianity."[14]

The attitudes towards sex which we normally ascribe to medieval Christianity are largely derived from the writings of St. Augustine, who viewed procreation by a husband and wife as being the sole justification for sexual intercourse, which, in itself, was only an animal lust.[15] Other theologians, however, brought different points of view to

bear on their notions of Church law, and their views ranged from relatively lax to highly restrictive. The acceptability of pleasure and related questions were heatedly debated in ecclesiastical circles. The majority of writers, following St. Augustine, asserted that physical enjoyment should not be the primary motive of sexual relations between husband and wife. Some writers, however, accepted the necessity of the pleasure of both partners because this, according to medical authorities, was essential for both participants to emit their seed and for conception, the goal of sexual intercourse, to occur.[16]

Sexual crimes also appear to have been uppermost in the minds of the commentators who followed Augustine, and appear to have posed a definite challenge to Church authorities, since "[s]exual offenses constituted the largest single category of behavior that the penitentials treated."[17] Though they originated long before the writing of the *Confessio Amantis* and reflect the prevalent monastic ideal of asceticism, their effect on the sexual behaviour of Christians, it has been suggested, was far-reaching.[18]

Sexual behaviour classified as deviant ultimately came under the jurisdiction of governing bodies even more powerful than the local confessor who used the penitentials in his work, namely, the civic and ecclesiastical legal systems.[19] However, "[a]lthough municipal statutes, customary law, and the canons all prescribed heavy penalties

for sexual transgressions, practice was considerably milder than statutory language would suggest."[20] Many sexual crimes were not even prosecuted. Thus, despite a very strict policy, a kind of unofficial tolerance is suggested. This ambivalence is concisely revealed, for example, in the attitude of canon law toward prostitution. While medieval canonists disapproved of it and thought it should be prohibited, following the teaching of St. Augustine "they were prepared to tolerate prostitution and to justify its toleration in a Christian society".[21]

Despite some debate on sexual topics, the legacy which persisted from the earlier Church and from the penitentials was that "only married persons should have sex and that they should do so primarily in order to conceive children."[22] Brundage maintains that the assumption running through the legislation, legal commentaries and judicial actions of the period from the Black Death to the Reformation is

> the moral and legal disavowal of pleasure, and sexual pleasure in particular, as a legitimate human goal. . . . [T]he underlying belief that sex was evil because it was pleasurable was clearly a factor in giving sex law the shape that it took. Allied to this was another ancient belief, namely that sex dirtied and defiled those who engaged in it.[23]

This stance may not have been held universally, and individuals both inside and outside the Church may have reacted in ways contrary to this philosophy and the laws it

engendered; however, there is no doubt that such attitudes have shaped the feelings of all of Western society. Even actions that indicate a rejection of such principles are still responses to them. What is crucial for our purposes is Brundage's conclusion that "[t]he rejection of pleasure as a legitimate purpose of sex depended . . . upon the dichotomy between body and soul, flesh and spirit, that is fundamental to late ancient and medieval Christian belief."[24] This bifurcation, as we shall see, provides a crucial underpinning for an understanding of Gower's poem.

A fairly large body of medieval writing also existed on human anatomy, physiology, and sexuality. This literature was generated by astrologers, doctors and natural-philosophers. Their work was sometimes at odds and sometimes intertwined with theological sources covering the same topics. Arabic authors were responsible for much of this material, a great deal of which was available to Western authors and was incorporated into their texts, though Latin authors often proceeded with caution in using "doctrinally dangerous" texts.[25]

No matter what discipline the medieval man of science studied, he was much more likely to be disposed towards discussing sexual matters openly, with an air of candid, non-judgmental curiosity, than was the theological writer. "Sexuality was treated in a matter-of-fact way by both doctors and astrologers."[26] Topics discussed by the

scientists--often in surprisingly frank detail--included predicting the success of a marriage, inciting male and female arousal, and disguising a girl's loss of virginity.

Investigators, however, remained products of their age, and brought to their work the preconceptions and methodologies of their time. Often this meant that older notions held sway even when contradicted by visible evidence. One branch of science has been described as "a jumble of facts from different places and different periods." Knowledge did not progress in a linear fashion; "innovations were inseparable from resurgences of archaic ideas whose archaism was not realized as such."[27]

In addition, the distinction between the realms of science and superstition was not clearly drawn, with the result that even at the highest levels of investigative thought there was a tension between "old" and "new" ways of thinking, between commonly held superstitions and contradictory scientific evidence. Rather than the latter displacing the former, it seems both were often held simultaneously, if not by the individual, then certainly by the culture.

Thus, while the scientists sought to investigate human sexuality and to describe it candidly, they worked under the shadow of extremely harmful biases. The scientific methodology of the Middle Ages facilitated this. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, for example, is highly associative

and works by analogy. Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset liken it to "religious revelation" in its search to find "the fragment of hidden truth concealed in each linguistic sign."[28] Isidore's definitions indicate a pattern of thought governing ideas about gender. They in turn helped establish a language

> that revealed a certain conception of woman; man was already proclaimed as the complete being who held no mystery; and all this was done with a method and a language of formidable efficiency. Man drew his name (*vir*) from his force (*vis*), whereas woman (*mulier*) drew hers from her softness (*mollities*).[29]

Though he wrote long before the fourteenth century, many of Isidore's etymologies survive in the works of thirteenth century encyclopaedists such as Vincent of Beauvais, author of *Speculum Naturale*, which Gower knew. "Their great circulation, which lasted until the end of the Middle Ages and even beyond, helped to keep alive ideas which, based as they were on thirteenth-century information, were more and more out of line with the thinking of scholars."[30]

In the literary world, urbane courtly love poets, writers of romance, and fabricators of fabliaux all presented diverse views on love. It was not too long after the *Confessio Amantis* appeared that the infamous discussion of romance and misogyny would begin, the *querrel de la rose*. While the *Confessio Amantis* is more than a courtly love poem, this tradition informs the text to a greater extent

than either the fabliau or the romance genres, which are also concerned with relations between the sexes. The *fin' amor* tradition, however, teems with contradictions.

Herbert Moller, in his essay "The Meaning of Courtly Love", concludes that this poetry resulted in an improved courtly society in which a whole set of behavioural changes occurred. Manners and courtesy became important, and women were now placed first.[31] As Richard Firth Green explains, "the very capacity to experience ennobling love was one of the qualities that distinguished a gentleman."[32] He, too, views the courtly love ethos as originating in fiction and then being appropriated by society:

> Since the capacity to experience exalted human love was, by definition in the middle ages, restricted entirely to the well-born, it followed that one way in which a man might display his gentility was to suggest that he was in love; thus the conventions by which this emotion was defined, originally pure literary hyperbole, became part of a code of polite behaviour. An elaborate social ritual which sought to render literally the romantic exaggerations of fiction informed the public aspects of aristocratic courtship, flirtation, and indeed almost all intercourse between the sexes.[33]

This aspect of *fin' amor*--its ability to ennoble and to raise the consciousness of the lover--is probably the primary and best known quality of the convention.

According to Elizabeth Salter, the scope and influence of this literature is even wider than Green takes into account. It is used by English religious writers as an

allegory of Christ and the soul, and by French clerks for "anti-feminist Christian moralizing."[34] Salter also points to the possibility that its form would have undergone some sort of permutation: "[T]he uncertain, sometimes precarious, existence of the concept of *amour courtois* in a changing medieval world that had already begun to idealize marriage itself is best seen in English courtly poetry of the late fourteenth century."[35] The *Confessio* might thus be seen as one of several poems which exalt the traditional courtly love virtues in the context of marriage.[36]

Beneath the superficial courtesy of the courtly love convention is a problematic subtext that speaks about the society that embraced (and still embraces) this literature. Primarily, one observes that the tradition's foremost characteristic--the worship of women--actually restricts women and denies their subjectivity.[37] The idealization of "the lady" transforms her into an icon that is held up for male scrutiny and judgment. In this literature is played out a very real social dynamic, whereby the man acts as voyeur of the passive woman. Rosalind Coward writes about this phenomenon in *Female Desire*, where she discusses "the look", or "the male gaze" as a form of control. The following comment on twentieth-century society could just as easily apply to the corpus of courtly love poetry:

> . . . the profusion of images of women which characterizes contemporary society could be seen

> as an obsessive distancing of women, a form of voyeurism. Voyeurism is a way of taking sexual pleasure by looking at rather than being close to a particular object of desire. . . .[38]

The result, she says, is that the voyeur is able to maintain control because he can "determine his own meanings for what he sees."

Not only does courtly love objectify women but, as Richard Firth Green has pointed out, it also marginalizes them. While they are idolized and loved, they are less important than the love itself. They become an instrument through which the male lover may demonstrate the degree of his own nobility. As Green explains:

> Whereas for earlier writers, and still predominantly for Guillaume de Lorris, the notion of swearing fealty to Love was only another way of expressing the idea of the lover's total commitment to his lady, poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries came to regard service in the court of Love as virtually an end in itself--the apotheosis, as it were, of the aristocratic life, in which the lady might almost be seen to play merely a supporting role. . . . The logical development of this line of thinking was that the lover should become a member of Cupid's familia without ever having an actual mistress to serve![39]

Even the *Roman de la Rose*, which is more robust than most courtly love poems in its delight in sensual pleasure, appears to enjoy the anticipation of fulfillment--and, even more so, the *discussion* of this postponement--more than the act of love itself. It is also like other courtly love poems in its ambiguous feelings towards woman (as typified by de

Lorris's gently romantic tone versus de Meun's sophisticated cynicism, if not barely disguised misogyny) and its relegation of the woman to a place of secondary importance. The man and his sexuality are what poems of this genre are about, reflected by the fact that the man is always the active, speaking subject--the *lover*--while the woman is always the object--the *beloved*. This reality is disguised, however, by the lover's preoccupation with and worship of the woman. Thus, while she is the apparent centre of the poem, the narrator/lover is himself the true subject.

This cursory overview of three forums in which sexuality was discussed helps us to place the *Confessio* in the context of contemporaneous thought. What is most important is that "[t]he end of the thirteenth century . . . seems to have inaugurated a bold debate on sexuality and used all the available texts."[40] This is not to deny the Church's supreme position in the hierarchy, nor its capacity as a ubiquitous, repressive force; it is rather to insist that while the Church's voice was the dominant one, it was not the only voice in the debate. Throughout this discussion, innovative ideas and resistance to regulation counterbalance stubborn superstition and conservative, repressive restrictions. This tug-of-war was carried on within the Church and in opposition to it; between priests and penitents; and in works of fiction (such as the *Confessio Amantis*). As the scientific texts demonstrate, this is a discussion in which

old ideas are not replaced by new ones, but rather co-exist alongside them. In the Church teachings and canon law, one observes a tension between the severe restrictions placed upon sexual activity and their comparatively lenient enforcement. In the scientific writings, one sees new ideas battling for ground against old notions and popular superstition. Courtly love poetry makes tension an art, by balancing intolerable yearning with insurmountable obstacles. In addition, this poetry depicts an uncertainty as to whether the lady or the lover is the actual topic of the poem.

All of these disparate discourses share an androcentric bias that threatens the social status and even the well-being of women. The authoritative ecclesiastical and scientific texts normalize an image of woman as physically weak, sexually insatiable, morally lax, and physiologically poisonous and then justify her oppression as a means to protect man from her reprehensible character. The poetry, by praising, worshipping, and being obsessed with the image of the woman, merely exchanges one kind of imprisonment for another. In all of these forms, almost without exception, the woman's voice is notably absent.

The Voices of Gower's Poem

The discourses described above participate in the beginning of what one commentator has described as an endless discussion of sex: the debating, theorizing, and legislating of sexuality.[41] Gower's *Confessio Amantis* reflects the tumultuous background of the writer and participates in this cultural obsession with discussing sexuality by presenting a multivocal poem about love. There are three ways in which the poem represents multiple points of view.

The first--albeit entirely unintended--layering of voices is temporal. Several passages of the *Confessio* have been rewritten. While Gower was extremely concerned with inner consistency and with the appearance of his manuscripts, multiple versions have nevertheless survived. Despite Gower's efforts to wipe away the evidence, to fit each revised passage exactly into a newly emptied space to produce a seamless appearance,[42] the *Confessio Amantis* has become a kind of palimpsest. We must acknowledge the existence of different versions, though we may privilege one in our interpretation. Reading the poem then becomes an exercise in simultaneity: how to hold variations of a particular passage in one's mind, how to comprehend them at the same time, though the temporal nature of the act of reading means that one can only apprehend one version at a

time. In comprehending different versions, one may metaphorically turn the mirror back on Gower. The variations become "before" and "after" snapshots, which one may attempt to interpret and to make into narrative by turning to Gower's life's events to explain his motivation, his process of moving from one position to another.

The excision of "the Chaucer greeting" from the epilogue, for example, has been taken by many as evidence of a rift between Chaucer and Gower. Some assume this rift was literary, stemming from differences in attitudes to appropriate subject matter for literary works, as alluded to by the Man of Law in the *Canterbury Tales*. Others hold it was political, a result of Chaucer's continued support of Richard II and Gower's change of allegiance to Henry. But did it occur at all? Is it reasonable to take the deleted reference to a colleague as evidence of the writer's dissolved friendship with that person? Perhaps Gower's reason for omitting the reference was entirely unrelated to his friendship with Chaucer. Macaulay, for instance, speculates that the omission was either accidental or that it became necessary to sacrifice this passage in order to insert the substituted version.[43] Whatever the rationale behind the change, the difference between recensions leaves a gap, from which the reader postulates his or her own version of events.

The second and most obvious manifestation of multiplicity is the division into spatially separate elements.[44] The main part of the poem is, of course, the English verse narrative. This, notably, is broken into two distinct portions (a fracturing to which the narrator himself calls our attention): the Prologue and Books I to VIII. In addition, there is a significant body of Latin text, consisting of Latin verses that introduce sections and subsections of the text, and Latin prose marginalia that gloss the action in the poem. Critics have noted the additional points of view added by Gower's Latin interpolations, and some have pointed out the authority that such elements lend the poem.[45] The *Confessio*'s fragmentary structure causes the reader constantly to pose very important questions. Whose views do the Latin passages represent? Is the voice speaking through the Latin verses the one that adds the marginalia? Are these the voices of more than one "person", or aspects of a single mind? What is the nature of the relationship between Latin and English text? By incorporating several distinct elements on the physical page, Gower gives a certain breadth to the text.

There is a third way in which the *Confessio*'s structure contains many voices, and this is perhaps the most important aspect of multivocality for the purposes of this study. If Gower's revisions inadvertently produce temporal layers, and his deliberate use of a spatial patchwork of "voices" gives

the poem breadth, his use of multiple narrators within the English portion of the text gives the poem depth.

The narrator who guides us into the text assumes the persona of Amans, who in turn engages in a dialogue with Genius. The introduction of Genius moves us even deeper into the fictive world. Genius teaches Amans through the *exemplum*, a discourse that is subdivided into two components: the *narracio*, which is the narrative of each story, the descriptive material; and the *moralitas*, which is "the theme and conclusion, the parts of the *exemplum* in which is stated the moral or religious lesson that is taught by the *narracio*."[46] Thus Genius, while firmly planted in the context of his role as confessor, speaks both the straightforward, literal language of moral instruction and the figurative, literary language of story. At times, we are plunged still deeper into the fiction, as when Genius tells a tale in which a character creates his or her own fiction or illusion--for example, when a character tells a story or has a dream. In such a case, the reader is presented with a story told by a character, told by Genius, told by the narrator, told by Gower.

The *Confessio* thus presents a great deal of talk--questions, replies, assertions, protests, fictions, contradictions, interjections--and a good deal of it originates from a single character. For this reason, perhaps, many readers select Genius's as the voice of

ultimate authority. Genius's loquacity and his derivation from amorous and Christian authoritative sources present a persuasive argument for his theoretical dominance and his presence as a reification of Gower's own beliefs. Denise N. Baker, for example, concludes an essay on the function of Genius as follows:

> By making Genius the representative not only of man's carnal nature but also of his *rationality*, the English poet reinvests this allegorical figure with the *true priestly authority* originally bestowed by Alain de Lille and *restores him to his legitimate role as tutelary spirit*. C.S. Lewis's psychomachic description of Gower's character is thus partially correct, for Genius is Amans's inner voice--the voice, however, of his *reason*, not his love.[47]

And J.A.W. Bennett boldly asserts, "The creed of Genius, then, is the poet's creed."[48] While, as I shall explore later, the ideas and moral underpinnings of Genius are crucial to an understanding of the poem, these critics invest too much authority in the confessor, who is not an infallible guide.[49]

Other interpretations similarly seek a transcendental signifier and ultimately result in a seamless and didactic monological discourse. Henry Ansgar Kelly, for example, synthesizes Gower the author with Gower the Latin commentator and Gower the narrator-*cum*-penitent when he says:

> Gower not only supplies a straightforward prologue and epilogue to his work, in which he speaks in his own highly moralistic voice, but he also makes his real presence felt in the course of the poem, especially in Latin verses and sidenotes. . . . To make clear to his readers what he is doing when he appears as a character in his work, Gower attaches [an explanatory sidenote].[50]

However, one must heed Foucault's warning that "all discourses endowed with the author-function" possess a "plurality of self." That is, we know the "I" is not the writer, nor does the present indicative refer to the moment in which he or she writes.[51] One must acknowledge that on some level the Gower-narrator is a fiction (or at least is a quasi-fiction),[52] just as Amans and Genius are fictional. For this reason, I refer to all of the characters in the *Confessio*, including the narrator and the "John Gower" who appears at the conclusion, as fictional characters.[53] While his essay on the *Confessio* might be considered extreme, Anthony Farnham is, I feel, highly accurate when he reminds us that "Gower created not only the Confessor, but the creator of the Confessor, the author-narrator in whose image the Confessor is made, whom we meet in the very first line of the Prologue. . . ."[54] Admittedly, Gower may have expressed his own ideas through any one or more of his characters, including Genius. However, the text itself assumes a meaning which transcends any single idea of truth embedded in it. There remain too many contradictions to position any one character above the others. The *Confessio*'s

significance lies in the very contradiction between its many voices, in their clamouring for the reader's attention, in their struggle to be heard. A straightforward interpretation of the text divests it of all sense of humour, robs Gower of any sense of his own fallibility, and oversimplifies a complex text.

In the chapters that follow, I will be concerned mainly with the four major voices heard in the English part of the text: that of the narrator, who establishes the major theme of the poem; that of Genius's dogma, through which the confessor conveys the values of his culture; that of Amans, the initiate who tells the story of his own love; and that of Genius's tales, which are sometimes at odds with his morality and which Genius attempts to tame through his application of *moralitates*.

The voices in the text may be organized according to their situation in one of three planes: the Latin material; the main level of fictional characters (Amans, Genius, Venus, etc.) in the English material; and the fictions uttered by Genius and by Amans. These three levels are overtly hierarchical in relation to each other, in that each comments on those below it.[55] The Latin stanzas and the marginalia describe and comment on the events in the English text; Genius and Amans each tell their stories and in the process interpret their own and each other's material. Their subjects, however, generally have no opportunity to comment

(Amans' lady, for example, is absent) except, perhaps, for characters within Genius's tales who tell their own stories or dreams. Some characters, however, do defy their role as subjects of Genius's moralizing, something to be passively read and interpreted. In the remaining chapters, I will examine how this hierarchical structure operates and how some of those characters resist authorial domination.

The multiplicity of the speaking "voices" is offset by the fact that all three textual layers share a single underlying philosophy. This is not surprising, since all of the traditions upon which Gower drew in composing the *Confessio*--the scientific, the ecclesiastical, the literary--were essentially based upon a fundamental scheme of dichotomy: the bifurcation of logic and emotion, the soul and the body, virtue and pleasure, man and woman. This thematic thread of binary opposition which runs through the traditions informing Gower's text necessarily becomes inextricably woven into the cloth of the poem. Therefore, one must question whether the apparent multiplicity of textual elements is illusory. In other words, does the singularity of ideology underlying the disparate textual elements override the effect of multivocality? In Chapter 2 I will look more closely at the philosophy shared inter- and intra-textually, that of the gender-asymmetrical patriarchal culture, rooted in a thought pattern of binary opposition.

CHAPTER 2: *DIVISIOUN*

The issue of multivocality versus binary opposition is crucial to an understanding of the text's presentation of the theme of violence in the love relationship. In this chapter I will examine the concept of binary opposition in greater detail, as presented in the text and as discussed by outside sources, to determine how it is at work in the poem, how it translates into a philosophy of gender, and how it is connected with violence against the loved one.

Gower discusses the phenomenon of binary opposition explicitly, through the voice of his narrator, in terms of *divisioun*. Analysis of Genius's dogma reveals that he, like the Christian and courtly love traditions from which he derives, participates in this way of viewing and interacting with the world. I will first examine what Gower has to say about binary opposition in the Prologue and early in Book I, through the voices of the narrator and Genius respectively.

Binary opposition has been a topic of particular concern to modern theorists, who see it as an insidious and pernicious element of Western patriarchal culture. I will turn to the work of feminist scholars de Beauvoir and Cixous and post-Freudian psychoanalysts Chodorow and Benjamin to understand the implications of Genius's and the narrator's

theories. I will then look at courtly love as a phenomenon fraught with division. I will conclude by discussing how Amans, the impressionable lover in the making, is actually an accomplished courtly lover, displaying the key psychological traits at the heart of the courtly love genre.

The Narrator

The Prologue to the *Confessio* is often discussed separately from the remainder of the text. Even the narrator speaks of the work as being composed of two distinct units. The Prologue, with its railing against the three estates and its revised dedication, outlines the political climate, while the following eight books explore the ups and downs of love. In the words of the narrator:

> . . . this prologue is so assesed
> That it to wisdom al belongeth:
> . . . .
> Whan the prologue is so despended,
> This bok schal afterward ben ended
> Of love. . . .[56]

But the Prologue *is* linked to the remaining eight books, in that it provides a theoretical framework from which to understand Genius's *narraciones* and *moralitates*. The Prologue itself reminds us of this connection between the larger, political world (which it discusses) and the smaller, personal world (which is discussed in the rest of the poem):

The man, as telleth the clergie,
Is as a world in his partie,
And whan this litel world mistorneth,
The grete world al overtorneth. (P.955-958)

If any particular chord dominates the Prologue, it is that of *divisioun*. This section is full of repetitions of this word and its synonyms, *debat, strif, diversite, hate, werre*. These terms describe a condition that extends through all levels of society, from the State (the war with France) to the Church (the Great Schism and heretical movements) and down to the Commons (the Peasants' Revolt). Through the story of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, the narrator teaches us that "Whan that the world *divided* is, / It moste algate fare amis" (P.645-646; italics added). Relating his own time to the dream, the narrator despairingly concludes that "Upon the feet of Erthe and Stiel / So stant this world now every diel / Departed" (P.827-829). There is only one possible consequence of such a situation: "Division aboven alle / Is thing which makth the world to falle / And evere hath do sith it began" (P.971-973).

The cause of division is man himself: "The man is cause of alle wo, / Why this world is divided so" (P.965-966). Originating with the war in Paradise, division is found in man because he is composed of the four humours, which continually war against each other:

For the contraire of his astat
Stant evermore in such debat,

Til that o part be overcome,
There may no final pes be nome. (P.979-982)

Because he is corruptible by nature, man must die. But even if man did not contain this mixture of elements, he would still be in a state of division, for:

The bodi and the Soule also
Among hem ben divided so,
That what thing that the body hateth
The soule loveth and debateth. (P.995-998)

Thus the narrator's position is paradoxical: he abhors division, yet this is how he has learned to see the world, and so even while he loathes it he cannot escape it. There is, however, a very slim chance to remedy the situation. While man's own composition may be unalterable, much of the problem with the larger world exists because the absence of peace and love facilitates debate and strife, which are their opposites:

And this men sen, thurgh lacke of love
Where as the lond divided is,
It mot algate fare amis:
And now to loke on every side,
A man may se the world divide. (P.892-896)

Thus love, in its broadest, most charitable sense, is a positive force associated with peace (P.189) and opposed to the forces of destruction. Love is so important that it should be the basis of good counsel for those in power, "That hate breke noght thassise / Of love, which is al the

chief / To kepe a regne out of meschief" (P.148-150). One day the new Arion will bring love to the world, unifying the divided elements into a state of peace and harmony.

Genius

After abruptly breaking off his reverie of the new Arion, the narrator moves into Book I, which, he says, is not of such "grete thinges". Instead, it will be about love, with which the narrator is familiar because he too has felt the pangs of this emotion. The love which is the topic of the rest of the book therefore seems to be of a different species from that found in the Prologue, which is more akin to what Lewis terms "charity".[57]

Assuming the guise of those in love,[58] the narrator/Amans tells of how, after praying to Venus for salvation, he has a vision of the King and Queen of Love. Instead of granting him his heart's desire, Venus declares that he shall be shriven on the points of love, and assigns her priest Genius to the task. Genius enters, discusses the five senses, tells stories to illustrate them, and then initiates Amans' confession. Book I up to this point forms a preamble to the rest of the poem, bridging the political theorizing of the Prologue with the *exempla* and teachings on the Seven Sins of the remaining books. In this earliest portion on the senses

Genius reveals an ideological foundation which will affect the way we receive the remaining stories in the poem.

Genius begins by discussing sight and hearing, the most important of the five senses, for these are "The moste principal of alle / Thurgh whom that peril may befalle" (I.307-308). Genius portrays the senses as inert conduits through which sensory stimuli flow into the individual, affecting him either for better or for worse, inciting him to do either good or evil:

> For tho be proprely the gates,
> Thurgh whiche as to the herte algates
> Comth alle thing unto the feire,
> Which may the mannes Soule empeire. (I.299-302)

The best way to protect against folly is to close off its means of access, to raise the drawbridge, so to speak:

> For if thou woldest take kepe
> And wisly cowthest warde and kepe
> Thin yhe and Ere, as I have spoke,
> Than haddest thou the gates stoke
> Fro such Sotie as comth to winne
> Thin hertes wit, which is withinne. . . .
> (I.535-540)

In particular, if reason is used to control the gates of sight and hearing, then the other three senses (touch, taste and smell--notably more closely connected to the sensual, the erotic) will be adequately protected.

This is an insular view of the individual. It blames sin on the mere presence of temptation, thus denying the role of

the will. In contrast, Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" admits three conditions necessary for sin to occur: "First, suggestion of the feend . . . and afterward, the delit of the flessh . . . and after that, the consentyng of resoun. . . ."[59] The denial by Genius of the role of the will is merely part of a larger strategy of disguised motivation, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Whereas the concept of will is elsewhere in the text an important ingredient in overcoming temptation and avoiding sin (the mere presence of moral imperatives, after all, implies Genius's belief that Amans can control his actions through will), here the individual appears to have no control over his reactions to sensory perception. The solution presented by Genius, therefore, is not to evaluate sensory evidence carefully, but rather to exclude it, to refuse to let it in altogether. This, as we will later see, is an important strategy employed by Genius to control his text.

Genius's philosophy is not just protectionist, it is also hierarchical, like the Christian tradition from which it derives, privileging defensiveness over experimentation, reason over sensuality, sight and hearing over touch, taste, smell, and it thereby *promotes* division. As Chapter 3 will show, the stories told to illustrate this theory show that bad things happen when the hierarchy is subverted.

Genius's lesson on the senses reveals a view of the world similar to that of the narrator. Despite the narrator's distaste for *divisioun*, his and Genius's monologues both portray the individual as being divided into two oppositional elements: the narrator discusses the soul and the body; the confessor discusses reason and the senses. In both schemes the "higher," rational faculty is pitted against the "baser," sensual faculty, in a relation that is both hierarchical and antagonistic. Both also imply that one should identify with the higher of these terms, whereas the body and the senses should remain alien to one's "true self". This philosophy is perfectly in keeping with the Christian tradition that influenced both Gower and his character Genius, a tradition highly suspicious of the sensual aspect of human beings. As Brundage concludes: "The rejection of pleasure as a legitimate purpose of sex depended in turn upon the dichotomy between body and soul, flesh and spirit, that is fundamental to late ancient and medieval Christian belief."[60] The privileging of the soul over the body is certainly understandable, in places and times and individuals plagued by a hyper-corporeality, by an experience of the fleshly body as stubborn, diseased, fallible, and resistant to the strivings and ideals of the mind, an experience antithetical to mainstream modern North American culture.

This division within the self described by the narrator and by Genius merely simulates at the microcosmic level what appears to be an intrinsically human way of understanding the world. Simone de Beauvoir, utilizing the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, comments, "The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality--that of the Self and the Other."[61] Hélène Cixous writes,

> Thought has always worked through opposition,
> Speaking/Writing
> Parole/Ecriture
> High/Low
> Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. . . .
> Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatable, dialectical). . . .[62]

Genius incorporates this view into his lessons by emphasizing the discreteness of the individual and the external world, and he thus appears to condone this condition. The narrator sees men at all social levels as harbouring a view of Us and Them, or, in de Beauvoir's terminology, of Self and Other. In contrast to Genius, however, he is critical of division because it engenders strife, discord and war.

But Us *and* Them, as Gower demonstrates, is likely to be manifested as Us *against* Them. The reason for the ease of transition is explained by de Beauvoir:

> These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a *fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness*; the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.[63]

Though we might concede the "naturalness" of the binary oppositional thought pattern itself, there is one particular aspect of this way of thinking which feminists have perceived as threatening to women--the correlation of the hostile pairing of Self and Other to man and woman. Cixous asks, "Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought--all concepts, codes and values--to a binary system, related to 'the' couple, man/woman?"[64] De Beauvoir stresses that

> This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. . . . The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Vauna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between Good and Evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer.[65]

But woman *was* incorporated into this paradigm of binary opposites, and the danger of her inclusion can perhaps be seen more clearly if we look at the theory of Hélène Cixous.

At the beginning of Part Two of *La Jeune Née*, Cixous sets forth the following series of binary oppositions which permeate our culture:

> Where is she?
> Activity/passivity
> Sun/Moon
> Culture/Nature
> Day/Night
>
> Father/Mother
> Head/Heart
> Intelligible/Palpable
> Logos/Pathos.
> Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.
> Matter, concave, ground--where steps are taken, holding- and dumping-ground.
>
> Man
> Woman.[66]

These oppositional pairs always can be reduced to "'the' couple, man/woman". And in every pair

> the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance. . . . [I]t doesn't much matter which 'couple' one chooses to highlight: the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as the underlying paradigm.[67]

Just as Gower's narrator saw strife and discord as the inevitable results of division, so Cixous views violence as the inevitable outcome of this patterning. "[T]he movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work."[68] On this battleground, man is always the victor

because he is always equated with activity, the woman with passivity:

> Intention: desire, authority--examine them and you are led right back . . . to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for woman in the calculations. . . . Either woman is passive or she does not exist.[69]

It is not the principle of the binary pairings itself which one should see as abhorrent, but the attempt of one element to negate the other. In Western patriarchy, dualism, from the Latin root *duo*, two, is evaded. It is transformed instead into dichotomy, from the Greek *dikho*, apart. The fundamental explanations of this emphasis on separateness and division must be sought in the works of psychoanalysts.

Post-Freudian Theorists

The "fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness" which establishes the dichotomized Self/Other distinction (or, in other words, an over-exaggerated sense of the individual's separateness from the world) is discussed in the work of many post-Freudian psychoanalysts. According to psychoanalytic theory, the process of seeing oneself as separate is an essential part of individual development. This is termed "differentiation" or "separation-individuation", and is essentially the growing to an awareness of selfhood. Nancy J. Chodorow explains:

> A child of either gender is born originally with what is called a "narcissistic relation to reality": cognitively and libidinally it experiences itself as merged and continuous with the world in general, and with its mother or caretaker in particular. Differentiation, or separation-individuation, means coming to perceive a demarcation between the self and the object world, coming to perceive the subject/self as distinct, or separate from, the object/other. An essential early task of infantile development, it involves the development of ego boundaries (a sense of personal psychological division from the rest of the world) and of a body ego (a sense of the permanence of one's physical separateness and the predictable boundedness of one's own body, of a distinction between inside and outside).[70]

Object-relations theorists such as Chodorow posit that this development happens not in isolation, but in the child's relation to the mother, or primary-caretaker:

> Separateness, then, is not simply given from birth, nor does it emerge from the individual alone. Rather, separateness is defined relationally; differentiation occurs in relationship: "*I*" am "*not-you*". Moreover, "*you*," or the other, is also distinguished. The child learns to see the *particularity* of the mother or primary caretaker in contrast to the rest of the world. Thus, as the self is differentiated from the object world, the object world is itself differentiated into its component parts. . . .
>
> However, adequate separation, or differentiation, involves not merely perceiving the separateness, or otherness, of the other. It involves perceiving the person's subjectivity and selfhood as well.[71]

Differentiation therefore consists in learning not only that the mother is separate, but that she has her own interests, activities and needs--her own identity--apart

from those of the infant. This involves "the ability to experience and perceive the object/other (the mother) in aspects apart from its sole relation to the ability to gratify the infant's/subject's needs and wants," and it involves "seeing the object as separate from the self *and* from the self's needs."[72] Chodorow's understanding of this process (as opposed to earlier, Freudian accounts) is therefore based on looking at differentiation from the viewpoint of two interacting selves rather than just the infant as a self. Chodorow stresses that the secure ego core does not need to define itself strictly through separateness from others.[73] "Differentiation is not distinctness and separateness, but a particular way of being connected to others."[74]

If, however, the infant fails to differentiate successfully, the result may be what is known technically as "narcissism," or what Benjamin terms "false differentiation." In this case, "the other subject remains an object, rather than emerging as a person in her/his own right."[75] In other words, the individual does not perceive the other as another subject, with desires and needs of equal importance to his or her own. Instead, the individual perceives the other either as something through which the individual may achieve its own desires, or, in terms relevant to the beginning of Book I of the *Confessio*, as an object (temptation) thwarting the self's goal (virtue). This

outlook has serious implications, for it means the self/subject can act upon the other/object as it wishes or deems necessary, without granting the other the respect of full personhood and without consequence.

This posture is significant because it permeates all facets of our culture. "In these psychic tendencies the basic elements of Western rationality take shape: analysis or differentiation; duality or polarity; and objectivity."[76] Thus are emphasized difference over sameness, boundaries over fluidity. Benjamin summarizes as follows:

> . . . both in theory and practice our culture knows only one form of individuality: the male stance of *overdifferentiation*, of splitting off and denying the tendencies toward sameness, merging, and reciprocal responsiveness. In this 'false differentiation' *the other subject remains an object*, rather than emerging as a person in her/his own right. This way of establishing and protecting individuality dovetails with the dualistic, objective posture of Western rationality. To be a woman is to be excluded from this rational individualism, to be either an object of it or a threat to it. To be a man is not merely to assert one's side of the duality, the supremacy of the rational subject. It is also to insist that the dualism, splitting, and boundaries between the male and female postures are upheld."[77]

When "false differentiation" or "overdifferentiation" becomes a cultural characteristic, and when a specific group is consistently defined--and marginalized--as the Other, the way is paved for the institutionalization of the "universal battlefield" described by Cixous.

Why does woman become institutionalized as the Other? Rational man prides himself on being different from beasts; he enjoys his separateness, even though it is illusory. In woman he sees all the things that terrify him: connection to nature, to the body, to sensuality. These are things that exist in him, but which terrify him. His terror often manifests itself in hatred and loathing. Consequently, patriarchal culture attributes these qualities to one-half of the male-female polarity, and then systematically devalues, and even attempts to nullify, them. Crucial to this process is that men hold power and cultural hegemony and they "have used this hegemony to appropriate and transform" their experiences. "Both in everyday life and in theoretical and intellectual formulations, men have come to define maleness as that which is basically human, and to define women as not-men."[78] Patriarchal man posits woman as the Other, as the cultural repository of all the characteristics he cannot accept within himself, and simultaneously affirms the universality of what is actually his own particular experience.

Separateness in Courtly Love Poems and in the *Confessio*

At this point, one might question what the differentiation of the infant has to do with Amans's confession. If the *Confessio* is to be discussed in

connection with courtly love, then it must be linked, not with the superficial characteristics that compose the courtly love tradition, but with a deeper, psychological truth inherent in this form of literature. Herbert Moller and David Aers each have applied psychoanalytic principles to works of courtly love to produce interpretations that account for many of the paradoxical elements of this literature and also for the enduring popularity of the sentiments embodied in such poetry.

Herber Moller, in "The Meaning of Courtly Love," remarks that, like all poetry, this literature was a "projection of unconscious emotions, which in cooperation with a responding public crystallized into a collective fantasy."[7] Moller points out that each courtly love poem idealizes a specific woman, yet most of these women possess essentially the same characteristics. While the reason for this is partly that the adored lady was often only distantly known to the poet, Moller claims that "the characteristics of this unique woman are those of a mother image of infantile origin and that the lover's relation to her is under the spell of disguised childlike fantasies."[8] This theory is born out by the types of fantasies expressed in the poetry, many of which are infantile, "recalling early gratifications." Moller points to examples of the concept of *amor purus* and "a morbid fixation to infantile desires and caressing memories" instead of the customary courting practices between

unmarried couples; the identification of love and food; the lover fearing the beloved as the child fears the punishing mother; a notable inequality of the lovers; and a partial role reversal, in which the lover adopts "a childlike or feminine attitude" from which stance he venerates the woman.[81]

Though it is a fantasy about returning to a state of undifferentiation, the central characteristic of this aspect of courtly love poetry, according to Moller, is yet another kind of division: the "dichotomy of the tender and the sensual feelings," as described by Freud in "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life". "Only the tender emotions are permitted to enter consciousness, while the crudely sensuous ones are rejected as utterly incompatible with 'pure,' i.e., infantile, love."[82] As distinguished from the Platonic, this so-called pure love delights in provoking desire, which cannot be satisfied "because of an unconscious prohibition. The helplessness of the lover in the face of his unassuaged tension is then projected outward and perceived as rejection by the object."[83] This apparent rejection leads to the wretched state of sleeplessness, despair and loss of appetite bemoaned by most courtly lovers. Moller goes on to describe courtly love poetry as representing an Oedipal-like relationship, not between son, mother, and father, but between son, mother, and siblings. The lady in these poems,

moreover, is a moral authority or, in modern terms, a superego or ego ideal, "the repository of morality," whom the lover feels he must obey in order to earn her approval.[84]

Whereas the troubadours and minnesingers who are Moller's subjects belonged to an era predating that of Gower and Chaucer, David Aers demonstrates how the patterns explored by Moller thrive even in the later revisions of courtly love. Aers views love as a potent method of binding individuals into a class: "It offers a system through which the cultural standards and ideals of the class are internalized. . . . As for the woman, she is primarily the eroticized repository of the values and standards of the male's social group."[85] Aers develops Moller's investigation in connection with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, bringing in the work of object-relation psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, and feminist theorists Toril Moi and Dorothy Dinnerstein to derive a politicized reading of his literary subject.

Aers begins his inquiry by examining the language of courtly love. The man generally is described as being ill, the woman painted as a physician with life-giving powers. It is, therefore, *her* fault if he is "sick". Typically, the woman of courtly love is assumed by the man to be "invulnerable, without needs of human solidarity or friendship; she is the endless fountain of male life. Or, as Troilus complains, she *should* be."[86] This view of woman is

remarkably close to that of the undifferentiated infant. It provides both an idealization of the other person and a strategy to control her. The male lover, like the infant, cannot be content unless the (m)Other fulfils his needs and desires. Aers demonstrates how Troilus, like Moller's troubadours, splits the beloved into good/bad, love/punishment, as the child does the mother. But Criseyde evades Troilus, as the mother does the child, and he can never, ultimately, *know* her or possess her, even when they are in bed together:

> In Toril Moi's terms, commenting on Andreas Capellanus, "the lady remains *other*: however hard he [the male lover] tries to master her by his discourse he will always suffer in the knowledge that her consciousness is not his". It seems impossible for the male to accept this without anxiety, to accept the woman as a centre of desire and will. Even here, in bed, it is likely to induce panic. If "the lady remains other" then the resources of his life, his "feast", remain outside his control and could be withdrawn. The "other" is in the position of "mother", and the man's desire to know "outrely" and find total security in that knowledge, and its object, is a doomed project. It is the heritage of the infant in the adult, and fosters his inability to recognize the woman's subjectivity.[87]

Troilus's hymn invoking Boethius (III, 1,247ff), states Aers, is an example of idealization, which constitutes an attempt to transcend the inability, the impotence, that is experienced by the male lover when faced with the Other:

> It attempts to secure the moment, to fix it into a timeless metaphysical scheme where the woman

> becomes a space *existing solely in relation to his "desire"*. The transformations involve all the denials of social and psychic reality noted in Klein's account of idealization. . . . The *idealized and thus controlled* woman will fend off the man's deepest fears, satisfying his infantile longings for unlimited gratification and exclusive possession.[**]

The antidote to the courtly lover's anxiety over the uncontrollable otherness of the lady is therefore to idealize her. This entails keeping her at a distance, where she is controllable. Thus the typical posture of the courtly lover is that of the voyeur, and the paradox of his situation (he desires the lady but postpones consummation forever) is unavoidable.

It might be said that the *Confessio* documents Amans' attempt to become the perfect courtly lover. It is apparent, however, that in many respects he already is, not simply because he waits on his lady and pines for her and does all the things required of a courtly lover, but because he shares some very important and disturbing psychological traits with courtly lovers such as Troilus and the troubadours. Furthermore, Gower appears to have been aware of the universality of these characteristics: the lover's generic name and the Latin introduction to his appearance in the poem (the author, "feigning himself to be a lover, as if in the person of those others whom Love constrains") suggest that the audience is meant to apply what is understood about Amans to all male lovers.[**]

As with all courtly lovers, Amans sees his beloved in the same way the infant sees the mother: in terms of good/bad, kind/punishing. His entire existence is bent on (and, he thinks, depends upon) serving her and winning her approval of him, to the extent that he lives in fear, as the child fears the mother:

> Men sein that every love hath drede;
> So folweth it that I hire drede,
> For I hire love, and who so dredeth,
> To plese his love and serve him nedeth.
> (V.6059-62)

Amans' fear of his lady is not inspired by any physical threat, for "in hire is no violence" (IV.607), but rather by a psychological threat. The reason for Amans' fear he accurately summarizes thus: "I am ofte adrad / For sorwe that sche seith me nay" (I.2748-49). Just as the child responds with rage to the mother who withholds food or comfort, so Amans responds when his lady denies him access to her company:

> . . . whan that I muse
> And thenke how sche me wol refuse,
> I am with anger so bestad,
> . . .
> And ay the furthere that I be,
> Whan I ne may my ladi se,
> The more I am redy to wraththe,
> . . . .
> Bot, fader, if it so betide,
> That I aproche at eny tide
> The place wher my ladi is,
> And thanne that hire like ywiss
> To speke a goodli word untome,

For al the gold that is in Rome
Ne cowthe I after that be wroth,
Bot al myn Anger overgoth;
So glad I am of the presence
Of hire. . . . (III.75-104)

In Book Four (1122-1223), the lover describes how he falls into idle daydreams, only to be rescued by his lady, who stirs him back to activity by having him wait on her, he says, "til I sterve". At other times, he tries to assist her, "though I be noght bede." Despite all this *activity*, however, he remains in a posture of *passivity*, because, as he continually reminds us, he is perpetually being rejected by his lady. In Book I, for example, his lady bids him be silent (I.1274ff), a censorship that is, as we will pursue later, characteristic of the male posture in reading/writing activities. The passivity that the lover's confession reveals becomes a source of great humour in the poem, as, for example, when he likens himself to "The yonge whelp" (I.1259) because he obeys his mistress better than does the puppy its master. As is the case with the paradigm of the courtly lover, however, this passivity and this desire to devote oneself to the beloved's happiness conceal a simultaneous desire to control the m/Other.

Amans' stories tell of continual defeat in his service to his lady; they tell of his utter passivity, of his being subject to her whims. However, in the act of confessing, by which he becomes the teller of their story, he gains power

over his lady, the kind of power held by a speaking subject over his or her material. The act of confession itself reveals a paradoxical power balance, with Amans at once powerless and powerful.

Foucault has observed how the confessional mode possesses a power dynamic in which the one who reveals nothing (i.e., the confessor) holds power over the one who speaks (i.e., the penitent).[90] Thus Genius, the one who, in Foucault's terms, "requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile," holds power over Amans, who holds the position of a text interpreted by a critic.[91] However, Amans must also be regarded in relation to his lady, and here the relationship is inverted: she is text to his *auctor*. This dynamic operates much like that which Carolyn Dinshaw observes at work in Chaucer's poetry (and the exegetical tradition in general), whereby

> writing is a masculine act, an act performed on a body construed as feminine. . . . [L]iterary activity has a gendered structure, a structure that associates acts of writing and related acts of signifying--allegorizing, interpreting, glossing, translating--with the masculine and that identifies the surfaces on which these acts are performed, or from which these acts depart, or which these acts reveal--the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning--with the feminine.[92]

When a character or a critic reads "like a man" (the usual, though not the sole, way of reading in a patriarchal

society, according to Dinshaw), he attempts to control the material. When that material evades authorial control, the reader/writer/interpreter often rejects it; he occludes it in an attempt to impose closure upon his text."[9] Certainly this is observed at work in the *Confessio*: Amans attempts, through examination of past events, to find some way in which he has mastered his lady; he attempts, by absorbing Genius's lessons, to find some way to win her in the future; and ultimately, when he is forced to acknowledge the impossibility of either endeavour, he turns away from her.

The most overwhelming characteristic of Amans' lady is her total absence from the poem. She hovers above it as a kind of icon. Because she lacks the "reality" of Genius and Amans, and because she can be seen only in her absence, she is situated on the same level of fictionality as the characters in the stories Genius tells. She is, in fact, Amans' character, and as such she ceases to have a will or a truth of her own, being subjugated to his authorial power. Everything the reader knows of her (and this is not a lot) has been learned exclusively from Amans' point of view. Her lack of subjectivity is reflected in her lack of a name.

As is the case with most courtly lovers, Amans' narrative is centred, not upon the object of his affections, but upon his love and ultimately upon himself, a fact his lady understands:

For whanne I wolde with hire glade,
And of hire love songes make,
Sche saide it was noght for hir sake,
And liste noght my songes hiere
Ne witen what the wordes were. (I.2738-42)

When his lady appears in the poem, it is because Amans is attempting to discern whether he has sinned in love, an act which necessarily involves her. But he is not trying to discover whether he has *harmed* her, simply whether he has transgressed *his* code in his dealings with her. She exists solely as a kind of test for Amans. This distinction reveals the solipsism discussed in Chapter One that is at the heart of the courtly lover's and Amans' situation. While Amans speaks continually of his lady, the lover himself is the true *subject*, in both senses of the term, of that speech act.

Amans' lady is in the fullest sense of the word the "Other": "however hard he [the male lover] tries to master her by his discourse he will always suffer in the knowledge that her consciousness is not his."[94] The *Confessio* attempts to force Amans to accept this fact through repeated examination of his interaction with the lady. Amans, however, is resistant, and believes he can use the information provided to him by his Confessor, not to become a better person, but to become a successful lover--that is, to secure his lady and ensure his exclusive possession of her. He also uses the deferral provided by the confession

for his own purposes. At the same time that he seeks to become closer to his beloved, he paradoxically delights in his distance from her and even perhaps seeks to prolong it. Only at a distance can his love and his beloved remain perfect; and only through distance can he remain entirely in control.

Amans is, therefore, the ultimate voyeur, receiving fulfilment through separation rather than union. While he claims to desire closeness, he is actually far more content with distance and the power it provides. The lady is, in Cixous's words,

> Night to his day--that has forever been the fantasy. Black to his white. Shut out of his system's space, she is the repressed that ensures the system's functioning.
>
> Kept at a distance so that he can enjoy the ambiguous advantages of the distance, so that she, who is distance and postponement, will keep alive the enigma, the dangerous delight of seduction, in suspense. . . .[25]

While the narrator began the poem by protesting that society's ills result from *divisioun* and the strife and violence it engenders, Amans embodies that concept, albeit in a slightly comical way, by acting out *divisioun* at a non-violent level and delighting in it. His story thus forms a counterpoint to Genius's stories, in which division is manifested in its ugliest forms. Amans' actions demonstrate how separateness may be used to protect oneself from the

fearful elements both outside and within the self. Whereas the typical courtly love poem elevates division to the status of an art form, the comical tone surrounding Gower's inept lover helps us to see the absurdity of this philosophy.

This sense of separateness which is, as Benjamin has observed, at the heart of Western rationality, is also detectable in Genius's introductory mythological stories that illustrate his teachings on the senses. These early stories provide a reflection of the culture of which he is representative. In the guise of protecting Self from Other, these stories justify the denial of the Other's subjectivity, revealing a "fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness." Rather than controlling from a distance like the courtly lover, they exemplify control up close, through manipulation and physical violence. Instead of perceiving these tales as the opposite of Amans' actions and the courtly love ideal, one should conceive of both versions of love as existing on a continuum. Chapter 3 examines the values inherent in Genius's first few tales.

CHAPTER 3: WOMAN AS OBJECTIFIED OTHER

The struggle for control over the Other which results from the patriarchal binary system is acted out in the *Confessio Amantis* on the main narrative level (the level of Genius and Amans) through figurative violence. Both characters are engaged in reading and writing strategies in which they control or occlude the feminine Other. We have seen in Chapter 2 how Amans participates in this critical activity. In this chapter, I will examine how Genius is shown to participate in it, through his stories and his moral lessons on the senses.

When Genius teaches Amans about the need to stop up the gates of the senses to avoid personal downfall, and the need not simply to resist temptation but to avoid it altogether, he imparts information that is important for all that follows in the *Confessio*. Perhaps even more important is what Genius teaches implicitly, through the stories that illustrate his theory. In the introductory mythological tales that accompany his lesson on the senses, the ideology of separateness is not applied to some vague threat of danger, nor is it applied to the political world of which the Prologue speaks. Instead, the stories apply the generalized theory of the lesson to a very specific, inter-personal source of temptation--woman--as well as suggesting

a means of dealing with that temptation. In this chapter, I will look at the introductory stories of Acteon, the Sirens, Medusa, and the serpent Aspidis as discursive strategies, examining their literal and figurative content and the ideology implicit in Genius's versions of the myths.

Woman As Threat

To support his teachings on the need to guard one's sight, Genius tells the story of Acteon. In this tale, the "worthi lord" becomes separated from the rest of his hunting party and strays into a dale where he spies the goddess Diana bathing in a well with her nymphs. Instead of looking away, however, the proud knight (who "Above alle othre caste his chiere" (I.341)) continues to gaze at the naked goddess. Angered, Diana turns him into a stag, and he is killed by his own hounds. "Betre is to winke than to loke" (I.384) is the moral according to Genius, who then tells the story of Medusa to prove just how much better this course of action is.

Because of the constellation under which they were born, Medusa and her Gorgon sisters are so hideous that they turn every man who sets eyes on them into stone. Perseus, with the help of Pallas's shield and Mercury's sword, is able to shield his eyes and slay the Gorgons. "Cast noght thin yhe upon Meduse," Genius warns,

That thou be torned into Ston
For so wys man was nevere non,
Bot if he wel his yhe kepe
And take of fol delit no kepe,
That he with lust nys ofte nome,
Thurgh strengthe of love and overcome. (I.438-444)

At this point Genius turns his attention to hearing, another sense which frequently gets men into trouble. While it is good to listen to "Such thing wherof a man may lere / That to vertu is acordant" (I.454-55), it is good to turn one's ear away from all the rest. One example of appropriate behaviour is that of the serpent Aspidis, in whose head rests "the Ston noblest of alle" (I.465), the Carbuncle. In order to escape the effects of the charms men utter to him that they might steal the stone, the serpent presses one ear to the ground and stops up the other with his tail.

Finally, the "Tale of the Sirens" concerns the mythical monsters who, from the waist up, are young women, but from the waist down are fish and who, "with so swete a stevene / Lik to the melodie of hevene / In wommanysshe vois . . . singe" (I.493-95). The passing sailors who hear them lose all reason and can no longer steer their ships: "thei here rihte cours and weie / Foryete, and to here Ere obeie" (I.509-510), and capsize along the rocky coastline. Only Ulysses was able to avoid the Sirens, by stopping up his own ears and those of his crew; thus not only were they able to sail safely by the Sirens, but also they "slain of hem a gret partie" (I.527).

Genius intends these tales to confirm the content of his lesson: to avoid losing one's rational powers one must refuse to look at, refuse to listen to, temptation. A man should be like the serpent Aspidis, and do everything in his power to refuse access to the other's charms. Reason must guard the gates of the senses. A man who allows the inversion of this hierarchy will end up like Acteon.

It soon becomes clear, however, that there is a discrepancy between Genius's overt teachings and the ideology implied by his *exempla*. What Genius *tells* is that Reason must stop up the sensory gates to keep temptation distant. What his stories *show* is a much more aggressive means of treating that temptation. Perseus did not simply refuse to look at Medusa; his mission was to destroy her. And although Ulysses and his men set out simply to pass by the Sirens, Genius adds that the sailors killed many of them. Thus there is a discrepancy between Genius's dogma, which advocates passive resistance and protectionism, and his tales, which support aggression.

It should be noted that Genius himself does not specify any particular external source that causes man's downfall, except after the story of Medusa, when he warns Amans away from "fol delit" and from being overcome by lust. It is Amans' confession that makes the link specific. Genius poses to Amans the neutral question of whether he has misused his sight. Amans' reply, in the context of the conventional

stance of the courtly lover, is shocking. While one might expect the lover (who is supposed to worship his beloved as the fairest, the worthiest, and most saintly woman alive) to identify with the first story, in which a mortal man is punished for "misloking" at a goddess, Amans instead identifies with the story of Perseus and the Gorgons. Amans says he has seen Medusa; his lady is she. Similarly, when Genius asks whether he has misused his ears, Amans makes an explicit connection between hearing his lady's voice and the men who were lost to the Sirens' song.

The result of the comparison is comic (the epic proportions of the material to which Amans compares himself far outweigh his own stature,[96] and courtly love conventions are undercut by presenting the opposite of what the audience expects), and yet it suggests a psychological truth. Despite their depictions of supernatural and monstrous characters, these stories are metaphors for relations between men and women. In particular, they use archetypal representations of men's innermost, unconscious erotic feelings toward women, representations that call to mind Cixous's idea that "For one of the terms to acquire meaning . . . it must destroy the other."[97]

These stories, all of which portray the struggle between men and women from the male point of view, reveal three things that Genius's explicit teachings do not. First, woman is firmly situated in the system of binary opposition

discussed in the previous chapter. She is excluded from the realm of the subject and relegated instead to the category "Other".

Second, this Other is regarded not as another subject but as an object in relation to the self. The subjectified self feels free to act upon the objectified other without fear of consequence. This is certainly how the monster women, Medusa and the Sirens, are presented in the stories: their reality consists not in their own subjectivity, but rather in what they represent to the male subjects of the stories: obstacles to be eliminated, temptations to be overcome.

Third, in addition to the Other serving merely as an object that either satisfies or impedes the subject's wishes, the Other is seen as a *threat* to the subject. The subject-self may (and must) destroy it because it is *perceived* as either a threat to selfhood or a challenge to the power structure. As David Aers comments in his analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde*, dread "easily leads to violence against the person(s) seen as its cause, especially when that 'drede' involves what is taken as a threat to self-identity."[9] This threat may be real. Or, more likely, it may be only perceived by the self-subject. It may in fact emanate *from* the self, and be projected onto the object. Justified or not, this fear remains a powerful motivating factor in causing the subject to act against the passive object. Genius's stories illustrate perfectly Benjamin's

observation that to be a woman is to be either an object of rational individualism or a threat to it.

The absurdity of this situation is evident in literature and in society, where men traditionally have been preoccupied with the threat posed to them by women. Ironically, women are more often the objects of male attempts at seduction and the victims of male hostility, both written and physical. To take a literary example of seduction, in eight sample dialogues between lovers given by Andreas Capellanus, all are initiated by the man, no matter what class combination is portrayed; Andreas never explains how the woman can attain or even approach the man she desires, even though he admits it is possible for the woman to be struck first by love. In the epilogue, he counsels his protégé to avoid love and women, against whom his invectives become increasingly hostile.[99]

The reader who accepts Genius's authority also accepts his unstated premise that the monsters must be controlled or even eliminated to preserve the more important self. Patrick Gallacher is one of many such readers. His reading of the *Confessio Amantis* is premised on the medieval interpretation of Hermes, or Mercury, as a symbol of rhetoric and as the Word Himself.[100] This is a crucial element of the sacrament of confession, which seeks "to penetrate inwardly to the principle of a man's being by clearing away the dishonesties and hypocrisies standing in the way of self-knowledge and of

achieving the virtue of truth."[101] Gallacher uses these concepts to understand the symbolism of the Medusa/Perseus myth:

> Medusa, a demonic anti-type of Venus, represents Amans's distorted experience of sexuality, and the sword of Mercury, by which she is destroyed, points the way toward an authentic sexuality through the speech of confession. . . .
>
> Perseus's use of the sword to decapitate Medusa represents the confessional dialogue and foreshadows all the situations in the *exempla* in which the word of God enters the action and provokes a recognition scene."[102]

With this story, Genius impresses upon Amans that the confession to follow will help him to achieve self-awareness and will heal his sexual sickness.

Gallacher's view that Amans' identification with the Perseus myth is a symptom of psychic and sexual sickness that must be healed is certainly acceptable. What is troublesome about this reading is that it upholds Perseus as an exemplar of self-knowledge. If a hero conquers a monster by shielding his eyes and blindly wielding his sword, can it be said that he has truly faced his enemy, that he has understood and overcome his foe? Or is his response just a more aggressive variation on that of the serpent Aspidis? As a model of behaviour for Amans, this myth instead seems to counsel that one does *not* have to come to terms with what one finds threatening, whether its source be external or internal. In fact, the lesson of these stories as a whole

appears to be, don't look at--that is, understand--what threatens you; instead, kill it before it kills you. This is the ultimate manifestation of the Western rationalism fostered by separateness and over-distinct ego boundaries that was discussed earlier.

The Struggle for Control

While the struggle for power between the male self and the female Other is fought on a continuum that extends, at its extreme end, to violence, it begins where Genius begins, with a discussion of sight and hearing. In the words of Amans, Genius "bad me that I scholde schrive / As touchende of my wittes fyve" (I.295-96). It may seem lax that after discussing sight and hearing he abandons the other three senses, saying that these first two are the most important and that proper protection of these senses will ensure the well-being of the others. However, in a society that prides itself on its rationality, the primary modes of individual interaction with the world are sight and speech. The senses used to facilitate these are conceived of as the least primitive, whereas smelling, tasting and touching are more animalistic ways of interacting with the environment. This attitude is reflected in the relative sophistication of the language available to describe various types of sensory experience. So it is not unreasonable for Genius to question

Amans on only two of the "wittes fyve", sight and hearing. These, he explains, are "The moste principal of alle / Thurgh whom that peril may befalle" (I.307-308).

Given their connection with rationality and the role of rationality in posturing the self as superior to and hostile towards the Other, it is not surprising that sight and hearing are the senses chiefly involved in controlling or coercing the Other in a socially acceptable way. Rosalind Coward has described how "the look" or "the male gaze" functions as a mechanism of control in Western society. "Looking," she explains,

> is not a neutral activity. . . . In this culture, the look is largely controlled by men. . . . [In public], men can and do stare at women; men assess, judge and make advances on the basis of these visual impressions. The ability to scrutinize is premised on power. Indeed the look confers power; women's inability to return such a critical and aggressive look is a sign of subordination, of being the recipients of another's assessment.[103]

Female sexuality in many cultures follows this pattern, and is established in terms of being the object of the gaze: "Since it should not be active, seeking, decisive, it should be responsive; our sexuality should aim at eliciting reaction."[104] Through his analysis of how the male gaze operates in *Troilus and Criseyde*, David Aers has demonstrated that this phenomenon is not unique to twentieth-century Western society.[105]

Genius's first two stories show what happens when the power of the gaze is misappropriated. In the "Tale of Medusa," the gorgon is perceived as a challenge (and therefore a threat) to male authority because she overcomes men with the look; or, more accurately, because men are unable to overcome *her* with their privileged gaze. Medusa, whose snaky tresses, associated in the medieval mind with death, evil, sensuality, and sin, terrifies men.[106] Indeed, Minerva herself wears snakes on her breastplate "to terrify her enemies and numb them with fear."[107]

Medusa is a symbol of both that which stimulates and that which frightens men and hence turns them to stone. Or it may be said that she frightens men *because* she stimulates them. By the time the story leaves Genius's lips, however, the myth, which epitomizes ambiguous male feelings towards female sexuality, desire and fear combined, has become a simple story of the hero's conquest of abhorrent external forces. In such a context, how can we possibly feel anything but admiration for Perseus?

This is why the "Tale of Acteon" appears to be so different in nature from the tales of Medusa and the Sirens. The only one of the three stories in which we are not meant to sympathize with the male character,[108] it concerns a mortal man who transgresses his subordinate role by looking at a naked goddess. Acteon inappropriately uses the prerogative of the male gaze, which implies superiority and

domination. His punishment--transformation into a hunted animal--reflects his appropriate relation to Diana. His metamorphosis is an inversion of a traditional metaphor for male-female relations, that of the hunter and the hunted.[109] It also offers a warning, from which perspective one should read Genius's remaining tales: kill or be killed.

The second sense, hearing, is intrinsically related to speech because this sense is most often used in society to listen to the speech of others. Control over speech is an even more effective means of domination than the gaze. The question of who is allowed to have a voice--in a work of fiction or in society--and who is kept voiceless, has important political consequences. As Coward observes about texts of another era, "The female protagonists of the nineteenth-century novel are profoundly silent. Their characters express sensitivity and inner feelings. Their looks, as the saying goes, 'speak volumes'." Even the sexuality of these heroines, she continues, is expressed "from the body, physically but without a voice."[110]

The Sirens, in contrast, express themselves through their voice. In fact, they don't just speak, they *sing*. Men are attracted to and follow the sounds, but are imperilled when they do so. As a result, the Sirens are themselves perceived as the source of danger. The Sirens provide a metaphor of the attitudes towards, and sometimes the fate of, the vocal woman. They are particularly frightening because they appeal

to the two main senses, sight and hearing, but are physically and sexually unattainable.

There are two methods of dealing with the power of another's voice: refuse to listen to the Other, or silence the Other, both of which are employed by Ulysses against the Sirens. Though one is obviously more harmful than the other, both strategies are in effect acts of censorship. By censoring or repressing part of the Other's truth, one refuses to look at it, which is what Perseus literally has to do in order to kill Medusa.

In the words of Hélène Cixous, "All you have to do to see the Medusa is look her in the face: and she isn't deadly. She is beautiful and she laughs. . . . For their own sake they need to be afraid of us."[111] In fact, this is true of each of the three stories about men and women with which Genius chooses to begin the examination of the penitent: all three female characters are literal or metaphorical objects of desire, but all three are entirely unobtainable, impenetrable, and thus uncontrollable. They must therefore be overcome before they harm the male subject.

Inversion: The Need for Disguise

Sight and voice are the most common and socially acceptable tools of control, but there is a third that is used when all others fail. Violence has been described as "a

last resort to keep the power structure intact against individual challengers. . . ."[112] It is, notably, the *opposite* of power, for "[r]ule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost. . . ."[113] Violence, then, is used to prop up power and authority when these are about to collapse. Genius's mythological tales illustrate that when the look fails to subdue and the Other will not be silenced, physical force must be used. In Genius's stories, the heroes murder the monsters to remove the perceived threat they pose.

Violence, however, is not always flagrant and boastful. As Foucault says, "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[114] As illustrated by Genius's theory and his mythological tales, violence often hides behind a mask of rationality that justifies its necessity as the only sensible response to the Other. If the Other is proclaimed as a threat to one's safety, as, for instance, Medusa is, one must act to protect oneself, even if this entails killing the Other.

Cixous has claimed that victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity and therefore, under patriarchy, the male is always the victor.[115] What could easily be added to this admittedly oversimplified scheme is that the victor often seeks to disguise his active role completely by pretending to be passive and humble. This process can be

more clearly understood if we refer to an observation made at the beginning of this chapter--that what Genius teaches (passive resistance) is at odds with what his stories demonstrate (aggression)--and compare it with the motif of action and passivity presented in courtly love poetry.

In the foremost poem about courtly love, the *Roman de la Rose*, the Rose is contained within a formidable castle which the lover seeks to penetrate. In this model, the male plays the active role, the female the passive. This is the model after which most of the male-female relations in the *Confessio*'s stories are patterned, including the myths that illustrate sight and hearing. Towards the end of Part II of that poem, Genius urges the barons to procreate, using active and violent imagery:

> Plow, for God's sake . . . plow and restore your lineages. . . . Tuck up your clothes . . . and exert yourself to push in stiffly with the plowshare in the straight path, the better to sink into the furrow. And for God's sake never let the horses in front go slowly; spur them harshly, and when you want to plow more deeply give them the greatest blows that you can ever give. . . ."[116]

Similar images are also found in the Christian tradition. Alan de Lille, for example, another of Gower's influences, in *De Planctu Naturae* uses metaphors such as hammer and anvil, subject and predicate, key and lock to describe sexual intercourse between men and women.[117] It is the basis for the blueprint of "normal" (and normalized) sexuality.

Most courtly love literature, however, seeks to portray the opposite image, as it is found in Book I of the *Roman de la Rose*. Guillaume's poem contains militaristic and violent images, but it places the lover in a position of passivity before the woman. In a series of submissive gestures, in which the man represses/controls/disguises his aggressive tendencies and assumes a feminized role,[11a] the truth of the situation--that he is actually engaged in the *active* pursuit of her love--is masked. Here the active male pretends that he is passive and that the female is active. This is the paradigm for romantic love.

Similarly, Genius's theory of the self and the senses shows the soul/man as the passive victim and temptation/woman as the aggressor seeking access through the gates of the senses. Just as the courtly love model is an inversion of normalized patterns of sexual behaviour, so Genius's theory is an inversion of the pattern found in his mythological stories, which depict the man as the active, aggressive force, and the woman as the passive recipient. By imposing a theory of male passivity and victimization onto stories which portray male activity and aggression towards women, a sophisticated act of "doublethink" takes place. Though the man acts aggressively, he nevertheless is perceived to be passive. The perhaps unconscious duplicity involved is hinted at in Genius's advice, "betre is to winke than to loke". Does this mean that it is safer to ignore

temptation than to expose oneself to it? Or is he really saying that it is more advantageous to use a little strategy than to stare outright?

Significantly, in Genius's early mythological tales, whoever the woman and whatever her treatment, each is figuratively an object of desire and an object of fear, whether she be goddess, gorgon, or siren. The mythological stories embody the notion of Western rationalism typified by separateness, dichotomy, and objectivity. They establish how the woman, once cast as objectified Other, may be subjected to the control strategies of the male gaze, censorship or violence. While the first two strategies are socially accepted forms of control, violence, in general, is not. Analysis of the stories together with Genius's lessons points to techniques by which violence is masked and thereby made acceptable: the aggressor may justify violence in the name of self-preservation; or he may disguise his activity as passivity.

At the narrative level, what is displayed is a shutting out of the feminine, a misreading of her, a denial of her story, and an insistance upon closure. Notably, there are no women at the main narrative level of the *Confessio* (except the goddess Venus), nor on the authoritative level of the Latin material, only at the level of Genius's fictions. Chapter 4 will examine how the feminine speaks through the fictions as a second subject. The voice of the stories as a

collective whole, and particularly the voices of the women in them, present the only significant challenge to the many voices in the text which speak from a gender-asymmetrical, binary system that seeks to ignore the feminine. From time to time, the feminine voices break through the oppressive censorship and moralizing to seriously and irrevocably undermine authority.

CHAPTER 4: WOMAN AS CHALLENGE TO AUTHORITY

I now turn to the stories that speak of violence between men and women. In this chapter I will examine the patterns of action and reaction to uncover the relationship of violent love stories to their context. How exactly are the stories connected to the discussion between Amans and Genius and to the values held by these characters?

The Means of Domination in the Tales

The worlds portrayed in Genius's *exempla* appear to be far removed from Amans and his amorous preoccupations, and from the courtly love society that inspires him. The men in these love stories, for the most part, are reprehensible, and they are that way because Genius's ostensible task is to speak of the most despicable characters he can find in order to convince Amans of the importance of living and loving virtuously. Therefore, the values of the characters in these tales might be expected to be antithetical to those of the Christian and courtly love traditions of which Genius is a part.

Certainly, nowhere in the tales themselves or in Genius's commentary are we asked or expected to sympathize with the characters who act in harmful ways. In many cases, violent

men (for it is almost always the male characters who initiate violence) are punished in the events of the stories. They are portrayed as inhuman, as morally corrupt, or at the very best, as fallen heroes. They are law-breakers: of Theseus it is said that "he the lawe of loves riht / Forfeted hath in alle weie" (V.5476-77). Cruel men are also described as animal-like and unworthy of the audience's sympathy. Theseus is said to be worse than "the *beste unkinde*" because he "no trouthe kepte" (V.5424 and 25; italics added), and Tereus is described in similarly bestial terms. These are men whom Amans is warned not to emulate.

Certain patterns of interaction emerge from the *Confessio*'s array of love stories. Love stories, like most stories of any genre, are tales of struggle between opponents. In the words of Cixous, "the movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. . . . Death is always at work."[119] The first point to be understood is *how* men and women in the tales war with each other.

The "Tale of Albinus and Rosemund" is a good example of how this battle is enacted. The story explores the means by which the active male acts upon the passive female within a society in which love and violence freely intermingle. The first part of the story portrays the man employing all three means of domination discussed earlier--the look, the voice, and violence--in his bid to dominate.

From the beginning of the tale, notably set on a literal battlefield, the relationship of Albinus and Rosemund is linked to military acts. After the slaughter, Albinus moves in immediately to gather the spoils of war. The first of these is his enemy's skull, from which he wishes to make "A Cuppe for Gurmondes sake, / To kepe and drawe into memoire / Of his bataille the victoire" (I.2474-76). The skull thus becomes, literally, a trophy.

Passages relating to Albinus are filled with active verbs that connote supremacy: *wonne, overrone, sesed.* His superiority is qualified when he spies Rosemund amidst the carnage ("His herte *fell to hire* anon" (I.2484; italics added)), but he soon recovers, for "such a love on hire he *caste*, / That he hire *weddeth* ate laste" (I.2485-86). Rosemund, in contrast, is the rose of the world, with all the passivity that a post-*Roman de la Rose* reading implies. As the object of the male gaze, she represents a universal ideal of womanhood: she "was *in every mannes sihte* / A fair, a freissh, a lusty on" (I.2482-83; italics added). Her feelings for Albinus remain unknown, except for the ambiguous comment that "to the beste / They love eche other wonder wel" (I.2488-89).

After his marriage to Rosemund, Albinus holds a feast, and it is in this scene that the function of both father and daughter as trophies is first recognized by Rosemund. In one sense, the feast, held "for his wyves sake" (I.2474), is

indeed in Rosemund's honour, to celebrate her and to introduce her to his vassals. Yet Albinus's motives are tainted, for he wishes to display Rosemund to the lords who are obedient to him, "That sche the lordes ate feste, / That were obeissant to his heste, / Mai knowe" (I.2501-3). Thus he wants her both to *get to know* the lords who are obedient to him and also to *know that* they are obedient to him, and to take her cue from them.

In the events and talk of the feast, the military and the amorous intermingle, as we are told that "Al was of armes and of love" (I.2528). Albinus's flaw is that he does not just combine these elements; for him the military supersedes the amorous. In the feast scene he publicly treats Rosemund as captured foe rather than as desired lady. The phrase "for his wyves sake," which is his reason for holding the feast, suggests the presence of force in their love, for it recalls the opening scene of bloodshed and Albinus's creation of the chalice "for Gurmoundes sake." After bidding his wife to drink from the cup, Albinus "made avant thurgh what prowesse / He hath his wyves love Wonne, / Which of the Skulle hath so begonne" (I.2560-2). Albinus, however, did not win Rosemund's love by proving his worthiness; instead, he seized her after his victory as his prize of war.

Albinus's attempt to exert control over his wife is made explicit when he rudely and cruelly commands her to "Drinke with thi fader, Dame" (I.2551), an act she correctly

perceives as an attempt to humiliate her. Here the parallel is drawn between father and daughter as objects of a common enemy who appropriates them, the one literally and the other figuratively, as trophies. By this point in the story, the audience has observed the full extent of Albinus's attempts to exert control over his wife: his deployment of the male gaze, by which he assesses her worth; his words which spell out his superiority while simultaneously keeping her silent and humiliated; and the implicit threat of violence everpresent in their relationship. Some or all of these strategies are present in virtually all stories that depict male attempts to dominate the female Other.

The Motivation for Domination in the Tales

The second aspect to be examined in the struggle between male and female characters is *why* they do battle. What causes the aggressors to act in overtly harmful ways? There appear to be three patterns of easily discernible motivation. Very rarely, violence in the love stories is presented as being directly caused by anger over another's actual or potential actions which conflict with the subject's desires. The introductory stories on the senses provide typical examples of women who inspire male displeasure and anxiety with their apparently rebellious or threatening looks or voices. In the story of Jupiter and

Laar, the god punishes the nymph by cutting out her tongue for revealing that she saw him making love with Jutorne. Tereus uses similarly drastic means to prevent Philomela from incriminating him.

A common, and perhaps the most straightforward, cause of violence is the uncontrolled lust of the man for the woman, which usually results in rape or attempted rape. One troubling aspect of the way this motivation is handled throughout the text is that the man's lust is regarded as uncontroll*able*. In Book I, for example, Duke Mundus is portrayed as a virtual victim of his love for Paulina. The narrator stresses that she was "to *every* mannes sihte / Of al the Cite the faireste" (I.766-67; italics added), and acknowledges that even though Mundus was "a worthi knyht" and a leader of the Roman army, "Bot yet he was noght of such myht / The strengthe of love to withstonde" (I. 786-7). At the end of the story, when the punishment is handed down, the accomplice priests are executed, but the Duke's sentence is reduced from death to banishment,

> For he with love was bestad,
> His dom was noght so harde lad;
> For Love put reson aweie
> And can noght se the rihte weie. (I.1049-52)

Men like Duke Mundus are held accountable for crimes committed under love's influence, but they are regarded as

being not entirely to blame for such actions because they are themselves victims of their passions.

Most commonly in the *Confessio,* violence is precipitated by the presence of a third party who threatens to usurp the man's power. The battle then moves from a simple contest between man and woman to a struggle between two men for a woman's love or for control of her body. Tania Modleski, in a study of one such "triangle" in an early talking film, refers to a scene in which "the woman literally and figuratively occupies the place that Freud assigned to women in the structure of the obscene joke: the place of the object between two male subjects."[120] A great many of the situations described in the *Confessio Amantis* portray exactly this triangular structure, as well as the accompanying attempt to silence women described by Modleski. The tales of Leucothoe, Albinus and Rosemund, and Canace and Machaire depict triangles in which a daughter is torn between father and lover, while the stories of Mundus and Paulina, Tarquin, Aruns and Lucrece, and Phebus and Cornide illustrate situations in which a wife is fought over by husband and either lover or rapist. In the poem, examples of this motif abound. This literary phenomenon also reflects a sociological truth: as Given points out, women in the Middle Ages were more often the occasion for violence than active participants in it.[121]

The "Tale of Virginia" illustrates all three motives for violent actions and emphasizes an elaborate variation of the triangle motif. The ostensible subject of the tale neither speaks nor acts in the course of the narrative. The only details provided about Virginia's life are that she is the daughter of Livius Virginius and that she is reputedly the fairest in the town. She is a shadow, an idea of a woman who exists in the narrative simply as the cause of the plot, much as Amans' lady does. She neither speaks nor acts in the entire course of the story. Apius, driven by lust to acquire her at all costs, is inflamed merely by the *reputation* of her beauty.

Most importantly, in Gower's story Virginia is not only a victim, but also a pawn, fought over and manipulated by men whose roles are archetypal. Apius represents the threat from the world outside the domestic haven, the archetypal menacing stranger. This figuration is recalled when Virginius tells his men

> That betre it were to redresce
> At hom the grete unrihtwisnesse,
> Than forto werre in strange place
> And lese at hom here oghne grace. (VII.5269-72)

Significantly, Gower (unlike Chaucer) retains the detail that the father has already chosen a man for Virginia to marry: Ilicius, who is "A worthi knigt of gret lignage" (VII.5150). The fiance is not, like Apius, a usurper of the

father, but rather a replacement for him; he is the father's younger double. Virginius is in many ways the most dangerous of the three men. His threat is insidious because as Virginia's male guardian his actions (giving Virginia away in marriage and using his political and physical power over her to achieve his own ends) are legal.

Although the story is named for the woman, it is primarily a tale about men--men who struggle against each other for control over a woman's body. In this story and in others, violence is paradoxically both the ultimate expression of that control (Virginius's actions are never questioned because he has legal control over his daughter) and the implicit expression of *lack* of control (Virginius must concede that Apius's power to acquire Virginia will overcome his own authority to give her to Ilicius, his surrogate). By accentuating the importance of the male characters at the expense of Virginia, and by structuring the plot around their struggle for power over her (rather than having it diffuse into insurrection as Livy does or portraying the simpler and more emotional father-daughter relationship as Chaucer does), Gower accentuates the helplessness of a woman denied all control over her body and ultimately over her life; a woman who in effect is no more free than the slave she is alleged to be; a woman who, in fact, represents all women. What this and the other stories of triangular relationships show is that it does not matter

who the man is--under the conditions of patriarchy the male figures collapse into one. Because woman is merely the object of their subjective agendas, she very often becomes the victim of male violence.

Female Reaction to Domination in the Tales

In a great many of the *Confessio*'s tales, women are victims of male aggression. Many of these women (Virginia, Leucothoe, Canace, for example), suffer passively the violence inflicted on them, and a significant number of these suffer silently. Some, however, actively resist the oppression of the men who dominate them, forcing the reader to remember that the Other is actually another subject, a second self, and to resist the impulse to rely solely on the subject's interpretation. This alternative view of the female subject is reinforced when the woman is given a voice with which to present her point of view. Every story of violence is a tale of both victor and victim, a tale of activity, passivity, and sometimes resistance, and Gower calls attention to this fact despite (or perhaps through) Genius's attempts to hide certain kinds of responses.

Those women who *re*act tend to utilize the strategies commonly employed by men to control them.[122] The second part of the "Tale of Albinus and Rosemund" provides an example of a woman who, at a clearly discernible point, understands her

victimization and responds by transforming herself from victim to aggressor. Immediately after Albinus's brutal and humiliating command to his wife, the narrative abruptly changes from the victor's to the victim's point of view. This shift may be a strategy employed to facilitate and solicit the audience's sympathy with a character and its identification with that character's struggle.[123]

Amidst the noise of the feast, the narrative moves from Albinus's boasting to Rosemund's devastated, "softe" reflections on his "unkynde pride". The shifting point of view from husband to wife is marked by a sense of movement from external to internal, from noise to silence, from action to thought, from brutality to humanity. Rosemund focuses on the gruesome details of her father's murder with realistic fascination. Genius, in contrast, had glossed over the details of Gurmond's murder, simply reporting that:

> Albinus slowh him in the feld,
> Ther halp him nowther swerd ne scheld,
> That he ne smot his hed of thanne,
> Whereof he tok awey the Panne. . . . (I.2469-72)

Rosemund, however, sits

> Thenkende . . .
> Of that hire lord so nyh hire side
> Avanteth him that he hath slain
> And piked out hire fader brain,
> And of the skulle had mad a Cuppe. (I.2566-69)

Here she recognizes, apparently for the first time, Albinus's brutality and his accompanying pride, and her role as a prize rather than a beloved.

The cup provides an emblem both of war and of the couple's love. When it is examined closely and the "Gripes Ey" of skull peeking through the gold is noted, it is seen for what it truly is: jewels encrusting a skull; glory founded upon death; love based upon violence. In this scene, the reader grapples with what it means to realize the aw(e)fulness of the lover as monster. Of course, this acknowledgment is extended almost immediately to Rosemund, who proves *herself* capable of cold-bloodedly orchestrating a ruthless murder.

From this point, Rosemund is no longer portrayed as a blameless character. Although she has a personal grievance against her husband, she employs others to help her carry out her revenge, to their common downfall. Not only does she secure the help of her maid Glodeside, she engages in adultery to trick Glodeside's lover, Helmege, into helping them. Rosemund's actions are very subtly paralleled to those of her husband in a number of ways. The criminals are quick to take the king's treasure with them, an action reminiscent of the opening of the story, where Albinus is seen gathering up the spoils of war. In the scene in which Rosemund and Glodeside plan the entrapment of Helmege, the audience is told "And with this *sleigte* thei beginne" (I.2591; italics

added). This echoes an earlier use of the word: of the cup it is said that "with gret *sleigte* / Of werkman schipe it was begrave" (I.2541-2; italics added). After Rosemund's plan has been carried out, she and her assistants are punished, just as she saw fit to punish Albinus.

The "Tale of Tereus, Procne and Philomela," in contrast, not only condemns Tereus's brutality, it also appears to justify Procne's violent reactions. The audience is asked to accept and forgive a mother who murders her child and feeds him to her husband out of revenge and anger. The reason for the difference in attitudes towards Rosemund and Procne is in part due to the force against which they struggle, in part due to the way in which they react, and in part due to the methods they use.

To secure our sympathy for Procne, Tereus is presented as the most loathesome of beings. Though initially portrayed as "a worthi king of hih lignage," held in "reverance" by Procne's parents (V.5566 and 5608), Tereus is later described as beast-like, as "that tirant raviner, / . . . / that lost hath alle grace" (V.5627-31), and is likened to fire that devours straw with its heat. The narrator appears to have no end of bad things to say about him. He is a "wode hound" (V.5701), yet is "mor cruel than Eny beste" (V.5672). His predatory nature is further evoked by contrast with Philomela: "in a rage on hire he ran, / Riht as a wolf which takth his preie" (V.5632-33), and at one point they are

positioned "As if a goshauk hadde sesed / A brid" (V.5644-45).

Conversely, the sisters are portrayed as being entirely innocent and unblameworthy, and as being of impeccable character and virtue. Philomela's greatest distress after being raped by Tereus is, first, over her lost virginity, and then over the harm done to her sister, the faithful wife of Tereus. Procne, similarly, bemoans the atrocity committed upon her beloved sister and then her husband's unfaithfulness. Unlike Tereus, neither woman thinks solely of her own needs or discomfort.

Throughout the scenes of their revenge, the narrator constantly excuses Procne's and Philomela's actions by reminding the reader of the horror of Tereus's cruelty:

> Thes Sostres, that ben bothe felle,--
> And that was noght on hem along,
> Bot onliche on the grete wrong
> Which Tereus hem hadde do. (V.5880-5883)

In punishing Tereus, the sisters are merely acting as agents of divine justice, and the punishment itself is said to fit the crime: "Bot thus his oughne fleisshe and blod / Himslef devoureth ayein kinde, / As he that was tofore unkinde" (V.5904-06). Procne can slay her child only because she is "mad / Of wo" (V.5891-92). In this way, the women's violent reaction against the man is justified.

Whereas Chaucer's "Good Women" have been described as "enervated, passive heroines,"[124] Gower is certainly not guilty of that narrative crime in this story. Chaucer's narrator tells of a Philomela and Procne who "dully and passively dissolve in tears."[125] Genius, however, gives us a Procne who is proud and "masculine" in her rejection of the stereotypically feminine reactions and in her assumption of the masculine role of activity. When she "reads" Philomela's woven autobiography,

> In a swoune tho sche gan doun falle,
> And efte aros and gan to stonde,
> And efte sche takth the cloth on honde,
> Behield the lettres and thymages;
> Bot ate laste, 'Of suche oultrages,'
> Sche seith, 'wepinge is noghte the bote:'
> And swerth, if that sche live mote,
> It schal be venged otherwise. (V.5788-95)

Procne is an ideal reader because she not only understands the text, she takes action on it. She immediately begins planning her strategy. In this scene she shuns the passive, feminine responses of tears and swooning and instead adopts the active, masculine posture of standing erect and outraged. Significantly, she begins her revenge by swearing an oath, a distinctly masculine activity.[126]

The "Tale of Tereus," however, contains a significant factor missing from Rosemund's story which helps to justify female retaliatory violence. This is the powerful element of voice in the story, an aspect which is, in fact, at the

thematic centre of the tale. This is a story of women's threat to male power and how one man attempts--unsuccessfully--to repress that insubordinate impulse. What Tereus finds threatening about Philomela, after he has raped her, is her speech--she vows to tell the world of what he has done; if there is no one around to listen, she insists, she will tell inanimate objects. One way or another, she *will* tell her story. Tereus's two-fold attempt to silence her--through mutilation and imprisonment--fails. While he has crippled her physically, he has not crippled her spiritually or morally. Though she cannot speak, she prays silently for divine justice. Though she cannot utter words, she still has a "voice," the ability to tell her story, and she expresses herself through the uniquely female art of weaving. With thread she conveys what she cannot spell out in words.

Procne, too, is extremely vocal, and after she reveals that she has fed Tereus his son, she proceeds to chastize him for his crimes. Together, the sisters probably have more direct speech than all the other female characters in the book. Thus Tereus's attempt to subject Philomela to his will, to defile her, silence her, and isolate her, not only fails but also brings about his own destruction and the end of his line. In this manner, what begins as a tale of cruelty, inhumanity and oppression becomes a testament to

the power of speech, particularly, of women's communication and solidarity in the face of adversity.

In both of these tales, women who find themselves the object of male domination retaliate against their oppressors. Given the abundance of models of female passivity, their mere existence is noteworthy. What must be observed in the *Confessio* is, first, that some women are portrayed as second subjects. They act independently of the male subject and they are implicitly judged, in the course of the *narracio*, on the basis of their actions.

Procne and Philomela are vindicated in the course of the narrative because their retaliation is justified by the enormity of Tereus's crimes, because they reject duplicitous, "feminine" responses in favour of forthright, "masculine" ones, and because they incorporate the power of speech. In contrast, Albinus carried out his oppression of Rosemund through implied violence; Rosemund employed deceptive means to gain revenge; and Rosemund never articulated her motives.

The second point to be noted is that Genius's response to such characters is morally ambivalent. As far as Genius is concerned, the story of Albinus and Rosemund might as well have ended with the toast scene. In his *moralitas*, he blames the man who speaks his own praise, who tries to gain fame through arms, and who uses boasts in an attempt to further his love, all of which Albinus does. The question is, how

does Rosemund fit into this moral grid? Why is Rosemund's role as a victim of Albinus ignored by Genius? The *effects* of his sins are never mentioned in the *moralitas*, and one might infer from the wording that the concern of the confessor is not so much that actions like Albinus's harm someone else as that they thwart the perpetrator's objectives. One might justifiably question whether those sins detailed by Genius are the most or the least of Albinus's misdeeds.

Rosemund's subsequent violent retaliation poses a complex moral dilemma. Are we to infer from Genius's silence that Rosemund is to be pardoned for her actions or are we to assume from the narrative's implicit criticism that she is blameworthy? Or is she simply not worth consideration in Genius's moral schema? While it might otherwise be easy to dismiss Genius's lack of interest in Rosemund as admission of her sin, the movement of the *narracio* to Rosemund's point of view at the exact moment Albinus is at his haughty worst invites the reader's engagement with Rosemund. By then omitting her from his commentary, Genius sacrifices the complexity of his *narracio* in an overriding attempt to impose closure.

Even after the narrative's morally unambiguous presentation of Procne and Philomela's retaliation, we do not know how Genius reconciles their actions with his own code of ethics because he ignores the sisters in his

moralitas just as he did Rosemund. One is left to *assume* that he pardons them, because he clearly condemns Tereus's actions and because he does not explicitly criticize the women. And once more, his moral--"if thou be of such covine, / To gete of love be Ravine / Thi lust, it mai thee falle thus, / As it befell of Tereus" (V.6049-52)--seems woefully inadequate to deal with the events just related. This is a pattern that occurs again and again as Genius ignores certain kinds of feminine behaviour--namely, violence and dissension--and normalizes others such as passivity and victimization.

The Textual Struggle for Control

Two aspects of the motives for aggression must be discussed. First, as exemplified by the "Tale of Albinus and Rosemund," the "Tale of Tereus, Procne and Philomela," and the "Tale of Virginia," all three motives--anger, lust and jealousy--may be interpreted as the self's desire to control the Other. This desire to control is present not just in the stories themselves but in all levels of the text. The relation of each narrative level to the level or levels below is analogous to Carolyn Dinshaw's metaphor of the masculine signifier acting upon the feminine surface. The stories function collectively as feminine body in a text filled with variations on the masculine-feminine pair.

Throughout the text, these binary opposites struggle against each other, as the higher, masculine entity seeks to control the lower, feminine entity, which it fears. Within the self, the soul is privileged over the body. Of the senses, sight and hearing are more important than the more animalistic touch, taste, and smell. In the structure of the poem, the Latin portions comment upon the English elements, and Genius comments upon his *narraciones*. Only the stories do not comment explicitly on another portion of the text, and so do not act in a "masculine" way. This also means they are invested with less authority than either of the other levels.

While Genius's *exempla* often consist of representations of literal, violent struggle, the battle between textual elements is of course figurative. Winning the struggle is not a matter of physically overpowering the opponent but of silencing it. Thus, Genius discusses sight and hearing, but conveniently omits touch, taste and smell. Amans, subject to Genius's interrogation, in turn has control over his lady, in that he is the author of their story and she is silent in her absence. Perhaps most importantly, Genius has control over his stories because he imposes a moralitas onto each narracio to indicate its significance and the "correct" interpretation. Collectively, the stories comprise a feminine text written by a masculine author and interpreted by a masculine commentator who seeks closure.

However, as Charles Runacres has pointed out, "Gower was aware . . . of the independent significance that could reside in his *narraciones* by virtue of their particulars."[127] As demonstrated by the "Tale of Albinus and Rosemund" and the "Tale of Tereus, Procne and Philomela," within the *narraciones*, acts of female violence may be given either implicit approval or blame. Genius, however, always imposes *moralitates* on his stories. Because the stories stand on their own, Genius's attempts to superimpose a moral structure frequently limit the tales and sometimes result in discrepancies between *narracio* and *moralitas*. These discrepancies allow the audience to hold sympathies and attitudes towards particular characters which might not agree with Genius's own interpretation. Though this appears to contradict the purported scheme of the book, it is possible because while Genius ostensibly has control over the stories he tells, almost all are derived from other sources, a fact to which he constantly calls attention: "The Poete upon this matiere / Of Stelthe wrot in this manere" (V.6713-14) is how Genius introduces the "Tale of Leucothoe" and in a similar fashion he begins a great many other tales.

The "Tale of Virginia" demonstrates the recurring discrepancy between Genius's *moralitates* and *narraciones*. At the beginning of the tale he states his purpose: to show

That rihtwisnesse and lecherie
Accorden noght in compaignie
With him that hath the lawe on honde.
(VII.5125-27)

The concluding *moralitas* confirms this by focussing on Apius's vice with the pun "thus thunchaste was chastised" (VII.5301).

Within the body of the *narracio*, however, Virginius, too, is portrayed in an unflattering way. Whereas Chaucer says that Virginius was "Fulfild of honour and of worthyness, / And strong of freendes, and of greet richesse,"[128] Gower, unlike both Chaucer and Livy, says almost nothing about the father's worthiness, but merely includes the non-judgmental fact that "Hire fader . . . / The ledinge of chivalerie / In governance hath undertake" (VII.5155-57). Virginius's murder of his daughter is committed without pity or reason, and any feelings of tenderness for his daughter are completely overshadowed by his hatred for Apius:

Wherof upon the tirannie,
That for the lust of Lecherie
His dauhter scholde be deceived,
And that Ilicius was weyved
Untrewly fro the Mariage,
Rihte as a Leon in his rage,
Which of no drede set acompte
And not what pite scholde amounte,
A naked swerd he pulleth oute,
The which amonges al the route
He threste thurgh his dowhter side. . . .
(VII.5235-45)

This is never portrayed in Gower's version as an act meant to spare Virginia--in fact the narrator specifies that it is committed entirely without pity. Virginius's drastic over-reaction stems from pride rather than righteous indignation: his action results not from the injury Apius intends to do to his daughter but from the injury Apius will be doing to him.

In this tale and throughout the *Confessio*, while Genius's *moralitas* implies satisfactory resolution, the workings of the *narracio*--the way it draws sympathy to certain characters and criticizes others--mean resolution is impossible. In instances such as this one, satisfaction is found neither in the events of the story nor in Genius's wisdom.

Often the discrepancy between *moralitas* and *narracio* results from Genius's attempt to apply the values of courtly love to stories that do not fit the literal courtly love pattern: in the "Tale of Leucothoe," for example, he blames Phoebus for stealth but not the father for murder. Genius's concern for the specifics of courtly love values frequently undermines the complex morality of these tales.

Genius's hermeneutics also eclipse his female characters, an aspect which accords with the courtly love poem's actual concern with the lover as opposed to its feigned interest in the beloved. As the stories of Rosemund and Philomela demonstrate, women do retaliate against male aggressors,

often with violence. In his *moralitates* Genius ignores the actions of violent female characters because he cannot reconcile them with his philosophy, which posits women as the fearsome Other who must be controlled. Genius, in fact, can admit only one view of women--passive victims--which he normalizes, as he does male cruelty. Any other view of women is too frightening to acknowledge. His interpretations all too often are at odds with a narrative that might be perceived to be beyond his control.[129]

Before telling of Jason and Medea, for instance, Genius laments:

> ... the matiere I schal declare,
> How the wommen deceived are,
> Whan thei so tendre herte bere,
> Of that thei hieren men so swere. (V.3235-3238)

He fails to acknowledge in his commentary either Medea's admirable strength and heroism or her terrible vengefulness, which are well developed characteristics in the narrative, insisting instead on reducing her in his *moralitas* to a feeble victim.

A similar attitude is apparent in Genius's summary to the "Tale of Mundus and Paulina." While certain aspects of the story--a strong community, a supportive husband, a vocal wife, and punishment of the criminals by a court of law--help to create a sense of resolution that offsets the reduction of Mundus's sentence, Genius's concluding words

divert attention from the real source of trouble, Mundus, and cast a moral shadow over the husband:

> And ek to take remembrance
> Of that Ypocrisie hath wroght
> On other half, men scholde noght
> To lihtly lieve al that thei hiere,
> But thanne scholde a wisman stiere
> The Schip. (1060-1065)

Here Genius pleads for strong and wise husbands who, unlike Paulina's, should know better than their wives and should control their wives' actions accordingly.

Even non-gendered subjects are endowed by Genius with stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities. The "Tale of the Trojan Horse," for example, becomes imbued with overtones of violent sexuality, as the Greeks become representatives of the active male and the Trojans the symbol of the passive and victimized female. Although the story is not literally about amorous personal relationships, Genius himself suggests this figurative meaning in his *moralitas* by likening the treachery of the Greeks to the hypocrisy of men towards women.

Genius's critical response is almost identical to that of Chaucer's narrator in *The Legend of Good Women*: "[h]e edits his pagan tales . . . to conform to a single, closed, secure, and comforting narrative model." To do so, he

> enervate[s] traditionally aggressive, passionate, even dangerous female characters like Cleopatra, Medea, Philomela, and Procne, and, equally

> unnerving, women capable of independent moral judgment and action, women like Lucrece, Hypsipyle, and Hypermnestra.[130]

Genius seeks to occlude subversive feminine behaviour; and that which he cannot contain, he ignores. Genius's consistent selectivity allows him to uphold and thus normalize the view of women as passive victims which he finds in many tales, and which he imposes on others that do not depict this pattern.

In this manner, a gulf is created in which the act of interpretation is highlighted. The difference between the voices of Genius the story-teller and Genius the moralizer indicates that meaning is not straightforward and monological; it must rather be found in the spaces between elements of the text, it must be sought in discrepancy rather than in didacticism. It is through such gaps in the text that the voice of the feminine may be heard to challenge authority. Stories that depict strong women who act as independent subjects, by refuting Genius's view of women as passive victims, provide an oblique commentary upon Genius's pronouncements, and thereby present the only significant challenge to his authority. They also challenge the ideology of gender-asymmetrical binary opposition that is present in his and in the other voices of the poem. To the extent that these stories problematize the *moralitates*

Genius superimposes onto them, they represent the feminine speaking against the masculine, and undermining authority.

Courtly Love and the Sexual/Textual Struggle for Control

The second notable aspect of the motivations for the crimes of Genius's male characters--dissatisfaction with another's actions, uncontrolled lust, jealousy and, fundamentally, the desire to control the Other, who is seen as an object that either satisfies or thwarts the subject's needs--is their striking resemblance to the psychological motivations underlying the courtly love genre. The key difference, however, is that in courtly love literature, these motivations are driven into the unconscious, along with admission of sensual feelings, whereas in Genius's stories, they are openly acted out.

The result is a profound splitting in the *Confessio Amantis* which mirrors the division within the psyche. Freud described the prevailing disunity of the affectionate and the sensual in Western consciousness and its common expression in art.[131] This division is analogous to that of Christian philosophy, as noted in Chapter 1 by James Brundage, who states, "[t]he rejection of pleasure as a legitimate purpose of sex depended . . . upon the dichotomy between body and soul, flesh and spirit, that is fundamental to late ancient and medieval Christian belief."[132]

Significantly, this split is found in one of Gower's major literary influences, the *Roman de la Rose*. Book I describes a stereotypical courtly love situation. Gentle in tone, it honours women and depicts a male lover who pretends to be passive before his beloved. When he is open about his activity (as when he steals a kiss from the rose), he is punished. Book II, however, is world-weary and cynical; it is filled with images of active and even aggressive male sexuality; and it culminates in a climactic, destructive figuration of the sexual act. Part of the enjoyment to be derived from the text results from its use of sexual metaphors: the contrast between what is said and what is meant and, moreover, the audience's awareness of this distinction instill the poem with much of its humour.

In the *Confessio*, the split between the affective and the sensual is represented by Amans and the stories. Amans assumes the courtly lover's posture of gentle, passive affection for a surrogate mother figure, whereas in Genius's tales, love is passionate, sexual, and violent. These are feelings that Amans, in his quest for amorous fulfilment, denies, and feelings that Genius, as counsellor of courtly love and Christian morality, counsels him away from.[133] The sensibilities of both Amans and Genius cause them to deny the profane. While this moral prescription, if followed faithfully, may result in a virtuous life, it is ineffective as a method of self-knowledge. It is like Perseus's

technique of slaying the gorgon: just as that hero seeks to kill his foe without looking at it, so Amans seeks knowledge without full understanding.

But while the division between affective and sensual, or between sacred and profane, is profound, it is illusory. The actions depicted in the stories must not be seen as being opposite to or discrete from Genius's virtuous ideal or Amans' attempts at courtliness, but rather as an extension of them. The stories of lust, rape, jealousy, and murder are related to the supposedly gentle courtly love pattern to which Amans aspires and Genius apparently subscribes, in that both are part of a larger pattern of Western rationalization. Genius's vicious men and Amans the gentle courtly lover are all unable to view the Other as a second self. To be a woman within this scheme is to be either an object of this rational individualism or a threat to it. While Amans compensates for feelings of powerlessness by trying to gain power over his lady through voyeurism and by telling, and thus controlling, their story, the frustrations of Genius's male characters often find expression through acts of violence.

These male attitudes are both acknowledged and criticized in Gower's "Tale of Florent." In an article entitled, "Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature,"[134] Joan Ferrante has demonstrated that many courtly love poets use a female character as a "realist" to ridicule and to question

"their own or their culture's fantasies, to reveal their limitations and to express their own reservations about them."[135] In the "Tale of Florent," a female character acts as "realist," as described by Ferrante, and educates the male character through her speech and by inverting the sex roles.

The "Tale of Florent" presents a common folkloric motif: to avoid execution, a knight must successfully answer a riddle. Here, the challenge is assigned to Florent by a woman as punishment for a previous crime. Thus the baffled knight is immediately placed in the position of humble supplicant or, in other words, in a feminized position. The knight's correct response to the riddle is not the conclusion of his adventure, but rather the beginning of his education.

Whereas Chaucer's knight is presented with the riddle as punishment for raping a woman, Gower's knight is being punished for killing another knight in battle. Chaucer's version seems to place male-female relations more clearly at the heart of his story, while the question posed to Gower's Florent (what do all women most desire) and its answer (to "Be soverein of mannes love") appears to be completely irrelevant to Florent's criminal record. However, Gower's account of the knight's crime and his character focuses the reader's attention on Florent's actions in this story, rather than holding him accountable for events that occurred

before the story began; it makes him a more sympathetic character (he is depicted as an honourable and worthy knight despite his limitations); and it highlights attitudes towards women inherent in the courtly society to which Florent belongs.

That Florent cannot answer the riddle is not surprising, since, as the story demonstrates, its concept is completely outside his realm of comprehension. When it becomes apparent to him that his choice is between death and marriage to this "lothly wommannysch figure,"

> . . . he caste his avantage,
> That sche was of so gret an age,
> That sche mai live bot a while,
> And thoghte put hire in an Ile,
> Wher that noman hire scholde knowe,
> Til sche with deth were overthrowe. (I.1575-80)

Although the old woman presents him with the possibility of escaping his death sentence, he accepts her offer with the intention of breaking the spirit of their pledge by denying her freedom. This is, significantly, a real possibility in a society in which men literally own their wives like chattels.

Florent returns to "collect" the hag because, as an honourman, he must remain loyal to the letter of his oath. Here his knighthood is tested again, and he learns what it means to be a *true* knight. "Thogh sche be the fouleste of alle, / Yet to honour of wommanhiede / Him thoghte he

scholde taken hiede" (I.1718-20). Though she bears no resemblance to the culturally defined ideals of youth and beauty to which the chivalric system pays tribute, he must nevertheless honour her as a woman, and he sits her on his horse while he walks. But Florent is a proud knight and, in his shame at being seen with her, he travels only by cover of night.

The audience, like Florent, is faced with a difficult proposition in this story: whereas in Chaucer's version it is merely stated "A fouler wight ther may no man devyse,"[136] Gower's narrator clearly describes, in the most horrifically fascinating detail, the utter ugliness of the old woman's person. There is nothing aesthetically redeeming about her, and the reader is made to understand how loathesome the idea of even routine, let alone intimate, physical contact with her would be. Gower's plethora of details make Florent's predicament more excruciating and build suspense. Whereas Chaucer condenses the promise and the marriage scenes, Gower draws them out, emphasizing the horror of Florent's dilemma but also the progression of his education.

While Genius lingers agonizingly on the details of the old woman's loathesomeness, he is tactful, but clear, about the fact that Florent must fulfill his pledge completely: it is not sufficient for him to perform the marriage ceremony with the woman, nor can he simply sleep in the same bed as her; he must consummate their marriage. Florent, despite

answering the riddle correctly, has not learned anything. Though he has apprehended the answer he does not fully comprehend it, for while Florent has fulfilled his pledge and married the old woman in exchange for his life, he never intends to honour that vow fully. As Green points out in relation to Ovid and Jean de Meun, women are outside the bond of "trouthe" because men in these texts feel they can use the pledge to get what they want from love and then discard it.[137] It is a sign of our own participation in Florent's ideals that we empathize with him and not with the woman. Significantly, it is not until she is beautiful that we can safely accept her as a suitable spouse for the knight.

The old woman, aware of Florent's lack of understanding and his intention not to honour his vow, "bad him thenke on that he seide, / Whan that he toke hire be the hond" (I.1796-97). It is only at this point in the tale, when "He herde and understod the bond, / how he was set to his penance" (I.1798-99), that he fully intends to honour his pledge, and again he is rewarded for doing so, as she is transformed into a beautiful young woman.

At this point the lady presents Florent with a second dilemma by asking him a question that forces him to choose between his pride and his lust. This truly is a problem for a young man raised in the chivalric code. With his answer ("Thus grante I yow myn hole vois"), he indicates that he is

unable to solve the problem, and leaves it up to the obviously wiser woman. The voice is equated with decision making and authority, which he surrenders to the woman as an acknowledgment of his own figurative impotence. Only when Florent understands what it is to be feminized, when he truly *knows*, with his body as well as his mind, what the riddle's answer means, does he give this sovereignty willingly.

The story itself therefore acts out the riddle's answer in a complex way: women want sovereignty in love because they don't have any socially. Yet because Florent is a man, sovereignty remains *his* to *give to* her. Thus even the woman who "has sovereignty" never has it completely, in the way that a man does, in and of herself, she only has it bestowed upon her. In the "Tale of Florent," the husband grants it to the wife. However, the unsettling irony of this story is that, while Florent is able to "thenke on that he seide" and to honour his word, he is only able to give the woman complete sovereignty when she is (partially, at least) beautiful.

The "Tale of Florent" thus points up a fragility in the text itself. The *Confessio* presents stories of women who are strong, women who react in powerful and terrifying ways to male acts of aggression. Genius attempts to contain them by imposing a morality on them, or more often, he ignores them. But their voices remain and their stories are told, often

with great sensitivity. Their stories are heard, however, at the discretion of the male story-teller who ultimately decides who has a voice in the text--that is, Gower himself. Like Florent, he may decide to relegate authority to the Other, but because he, too, is situated in a patriarchal context, it remains his to give.

CONCLUSION

The *Confessio Amantis* poses to its audience a complex problem: how to find love and happiness in earthly life. The poem's conclusion, in essence, juxtaposes three responses to that problem.

Genius advocates the balance of love and reason, though this is ultimately rejected by the lover as being impossible:

> Tho was betwen mi Prest and me
> Debat and gret perplexete:
> Mi resoun understod him wel,
> And knew it was soth everydel
> That he hath seid, bot noght forthi
> Mi will hath nothing set therby.
> For techinge of so wis a port
> Is unto love of no desport;
> Yit mygte nevere man beholde
> Reson, wher love was withholde,
> Thei be noght of o governance. (VIII.2189-99)

Instead, the lover insists on gratification of his desire. The tutor and pupil reach a stalemate and defer to the counsel of Venus, who advocates a solution antithetical to the Lover's goals: abandon earthly love for divine love.

The conclusion of the *Confessio Amantis* thus appears to propose an answer to the Lover's dilemma which fulfils the narrator's anticipation of the new Arion. If division causes violence, the antidote must be union. This is found, the conclusion seems to suggest, in divine love. To borrow the

terminology of Macaulay's gloss, the Lover bids farewell to earthly love and embraces heavenly love:

> My muse doth me forto wite,
> And seith it schal be for my beste
> Fro this day forth to take rests,
> That y nomore of love make. . . .
> . . . .
> Bot thilke love which that is
> Withinne a mannes herte affermed,
> And stant of charite confermed,
> Such love is goodly forto have,
> Such love mai the bodi save,
> Such love mai the soule amende,
> The hyhe god such love ous sende
> Forthwith the remenant of grace;
> So that above in thilke place
> Wher resteth love and alle pes,
> Oure joie mai ben endeles. (VIII.3140-72)

Though he is at first reluctant, Amans by the poem's end has found inner peace by abandoning his hopeless love in favour of metaphysical reflection. Or, rather, he has found peace after this state is forced upon his unwilling psyche. This is often accepted as Gower's solution to the woes of earthly love.

The *Confessio* documents the search for balance. Yet the overt solution proposed represents, not balance or compromise, but the complete denial of earthly pleasure. The poem seems to advocate rejection of inherently flawed earthly love in favour of metaphysical, rather than physical, union.

However, even so great a promise as eternal love and peace cannot obscure the truth spoken by the lover earlier

in Book VIII. Immediately after Genius's departure and before Amans achieves his final state of celibate bliss, he laments "that y hadde lore / My time, and was sori ther fore" (2951-54). The "solution" posited by the end of the book is, in itself, a false one. Celibate meditation may be the only reasonable action for Amans, who is bound in an irresolvable dilemma of his own creation: too old to love his chosen lady, he nevertheless insists on loving her, and her alone. His cure, however, is not a satisfactory universal antidote to strife-ridden love; nor do I think Gower intends it to be. How satisfactory would this proposition have been to an audience that belonged to an increasingly secular society, one which placed a growing emphasis on ideals such as love within marriage and personal fulfilment?

The dilemma presented in the conclusion is this: while one knows that divine love is ultimately superior to fragile, temporal earthly love, the pull towards the latter is nevertheless irresistible. As the narrator so succinctly phrases this dilemma: "The hevene is ferr, the world is nyhe" (P.261). The *Confessio* thus presents a paradox--the division between conflicting aspects of being human (reason versus will, need versus want, superego versus id) is irreconcilable but irresistible. It is only at the end of one's life that one is freed from the dilemma, and yet, like Amans, one cannot help but be saddened by its passing, even

though what is offered in its place is relief. The end of the poem ultimately looks back to the body of the text, to the struggle between Amans and Genius, for a solution.

Amans, throughout the poem and even by the end of Genius's moral counselling, still wants the same thing--to possess his lady--even though

> For al that ever I skile may,
> I am concluded with a nay:
> That o sillable that overthrowe
> A thousand wordes on a rowe (VIII.2047-50).

Amans continually fails to acknowledge the validity of his lady's will, even though he is, within the parameters of civilized society, at least, ultimately subordinate to it. Even after Genius has stated outright that the Lover should forsake all love "Bot if it be thurgh such a weie / As love and reson wolde accorde" (VIII.2022-23), Amans still pleads "That ye me be som weie teche / What is my beste, as for an ende" (VIII.2058-59). In other words, he wants Genius to tell him how to acquire his lady. Thus he fails to learn, as Florent does, that his lady is another subject, and that *her* will and *her* desire count, too. On the other hand, Genius, though full of moral wisdom and advice, never specifies what reason is, nor does he discuss how exactly it may be balanced with love.

Since none of the poem's characters seems capable of providing a practicable solution to the dilemma, it should

perhaps be sought in the interaction of all parts of the text. The *Confessio Amantis* is a multivocal text because it presents not just multiple voices but multiple points of view. Gower manipulates the voices of his text to allow the voice of the feminine Other to speak through the gaps and to challenge the authority of the masculine textual layers that try to silence or to ignore the female objectified Other.

This interaction seems to suggest the balance of which Genius speaks, a balance that is also illustrated in some of his tales. In the few stories where, as in the "Tale of Florent," the woman is ultimately perceived by her male counterpart not as an Other but rather as a separate subject in her own right, love can be happily played out. This solution, however, depends upon the recognition and reconciliation of deepseated fears of the male. It is modelled, not on the actions of Perseus, but on those of Florent, who of necessity confronted his terror and his loathing and was rewarded for his bravery with reciprocity, mutuality, and connection.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Linda Barney Burke, "Women in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*", *Medievalia* 3 (1977): 239.

[2] J.A. Burrow, "The Portrayal of Amans in `Confessio Amantis'" in *Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983) 8.

[3] Gerald Kinneavy perceives this discrepancy when he notes: "As often as not the *exempla* have little to do with courtly love, a fact difficult to explain if courtly love is Gower's principal interest." He concludes, however, by discarding love as a possible topic and turns instead to the penitential tradition, asserting that "The basis of both the tradition and the poem is the Christian standard of rational behaviour." ("Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the Penitentials," *The Chaucer Review*, 19:2 (1984): 159.)

[4] The subject is discussed only in the related topics of war and the appropriateness of bearing arms to win a woman's love. The words "violent" and "violence" appear in the Confessio a total of only eight times. In comparison, "love," one of the most frequently occurring words, appears 855 times. (J.D. Pickles and J.L. Dawson, eds., *A Concordance to John Gower's* Confessio Amantis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987).)

[5] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 9.

[6] Book VII skews the figures drastically because of its high content of Biblical stories that are not about love. This is anomalous in terms of the remainder of the poem and, since the exact nature of Book VII and its relevance to the rest of the poem is a key area of contention among Gower scholars, I will regard its content as an anomaly, though not necessarily one that cannot be reconciled with my interpretation of the rest of the poem.

[7] I am considering mainly "stories" as opposed to "anecdotes" or references. I distinguish these two classes by length and degree of characterization. In order for a story to be considered, it must be at least fifteen lines long, and there must be some sense of interest in who the characters are.

[8] Almost all stories could be described as being about love in a more general sense.

[9] It is important to note, however, that because of the sheer number of stories in the text, finding any consistent patterning is difficult, and certainly any hypotheses which can be drawn are not without exception.

[10] Paul Strohm, "Form and Social Statement in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979): 28.

Chapter One

[11] John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964).

[12] David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity, English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988) 26.

[13] By this term I refer to those who studied and practiced medieval branches of learning such as medicine, astrology, and natural philosophy.

[14] *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988) 152.

[15] Vern L. Bullough, Introduction, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982) 12.

[16] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) 450.

[17] Brundage, *Law* 153.

[18] Brundage, *Law* 175.

[19] Brundage, *Law* 169.

[20] Brundage, *Law* 493.

[21] James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law," *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Bullough and Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982) 152.

[22] Brundage, *Law* 173.

[23] Brundage, *Law* 549.

[24] Brundage, *Law* 173.

[25] This and much of the material on the medical and scientific writers is from Helen Rodnite Lemay, "Human Sexuality in Twelfth- through Fifteenth-Century Scientific Writings," *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Bullough and Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982) unless otherwise noted.

[26] Lemay 188.

[27] Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 35.

[28] Jacquart and Thomasset 8-9.

[29] Jacquart and Thomasset 14.

[30] Jacquart and Thomasset 38.

[31] Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love", *Journal of American Folklore* 73 (1960): 48.

[32] Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1980) 124.

[33] Green, *Poets* 114.

[34] Elizabeth Salter, "Courts and Courtly Love," *Literature and Western Civilization, Vol. 2: The Medieval World*, ed. D. Daiches and A. Thorlby (London: Aldus, 1973) 438.

[35] Salter 439.

[36] For a discussion of this permutation of courtly love, see Albrecht Classen, "Love and Marriage in Late Medieval Verse: Oswald von Wolkenstein, Thomas Hoccleve and Michel Beheim," *Studia Neophilologica* 62 (1990): 163-188.

[37] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature, From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia UP, 1975).

[38] Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (London: Grenada, 1984) 76-77.

[39] Green, *Poets* 124-125.

[40] Jacquart and Thomasset 196.

[41] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[42] G.C. Macaulay, Introduction, *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1900), xxviii.

[43] Macaulay xxviii.

[44] Robert F. Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other': The Page as Sign in the Work of John Gower," *Text* 3 (1987): 251-267. While I agree with his approach and conclusions, I am departing from the three categories posited by Yeager, namely, the frame story of Amans and Genius, including the *exempla*; the Latin verses; and the Latin marginalia.

[45] Farnham, "The Art of High Prosaic Seriousness: John Gower as Didactic Raconteur," *The Learned and the Lewd: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. L.D. Benson, *Harvard English Studies* 5 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974) 165. See also Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other,'" especially 256 and 258; and A.J. Minnis, "John Gower, *Sapiens* in Ethics and Politics," *Medium Aevum* 49.2 (1980): 224.

[46] Charles Runacres, "Art and Ethics in the 'Exempla' of 'Confessio Amantis,' *Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983) 109.

[47] "The Priesthood of Genius," *Speculum* 51 (1976): 291, italics added.

[48] "Gower's 'Honeste Love,'" *Patterns of Love and Couresty: Essays in Memory of C.S. Lewis*, ed. John Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1966) 112.

[49] For examples of critics who view Genius as an unreliable guide, see Runacres 127-128, Farnham 172 and Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other'" 257.

[50] Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975) 122.

[51] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornel Univ. Press, 1979) 152.

[52] The narrator of the Prologue is referred to in a marginal gloss as "Iohannes Gower". Similarly, the figure who awakens from his reverie as Amans is called "John Gower" by Venus. At least three ways of interpreting these figures exist: 1) they are both supposed to be the author; 2) one is John Gower and one isn't; or 3) they (along with Amans) are reifications of different aspects of John Gower. If (1) is true, then John Gower is asking us to believe that he met Venus. If (2) is true, we must figure out which one we believe to be Gower. If (3) is true, then the Prologue's views are only a partial aspect of Gower's beliefs.

[53] Farnham 169.

[54] Farnham 169. Farnham, like many critics, aligns Genius, and even Amans, with Gower himself. Farnham, however, at least distinguishes between Amans, who represents "a projection of his [Gower's] fantasies (not always impure) about 'love' and 'lust,'" and Genius, who embodies a projection "of his beliefs (not always foolish) about 'wisdom' and 'lore'" (172).

[55] This scheme is similar to the three hierarchically organized "voices" that Yeager points out in "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other,'" 258ff.

Chapter Two

[56] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* in *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols., ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1900). All references to *Confessio Amantis* are taken from this edition and will be cited within the text.

[57] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960; London: Fontana, 1963) 107-128.

[58] Derek Pearsall translates the gloss as "Here as it were in the person of other people, who are held fast by love, the author, feigning himself to be a lover . . ." and Burrow translates it as "From here on the author, feigning himself to be a lover, as if in the person of those others whom love constrains, intends to write about their various passions one by one in the various sections of this book." ("The Gower Tradition," *Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Responses*

and Reassessments, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983) 13.)

[59] Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1987) 1. 330. All other references to Chaucer's work are from this edition.

[60] Brundage, *Law* 173.

[61] Simone de Beauvoir, Introduction, *The Second Sex*, reprinted in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981) 44.

[62] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 24 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 63-64.

[63] Simone de Beavoir 45.

[64] Cixous 64.

[65] de Beauvoir 44.

[66] Cixous 63.

[67] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985; London: Methuen, 1986) 104-105.

[68] Cixous 64.

[69] Cixous 64.

[70] Nancy Julia Chodorow, "Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (1980; New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987) 5-6.

[71] Chodorow 6.

[72] Chodorow 7.

[73] Chodorow 10.

[74] Chodorow 11; italics removed.

[75] Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination" in *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (1980; New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987) 46.

[76] Benjamin 45.

[77] Benjamin 46-47; italics added.

[78] Chodorow 15.

[79] Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love," *Journal of American Folklore* 73 (1960): 41.

[80] Moller 41.

[81] Moller 41-42.

[82] Moller 43.

[83] Moller 43.

[84] Moller 46.

[85] David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988) 124.

[86] Aers 134.

[87] Aers 142.

[88] Aers 144-145; italics added.

[89] Burrow 13, 21.

[90] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 61-62.

[91] For more on this approach as applied to Chaucer, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1989).

[92] Dinshaw 9.

[93] Dinshaw 63.

[94] Aers 142, quoting Toril Moi.

[95] Cixous 67-68.

[96] Peter Nicholson, "The 'Confession' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Studia Neophilologica* 58 (1986): 196.

[97] As described by Moi, 105.

[98] David Aers, "Masculine Identity in the Courtly Community: The Self Loving in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Community, Gender and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988) 129.

[99] This does not take into account the possibly satiric nature of Andreas's work; however, if it is a satire, it still refers to other writers who wrote about these beliefs.

Affirming the sociological truth of this are statistics presented by J.B. Given in his analysis of court records from thirteenth-century England, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1977). Women constituted only 8.6% of accused killers, but 19.5% of homicide victims (48). Furthermore, of those people killed by relatives, 80% of women were murdered by their spouse or lover, as opposed to only 40.5% of men (56). Perhaps even more telling is the fact that even though women and men were equally as likely to be acquitted, women found guilty were more likely than men to be executed after conviction: whereas 18.3% of men were actually hanged, 33.3% of women suffered the same fate (137). Conversely, however, men who killed women were dealt with harshly: almost half were executed, as opposed to 15.1% for killing men (139). Given concludes that these figures reflect the different socialization of men and women: violence was regarded as inappropriate behaviour for women; thus women were not given training in the handling of weapons or access to them and they were severely punished for transgressing the code of appropriate female behaviour (136). He also notes, significantly, that women were often the "occasions" for conflict, rather than "active participants" (148). Thus women, who are statistically less prone to violent behaviour than men, are perceived as being dangerous and threatening and thus actually suffer more violent acts than do men.

[100] Patrick J. Gallacher, *Love, the Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower's* Confessio Amantis (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1975) 25.

[101] Gallacher 12-13.

[102] Gallacher 108-118.

[103] Coward 75.

[104] Coward 53.

[105] Aers 119-120.

[106] Katharine S. Gittes, "Ulysses in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: the Christian Soul as Silent Rhetorician," *English Language Notes* 24 (1986): 9.

Interestingly, snakes, Medusa's trademark, were sometimes associated in popular superstition with the physiological aspects of women which most frightened and horrified men: "If the hair of a menstruating woman be taken, and placed under a dung-heap or clod of earth, or where the dung was made during winter or summer, by the virtue of the sun there will be engendered a long and powerful snake." The instincts buried in folklore also permeated scientific thought: "One finds, stated explicitly in works of scientific popularization, an idea that was always latent in texts of a higher scientific level: that the female organism was capable of producing poison, in other words death or illness." (Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) 75-76.)

[107] Ovid 115.

[108] Gower has altered his source to make Acteon less sympathetic. He is morally responsible for his demise by being guilty of pride and by continuing to look at the naked goddess when he should have turned away. (Peter G. Beidler, "The Tale of Acteon," *John Gower's Literary Transformations in the* Confessio Amantis*: Original Articles and Translations* (Washington, D.C.: UP of America, 1982) and Russell A. Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower (New York: Holt, 1968) 43n.)

[109] Richard Firth Green points out in "Chaucer's Victimized Women," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 10 (1988): 18, that a metaphor often used by Ovid was "that of love as a hunt and woman as prey--a metaphor which, as Marcelle Thiebaux has shown [in *The Stag of Love*, 1974], the Middle Ages were to exploit over and over again."

[110] Coward 177.

[111] Cixous 69.

[112] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970) 47.

[113] Arendt 53.

[114] Foucault, *Sexuality* 86.

[115] As described by Moi, 105.

[116] Jean de Meun, *Roman de la Rose*, Part II, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Hanover: UP of New England, 1983) 324.

[117] Alan de Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980) 69, 75, 136.

[118] For articles dealing with this, see Joseph E. Gallagher, "Criseyde's Dream of the Eagle: Love and War in Troilus and Criseyde," *Modern Language Quarterly* 36:2 (1975): 115-132; and Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love," *Journal of American Folklore* 73 (1960): 39-51.

Chapter Four

[119] Cixous and Clément 64.

[120] Tania Modleski, "Rape versus Mans/laughter: Hitchcock's *Blackmail* and Feminist Interpretation," *PMLA* 102 (1987): 305.

[121] Given 148.

[122] It is noteworthy that Gower does actually present strong women in his text. In the *Confessio* women do not always act like courtly "ladies"--in keeping with the context of their tales, they are capable of brutal self-defence and heinous crimes. In contrast, Carolyn Dinshaw points out that the narrator of *The Legend of Good Women* refuses to show women acting in that way; instead he "enervates" them.

[123] Patrick McConeghy, "Women's Speech and Silence in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*," *PMLA* 102 (1987): 778.

[124] Dinshaw 75.

[125] Dinshaw 86.

[126] See the discussion of "trouthe" in Richard Firth Green, "Chaucer's Victimized Women," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 10 (1988): 13-21.

[127] "Art and Ethics in the 'Exempla' of 'Confessio Amantis'," *Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983) 128.

[128] "The Physician's Tale," ll. 3-4.

[129] Hiscoe asserts, in "The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 367-85, that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* relies on the difference between the tale as the audience knows it and the way Ovid tells it. He says Gower similarly uses the audience's familiarity with allegorized Ovidian tales to present a confessor who misses the point, counsels the penitent to wrong action, etc. Hiscoe, however, does not discuss Gower's *purpose* for doing this. Is this strategy employed just for laughs? He sees the *Confessio* as a "*tour de force* of sustained humour and audience engagement" (368).

[130] Dinshaw 72.

[131] Sigmund Freud, "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love: Contributions to the Psychology of Love II" (1912), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XI (London: Hogarth, 1964) 177-190.

[132] Brundage, *Law* 173.

[133] Brundage cites the Church's "rejection of pleasure as a legitimate purpose of sex." It might be added that courtly love rejects sex as a legitimate purpose of love. Both schemes are founded upon "the dichotomy between body and soul, flesh and spirit, that is fundamental to late ancient and medieval Christian belief" (*Law* 173), and that is carried through to present times, as documented by Freud.

[134] *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 67-97.

[135] Ferrante, "Male Fantasy" 94-95.

[136] Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," l. 999.

[137] Green, "Chaucer's Victimized Women" 13.

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