Queering the Middle Ages
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To the memory of

John Boswell

and

Donald R. Howard
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our first thanks go to our contributors, for agreeing to present their work as part of this volume and for contributing such challenging and rich essays. Karma Lochrie, Francesca Canadé Sautman, and Larry Scanlon are especially to be thanked for providing essays on short notice.

Our work on Queering the Middle Ages was enabled institutionally by the Department of English and Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, the Department of English at Queens College of the City University of New York, and the Ph.D. Program in English at the CUNY Graduate School and University Center. We thank our research assistant David A. Watt for his careful and intelligent work in the final stages of the project.

The University of Minnesota Press has provided a welcoming home for this book. We would especially like to acknowledge the assistance of Richard Morrison, William Murphy, Robin Moir, Pieter Martin, David Wallace, Rita Copeland, Barbara Hanawalt, David Thorstad, and Mike Stoffel, as well as the extensive and intelligent comments on the book’s project by Sarah Stanbury and two anonymous readers for the Press.

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INTRODUCTION

GLENN BURGER AND STEVEN F. KRUGER

HISTORY AND A LOGIC OF THE PREPOSTEROUS

Analyzing “the single and noteworthy exception of male-male sexual relations” in John Cleland’s Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Lee Edelman calls attention to the ways in which a logic of normative gender and sexuality is called into question by Fanny Hill’s “scientific” description of the sodomitical scene—“His red-topt ivory toy, that stood perfectly stiff shewed, that if he was like his mother behind, he was like his father before”—summarized by her as a “project of preposterous pleasure.” Edelman focuses particularly on that last phrase because it signally condenses the disturbance of positionality that is located in and effected by the sodomitical scene; sodomy, that is, gets figured as the literalization of the “preposterous” precisely insofar as it is interpreted as the practice of giving precedence to the posterior and thus as confounding the stability or determinacy of linguistic or erotic positioning.¹

The pursuit of such a logic of the preposterus in the relations between sexuality and culture has been a persistent tendency in the work of queer theorists more generally; for queer sex disturbs the normative logic of a missionary position—man on top, woman on the bottom—that depends, as the work of Judith Butler would suggest, not on some natural law but instead on the performative citation of a norm, constructed as a cause or natural origin, that is nonetheless an effect of its very citation.² Queer theory, in exposing the fictionality of such constructions—the ways in which supposed causes do not precede their effects but are instead themselves the (ideological) effects and justifications of certain normative behaviors—has developed a politics that allows it to claim such previously disallowed sexual positions and desires as both powerful and meaningful.
Further, the logic of the queer also effects a disturbance of temporality that is precisely “preposterous.” “The stability or determinacy of linguistic or erotic positioning” to which Edelman calls attention depends on a certain stabilization of temporal sequence into narratives of causation where sexual norms can be given their necessary and inescapable history. In Western, Judeo-Christian understandings, “proper” sex takes as its ultimate cause the divine institution of heterosexuality in both the biblical narrative and in the structure of the natural (“procreative”) world. If queer theory exposes the fictionality of such sexual constructions, it also suggests that the stabilization of a sequential “pre” and “post,” cause and effect, might be thought otherwise. Sexual norms themselves demand not only a reified sexual positionality but also a stabilized temporality. These are condensed both in a myth of origins—for the West, the story of Adam and Eve—that does not reflect some true origin but is rather the effect of a particular human understanding of “proper” sexuality, and in a myth of nature, considered separate from and prior to the cultural but in fact an effect constructed from within culture to serve particular cultural ends.

Queer theorizing, in its “preposterous” revision of temporal sequence, has important implications for how we think about history. Mainstream historicism insists on understanding the “flow of time” as uninterruptedly “progressive.” In Walter Benjamin’s formulation, “Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history.” Traditional historicism is anything but preposterous; instead, it insists on straight chronologies that privilege a value-based movement of supersession and progress—classical antiquity, Dark Ages, Middle Ages, modernity; pre-, modern, and post-. The preposterous thinking of queer theory might usefully interrupt such teleological sequences and the causal explanations—of decadence and decay, efflorescence, Renaissance, and Enlightenment—that accompany them.

Although queer theorists themselves have not for the most part pursued such a rethinking of history, tending to concentrate instead on modern (and most often, nineteenth- and twentieth-century) social and psychic formations, their work points toward the necessity of calling into question straight (teleological) narration, causal explanations, and schemes of periodization. If, as queer theoretical thinking would suggest, effects are often constructed after the fact as essences, origins, causes—with the human subject itself, for instance, being an effect of a
psychic process that is retrospectively misrecognized as the cause of interiority—might the apparently stable essences of historical thinking (primitivity, modernity, the medieval) need to be reconceived not as stable entities but as stabilized effects of retrospection? In other words, might we need (preposterously) to rethink what we have come to know as the Middle Ages not as preceding modernity but as the effect of a certain self-construction of the modern, which gives itself identity by delimiting a “before” that is everything the modern is not? What this suggests is the possibility that a “queer” medievalism is in crucial ways a historicizing project different from that of some gay/lesbian and feminist medievalisms, those that tend to treat temporality itself—sequentiality, cause and effect, period divisions—as relatively unproblematic. Queer theory’s “preposterous” historicism, while sharing a politics with other antihomophobic, antiheteronormative projects, provides a different theoretical perspective from which to take up and disturb the question of history and anachronism in the study of the premodern.

Such a rethinking, which the current volume pursues, will, we hope, push simultaneously in two directions. Recognizing the Middle Ages as retrospective construction, how can we—queerly, preposterously—return, from our current postmodern moment, to deconstruct the medieval as we have come to know it? How can we see anew, restore, that which has been cast aside in order to stabilize a Middle Ages standing counter both to classical antiquity and to a modernity that saw itself (and was seen by nineteenth-century historicism) as a “renaissance” of the classical? Whether the medieval is conceived of as a time of rigid sexual repression under a church thought to control every aspect of life or as a barbaric time in which social control was dangerously loosened, a certain stabilized idea of medieval sexuality is crucial to the schemes of historical supersession that see modernity emerging from an “other” world.

One major purpose of this volume, then, is to present new work from a variety of disciplines that, in one way or another, “queers” such stabilized conceptions, allowing us to see the Middle Ages and its systems of sexuality in radically different, off-center, and revealing ways. At the same time, we are concerned that this work resonate not just for medievalists, or for those concerned with the reconstruction of past histories, experiences, and understandings. The work of returning, preposterously, to rethink the Middle Ages from the perspectives of the postmodern and the queer, needs, too, to be brought back to a present
that might think itself immune from history. For, indeed, one way the postmodern has often been too easily proposed is as a radical movement beyond a history thought somehow to have come to an end.

The essays collected here, however, pose, more or less explicitly, the following question: if modernity is constructed in part over against the medieval, and if postmodernity distinguishes itself from the modern as commonly understood, what difference might it make to our understanding of both the modern and postmodern if we come to think the medieval—whose repudiation founds modernity—anew? What are the implications for the (post)modern, and not just for the medieval, of pursuing a queer Middle Ages? How does such a pursuit allow us not only to reenvision medieval studies but also to rethink more generally how we study culture from our current set of vantage points within postmodernity? While continuing the recent line of productive work that has queered medieval literature, history, and culture, this volume attempts—via the “preposterous” move of bringing the medieval into proximity with the postmodern—to consider what our own postmodern moment, and queer theory, might learn, and how they might change, by confronting the Middle Ages. What would it mean to historicize postmodernity (and not just in a relation of supersession to that recent past which the postmodern claims to move beyond) even as we think the Middle Ages from a queer/postmodern perspective?

**Pursuing a Queer History of Sexuality**

The work of “queering the Middle Ages” that this volume takes on has been importantly enabled by much recent work on medieval sexuality. In one of the most significant of contemporary movements in medieval studies, scholars have begun, despite their recognition of the at least partial incommensurability of contemporary queer formulations to medieval subjectivities and sexualities, to consider how the Middle Ages might be queer and how we might queer the Middle Ages. A crucial initiating moment for this work was the formation, in 1992, of SSHMA (the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages), an organization that has sponsored sessions since 1993 at the largest annual gathering of medievalists in the world, the Medieval Institute Congress.
at Kalamazoo, Michigan. This queer medievalism has been enabled both by the extensive feminist project of recovering and rereading medieval women's texts and histories and by the research of historians of sexuality such as John Boswell, Michael Goodich, and James Brundage working in the tradition of gay and lesbian studies. Recent work, such as that anthologized by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero in *Premodern Sexualities*, Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James Schultz in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler in *Desire and Discipline*, and Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson in *Queer Iberia*, continues to draw importantly on both feminist and gay/lesbian research and writing, but it also begins strongly to engage with queer theory, as does much research currently under way—for example, that represented in a forthcoming anthology by Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn, *Same-Sex Desire between Women in the Middle Ages*. Historians such as Murray, Judith Bennett, and Joan Cadden (working specifically in the history of medicine); a student of theology such as Mark Jordan; literary and cultural critics such as V. A. Kolve, Bruce W. Holsinger, and Simon Gaunt are all actively engaged in important work on medieval sexuality, and such work touches on many and varied traditions—Latin writing of the twelfth century (as in David Townsend and Andrew Taylor's *The Tongue of the Fathers*); medieval Islam (as in Everett K. Rowson's *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*); German culture and literature (as in Christoph Lorey and John Plews's *Queering the Canon*). The vigor of the field is also suggested by a number of recent and forthcoming monographs that either present important new queer medieval work (e.g., Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval*, Karma Lochrie's *Covert Operations*, Kathleen Biddick's *The Shock of Medievalism*) or that react against some of the uses of queer theory in medieval studies (notably, Allen Frantzen's *Before the Closet*), and by the success of the recent conference *Queer Middle Ages*, at which more than seventy papers were presented in a wide variety of disciplines, and on a range of periods and geographical locales (from India to al-Andalus to England).
In organizing the contents of this volume, we considered dividing essays whose primary goal is a queering of medieval texts and culture from those more explicitly juxtaposing the pre- and postmodern with each other. We found, however, that the essays are not so neatly divisible—that even essays that focus intently on a particular medieval moment or text engage strongly with the (postmodern) moment of their writing. Consequently, we have structured the volume (and this introduction) more loosely, concerned more to place the essays into resonant groupings than to divide and categorize them.

To further our attempt to make Queering the Middle Ages self-conscious and metacritical, we asked three prominent medievalists—Karma Lochrie, Francesca Canadé Sautman, and Larry Scanlon—to engage with the work collected in the three sections of this anthology. Each has provided a generous response that is more than a review of the three or four essays considered. While each reflects on the significance of these essays, each also contributes an original and significant essay of her/his own, broadening and deepening, we hope, the work that we have been able to collect here.

The essays presented in this volume take their place in an active and quickly changing field of study, and they should be read as being in intimate conversation with ongoing work in medieval studies, the history of sexuality, and queer theory. Queer study of the Middle Ages promises the recovery of cultural meanings that are lost, obscured, or distorted in work that either ignores questions of sexuality or attends only to hegemonic or heteronormative understandings of it. One strain of queer medievalism has directed its attention to a rethinking of canonical literary figures such as Chaucer and mainstream genres such as medieval romance, as do many of the essays in this collection. At the same time, queer medievalism has been concerned to disturb traditional historical understandings of the Middle Ages as either a time of “quiet hierarchies” or of squalid, antimodern disorder. Medieval women’s sexuality is often thought to be rigidly controlled by men; Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, reading Christine de Pizan, present us with a very different (“outlaw”) view, suggesting that, at least in the realm of representation, women might intervene powerfully in understandings of their own sexuality. Medieval romance is often read as representing a
simplified, even stereotypical, heroic masculinity; Peggy McCracken shows us, in the romances of the Grail quest, how this popular genre might, alternatively, reenvision gender and sexual conventions, depicting a _chaste_ heroism standing outside a normative sexual economy and in a tense relation to the conventional masculinity of knighthood. Claire Sponsler's essay interrogates the complex ways in which sexuality—both a demonization of male-male sex and an assertion of the prerogatives of heterosexuality—inflcts English national politics at the moment of Edward II's deposition in the early fourteenth century. National politics is also central in Hutcheson's contribution; here, the consolidation of a Catholic Spanish nation via a policy of _Reconquista_, driving out the Moors, enables and depends on a retrospective construction of the "sodomitical Moor," a stereotypical figure, racialized and sexualized in ways not characteristic of representations from the earlier period when Christians and Muslims, however tensely, coexisted on the Iberian Peninsula. Francesca Canadé Sautman's discussion focuses our attention on inquisitorial records that show, paradoxically, how common and everyday same-sex sexual activity might be, at least in certain places and at certain moments in the Middle Ages, and yet, when focused on by the authorities, how demonized; Sautman also emphasizes how strongly medieval male-male relations depend on both a (disavowed) idea of femininity and actual female presences.

All the essays in the volume attend to history, but it is a history thought otherwise—in Carolyn Dinshaw's resonant formulation, a history that "touches" us both queerly and intimately, that we in turn rewrite with a "queer touch"; and a history that, in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero's formulation, "has its pleasures." One of those pleasures is the disturbance of a traditional understanding that would see medieval sexuality as only rigidly controlled by a patriarchal heteronormativity. While not denying the force of gender and sexual norms, these essays consider, too, how historical work itself has written out or over what might have been queer, unstable, nonnormative in medieval sex and culture, and the essays work to restore a sense of such instabilities, a project enabled by the thorough theoretical rethinking of the stability of body, sex, sexuality that has characterized queer theory. For example, Desmond and Sheingorn bring Sally O'Driscoll's "outlaw theorizing" to a reconsideration of female desire that enables us to see Christine de Pizan constructing a place for women's sexual agency and independence. Susan
Schibanoff, in examining the important tradition of poetic, philosophical, and theological thinking represented in Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature* and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, pays careful attention to the shiftiness of discourses on sexuality and recognizes the disruptive instabilities in what seem, on the face of it, orthodox treatments of the "natural." Michael Camille, considering Dante's *Commedia* and its reception in the early commentary traditions and traditions of illustration, links the gaze and pose of the medieval sodomite to contemporary queens and queers, without losing sight of the distance between trecento Italy and the late twentieth century. McCracken, Hutcheson, Sponsler, and Sautman are all concerned to recognize how different categories of identity—gender, sexuality, race, religion—come together in dense, historically specific conjunctions. Glenn Burger makes use of poststructuralist theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari who might point the way to a revisioning of Chaucer's relation to modernity. Garrett Epp, considering the medieval *corpus Christi* Passion plays and a tradition of anxiety about their corporealization of divinity, uses film theory to help understand medieval spectatorship, especially its relationship to flesh and desire. Kathleen Biddick, engaging critically with psychoanalysis and postcolonial ethnography, and Steven Kruger, analyzing how processes of othering have operated in the contemporary AIDS crisis, both push toward a reconceptualization of historical periods that would enable a different thinking of the history of sexualities. Larry Scanlon considers how a queer rethinking of the Middle Ages might involve a rigorous (psychoanalytic) engagement with father figures, and a concomitant reinvestment of originary bodies and narratives with complex sexual desires written out of their history through repression.

**Historicizing Postmodernity**

Queer theory itself has tended to be "presentist" in its concerns. In part, this results from Michel Foucault's emphasis, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, on a line of demarcation, somewhere in the nineteenth century, between a "deployment of sexuality" stretching into the present and a time before "sexuality" as such. Foucault himself, in the subsequent volumes of his *History*, of course transgresses this line, and others, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, have complicated and ques-
tioned Foucault's periodization. Still, Sedgwick focuses her *Epistemology of the Closet* on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and her wider-ranging *Between Men* begins with Shakespeare, delimiting its consideration to modernity.\(^1\) Even the work of Jonathan Dollimore—both *Sexual Dissidence* and *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*—despite its sweeping scope and its recognition of how the ancient and early modern might be significant for thinking the (post)modern, ignores the medieval almost completely.\(^2\) Whether consciously or not, such a temporal delimitation of material tends to reiterate, without questioning, the construction of a Renaissance, and hence of a modernity, that might be significantly informed by the ancient Greek and Roman worlds (including, in Dollimore’s work, such church fathers as Augustine) but for the understanding of which the medieval is important only in its exclusion.

What might it mean for queer theoretical work, and more generally our postmodern moment, to have to grapple with the medieval material it has for the most part excluded? This is the second main question that motivates this anthology. In some of the essays collected here, that question remains largely implicit. Desmond and Sheingorn, Schibanoff, McCracken, Hutcheson, Sponsler, and Sautman focus intently on their medieval materials, without making central to their essays a consideration of how their work might resonate with the current moment. And yet such resonances are nonetheless discernible: the politicization of sexuality in the texts Sponsler considers, for instance, provides suggestive parallels to the ways in which gay/lesbian sexuality has been posed against “the family” in recent years, as does, in a very different way, the tradition of philosophical thinking analyzed by Schibanoff (as she points out in her “millennial postscript”). The persistent ways in which these essays show gender, sexuality, and race/religion to be mutually constructed also provide resonances and dissonances with contemporary understandings of identity and its complex determinants.

Other of the essays here take on more directly the question of how medieval work might help in understanding our own moment, in “historicizing postmodernity.” Karma Lochrie suggests that a medievalist recognition of the complexity of a sexual category such as sodomy, and of the ways in which, despite that complexity, its meaning tends to be narrowed, speaks importantly to the variable and confused understandings of sex that circulated around President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. Camille’s and Epp’s essays consider how very differently structured
medieval understandings of the sexualized body might nonetheless resonate strongly with contemporary queer bodies. Burger's essay, examining how Chaucer might be read as both a stabilized and a destabilizing literary figure, considers how, in a similarly complex reading of the current moment in the emergence of gay writing into public prominence, we might recognize both a canonizing impulse that would tend to reinforce the category of the literary as traditionally conceived and a more resistant impulse that would preserve something of the displaced and shamed positioning of gay sex and identity before Stonewall. Burger's essay suggests that in learning to restore the destabilizing force of Chaucer's literary performance we might also learn to forestall a too easy delimitation of gay identity and gay literature, thereby keeping these categories open to future contingency. Biddick and Kruger both reflect on the violences of traditional historical periodization. Recognizing the gaps and silences in theoretical work such as Freud's, and in ethnographic and historical work such as Ghosh's and Goitein's, Biddick proposes that a working through of historical traumas that have been traditionally covered over might enable a new history, a disruption of the certainty of period divisions, and new conceptions of what it means to do historical (and theoretical) work. Considering how the violences of the AIDS crisis depend in part on a stable framework of historical periods, Kruger proposes that one way of addressing those violences is through historical work that insists on rethinking the traditional division of medieval and modern. Larry Scanlon, reflecting on how such disciplines as Chaucer studies are at least in part founded on certain assumptions, and anxieties, about sexuality, sees, in the work of a queer medievalism, the possibility of a rigorous analysis of historical repres- sions that might enable us to think history, and hence our own contemporary moment, otherwise.

A conventional historicism, confident that it finds the "truth" of the past in narratives of birth, growth, decay, and death, will perhaps find the essays gathered together in this anthology preposterous. In that they recognize the construction of a univocal past, a "proper" Middle Ages, as always a retrospective selection of some facts over others, a privileging of some narratives (those that might be seen as explaining later events and phenomena) over others (thought to be dead ends), these essays are, however, an attempt to disturb a certain naturalized but precisely pre-
posterous logic, a logic that sees the past as significant only insofar as it might make sense for a stabilized present. In disturbing such a sense of the past, in attempting to revivify the queer detritus that otherwise might fail to be recognized within the stories we tell ourselves about the past, these essays also hope to disturb a present too easily understood as the necessary end point of a certain history of modernity and hence a future that might seem, too, to be the work of necessity. In queering the Middle Ages, perhaps we will see that the complexities of the past, if in many ways left behind, also suggest unrecognized complexities in our present moment that might be exploited as we move into a future of unexpected shape.

Notes


Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1998); and Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). The Queer Middle Ages conference was organized by a committee of scholars (James D. Cain, Marilyn Desmond, Frederick Roden, Pamela Sheingorn, Alan M. Stahl, Chris Vaccaro, Richard Zeikowitz), and coconvened by Francesca Canadé Sautman and Steven F. Kruger; it was sponsored by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) at the City University of New York, and the Center for Research in the Middle Ages and Renaissance at New York University, and cosponsored by Binghamton University’s Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, the Department of English at Queens College, the Ph.D. Programs in French and History at the Graduate School and University Center of CUNY, the Medieval Club of New York, the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages, and the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship.


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Part I
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Outlaw theory encompasses any sexual practice that is a challenge to whatever a particular society has marked out as the preserve of the “normal.” I am suggesting outlaw theorizing as a term that follows the original impetus of queer theory—a liberating deconstruction of sexual ideology and categories—without the problematic terminology confusion that negates the insistence on the material reality of specific sexual practices and their consequences.

SALLY O’DRISCOLL, “OUTLAW READINGS”¹

Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea or Letter of Othea to Hector, composed and illustrated during the first decade of the fifteenth century, offers a highly visual adaptation of classical narratives, especially Ovidian myths drawn from the Ovide moralisé. As a cinematic deployment of text and image, the Othea privileges the visual element as the component that challenges normative constructions of desire.² In the process, Christine queers the Ovidian obsession with metamorphosis and explores trans-species sexuality as a way of revising received notions of female sexuality and envisioning female desire.
The *Epistle Othea* was produced in several luxury editions early in the fifteenth century. Of these early illustrated manuscripts, the copy of the *Othea* in British Library manuscript Harley 4431 constitutes a uniquely critical performance of desire. Known as the Queen’s manuscript because it was presented by Christine to Queen Isabeau of France, Harley 4431 contains Christine’s collected works. Bound in this manuscript is a fully illustrated text of the *Othea* written in Christine’s hand and illustrated in Paris about 1406–8; it consists of 101 images accompanied by brief textual narratives and explanations. The design of the *Othea* follows a pattern in which a chapter opens with a miniature depicting a mythological figure or an event in a classical narrative. After the miniature there is a short verse called texte that briefly describes the figure or narrative moment. Next comes a prose passage of about fifteen single-column lines, labeled glose, which may slightly expand the narrative but functions primarily to interpret the myth as a lesson for the improvement of human character, specifically, the character of a good knight; each glose ends with a tag line from an ancient philosopher. Concluding the unit is another short prose passage, the allegorie, which draws a lesson from the myth that is applicable to the “good spirit” or soul; each allegorie ends with a Latin quotation from a biblical text that is written in red. In addition to the prominent multicolor miniature framed in gold, the textual material includes verse, prose, rubrication, and decorated initials combined in a complex page design. As a result, the page layout or ordination purposefully situates the reader as a viewer of images.

Ostensibly a letter written by the goddess Othea to the Trojan youth Hector, the *Othea* appropriates a variety of texts central to late-fourteenth-century humanism. Much of the mythological material comes from Ovid by way of the *Ovide moralisé*, a vast compendium in French verse of material based on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; in addition to providing a translation of and commentary on Ovid’s text, the *Ovide moralisé* offers lengthy Christian allegorical interpretations. For historical material, the *Othea* draws on the French vernacular tradition of universal history that modern scholars have entitled the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*, a prose compendium of biblical, Theban, and Trojan history based on Ovid, Virgil, and Statius. Boccaccio’s encyclopedic approach to mythical and historical women, *De claris mulieribus*, was translated into French and produced in an illustrated edition in 1403; although the French text, known as *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, was not available to Christine when she
wrote the text of the *Othea*, the visual programs in the first manuscripts of *Des cleres et nobles femmes* clearly formed a countertradition to the images in the Queen's manuscript, which was produced a few years later.9

Taken together, these materials provided Christine with a vast repertoire of classical narratives in a highly visual format;10 as a result, her intertextual references are largely constructed through the dynamic restructuring of a visual regime. The privileged place of the image in this visual arrangement of intertextual and interpretive materials suggests an awareness of the visual nature of reading as a cognitive and memorial process.11 The complexity of page design in the *Othea* arises in part from workshop practice; as Michael Camille comments, by the thirteenth century “text and picture become distinct acts with separate structures of significance. . . . It is a relationship built on disruptive difference and mutual incompatibility of two codes vying for the reader’s attention and generating subtle nuances of meaning in the process.”12 By the early fifteenth century, Parisian book production had become highly sophisticated at manipulating word and image, given the extraordinary quality that manuscript illumination had achieved at this point. As an author who worked collaboratively within Parisian manuscript culture, Christine purposefully exploits the disruptive differences that the visual and the verbal pose for the reader as a viewer. Each chapter of her *Othea* in Harley 4431 opens with an image that depends on the erotic economy of the reader/viewer, whose gaze renders the image the object of readerly desire. Yet in its disruptive difference from the textual material, the image reconfigures spectatorship, so that the erotics of reading questions rather than reinforces heteronormativity. Throughout the *Othea*, the images question, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis, “what can be seen, and eroticized, and on what scene.”13

The received Ovidian tradition, as formulated in the *Ovide moralisé*, obsessively explores—in both text and image—the process of metamorphosis from human to animal. The horror of transgressing the boundary between the species takes on a lurid quality in the extensive visual program of the *Ovide moralisé*, a program that revels in images of hybrid beings, half human and half beast. The *Othea* refuses to explore this visual feast of human transformation; instead, the visual programs of the *Othea* address this captivating quality of the Ovidian tradition by re-visioning several myths of bestiality and desire in the stories of Andromeda, Pasiphaë, and Circe. The images in Harley 4431, in particular, respond
to the queer space the Ovidian text offers by using the Ovidian narrative to interrogate heteronormative paradigms for female desire. As such, deployment of visual material in the *Othea* exemplifies the methodology "that deconstructs categories of sexuality," in the words of Sally O’Driscola.14

Although the *Othea* follows medieval mythographic tradition in assigning Christian interpretations to classical myths, Christine de Pizan’s explorations of female sexuality and desire cannot be fully understood in terms of mainstream Christian attitudes toward women. In the cases of Andromeda, Pasiphaë, and Circe, the text and images of the *Othea* restructure the dynamics of the gaze as it operates in the *Ovide moralisé*, so that Christine’s Andromeda emphasizes the erotic agency of the heroine rather than her sexual vulnerability in the face of the sea-beast. Likewise, Pasiphaë’s serene caress of the bull counteracts the transgressive implications of her desires, and Circe’s regal stature and demeanor shift emphasis away from her terrifying ability to transform her suitors into beasts. These images focus on bestiality as a desire that the dominant culture marks as beyond the law; as such, they constitute an example of "outlaw theorizing." For O’Driscoll, this term "suggests in its very use that its focus is on the outlook of the interpreter; the critical position . . . is the framework for the interpretation, and the text . . . becomes the object of the outlaw gaze."15 In the visual dynamics of the *Othea*, the goddess Othea directs the implied male reader to look differently on these images of bestial desire and to see in their outlaw status an alternate economy of female desire, one that is not paradigmatically heterosexual but draws instead on female agency and authority. In addition to the outlaw image, the textual material in the *Othea* marks a significant revisionary departure from the glosses and allegories in the *Ovide moralisé*. In the received mythological versions of their stories, these three women dance dangerously into the border region where human and beast mate. The *Othea*, through its combination of text and image, re-visions female sexuality at the boundary of bestiality as a performance constituitive of the power of female desire.

Chapter 5 of the *Othea* depicts the Andromeda–Perseus story; the text and image illustrate how Christine restructures Ovidian material to explore the politics of the male gaze. The *Ovide moralisé* details Perseus’s first sighting of Andromeda tied to a rock and describes her as "soft and slender" ("tendre et deliee," 4.6623). Much of the Ovidian text concentrates on Andromeda’s beauty in the eyes of Perseus and gives him par-
ticular access to that beauty by graphically emphasizing her nudity ("toute nue," 4.6643) as part of the visual experience for both Perseus and the reader/viewer. Perseus studies Andromeda as though she were a polychromed statue: "He would have thought she was a form in marble, that she was painted, an image made in the likeness of a woman, if he had not seen her tears and her hair blowing in the wind." The penetrating gaze of Perseus fetishizes Andromeda’s vulnerable nudity in an erotic appeal to the reader.

The emphasis in the Ovide moralisé on a sexualized depiction of Andromeda’s nude body demonstrates its participation in the astrological tradition deriving from classical antiquity that frequently depicts the constellation Andromeda as a nude or partially nude woman bound at the hands. As an astrologer’s daughter, Christine would have known illustrated astrological manuscripts independent of their assimilation into the Ovid tradition. Images of Andromeda in astrological treatises such as the one in Bodley 614 (figure 1) focus the viewer’s attention on the mechanism by which her arms are stretched and her hands tied.

The textual and visual representations in the Ovide moralisé share an iconographic interest in the bound Andromeda. Rouen MS O.4, an Ovide moralisé manuscript produced in Paris in 1315–20, illustrates the story of Perseus and Andromeda with three miniatures (figures 2–4) that form the visual pre-text for the Othea’s treatment of this material. The first two of these miniatures translate into visual language the focus of the narrative on Andromeda as the object of desire. With her white body silhouetted against the dark rock and the ropes visibly outlined against her flesh, Andromeda’s bondage encodes her exposed vulnerability. The sadistic sexual economies inherent in this representation of Andromeda bound and nude are entirely revised in the Othea.

Christine’s texte, which ostensibly presents the received story from the Ovide moralisé, directs the young male reader/viewer not to a portrait-like image of a nude Andromeda but to a mirror-like image of Perseus: "Aprés te mire en Perseüs." Immediately above these words appears the miniature showing Andromeda on the cliff facing the sea monster, with Perseus on the winged horse Pegasus hovering overhead (figure 5). Although urged to focus on Perseus, the viewer’s gaze is instead attracted to the sexually charged confrontation between Andromeda and the monster. Fixated on the resolutely poised Andromeda, the sea-beast threatens to devour her with its huge mouthful of razor-sharp teeth. The
monster poses a sexual threat; as Marina Warner observes, "In myth and fairy tale, the metaphor of devouring often stands in for sex." Although endangered, Andromeda exerts a powerful agency in her gaze, as though by directly staring at the monster she forcefully holds the predatory beast at bay. Perseus's chivalric rescue further situates the monster as a rival for the possession of Andromeda; Perseus's performance is the topic of the *glose* on this image, which states explicitly that the good knight should imitate his action. The *glose* details the chivalric qualities inherent in Perseus's actions, particularly the nobility represented by his rescue of Andromeda from the threat of bestial aggression since, according to Christine, the chivalric knight should provide assistance to women in need. The image, however, does not depict the vulnerability traditional to the Andromeda story; rather than needing aid, in the *Othea* Andromeda appears steadfastly to hold her own.

The *Ovide moralisé* text chronicles Perseus's arrival at the scene; he decides to rescue Andromeda after greeting her and asking her why she is tied to a rock. Reducing Andromeda to the object of exchange between men, the *Ovide moralisé* constructs Perseus as a marital suitor who negotiates with Andromeda's father before slaying his rival. The episode concludes with a lengthy description of the marriage between Androm-
Andromeda and Perseus, which reinscribes Andromeda's sexuality within the patriarchal order. As O'Driscoll reminds us, "The regime of 'normal' or normative sexuality is defined in the discourse of 'in-law' practice: such sexuality falls within the bounds of law, and, as 'in-law' suggests, the discourse rhetorically and legally binds sexuality to marriage, family, and reproduction." Two fourteenth-century manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* visualize the "in-law" emphasis of the narrative in miniatures of the wedding of Perseus and Andromeda (figures 4 and 6). The *Othea*, on the other hand, specifically directs the reader/viewer to look at a different moment. Although the *texte* details Perseus's agency in this tale, the image freezes the narrative at the particular moment of Andromeda's confrontation with the beast: Andromeda's gaze constitutes her sexual power. Unlike the images in the astrological tradition and the *Ovide moralisé*, the *Othea* image depicts Andromeda without bonds and clothed rather than nude, so that the visual economy denies the specularity of the received Ovidian tradition. Instead of being the object of the male gaze, Andromeda powerfully deploys her own gaze. Likewise, the *Ovide moralisé* tale of marriage and traffic in women is completely excluded from the *Othea*. In its emphasis on Andromeda rather than Perseus, the image differs from the text and thereby queers the patriarchal and heterosexual assumptions inherent in the Andromeda myth as it had been transmitted in the *Ovide moralisé*. 

Figure 2. Andromeda tied and Perseus. *Ovide moralisé*, Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale MS O.4, fol. 128v. 1315–20. (Photograph: Bibliothèque Municipale.)
Chapter 45 on Pasiphae exemplifies how the text-image relationships of the Othea deploy the outlaw gaze to subvert cultural assumptions about female sexuality. The received narrative of Pasiphae explicitly presents her story of bestiality and desire as one of sexual transgression: to satisfy her desire for a handsome bull she commissions the craftsman Daedalus to construct a hollow wooden heifer as her disguise to attract the bull's attentions. The Minotaur, a half-human, half-bull, results from this union. In medieval texts, the name Pasiphae is synonymous with bestiality; for instance, in Dante's Purgatorio those guilty of bestiality identify themselves by calling out “Pasiphae,” “the name of her who bestialized herself in the beast-shaped planks.”27 Modern critical responses likewise find the figure of Pasiphae legible only as a cipher for the pejorative category of bestiality.28 Christine's recuperation of Pasiphae for outlaw theory so distressed Erwin Panofsky that he assumed that Christine misunderstood her subject: “poor, blue-stockings Christine de Pisan, always prepared to take up arms in defense of her sex, found it hard to fit Pasiphae into a feminist scheme of things.”29 For medieval and modern readers alike, Pasiphae's bestial desire places her beyond the law.

Although the image dramatically depicts Pasiphae's erotic embrace of the bull, the texte, glose, and allegorie work to bracket her story as a fable of bestiality. The textual material explicitly subverts the mythographic traditions of Pasiphae. First, the four-line verse texte refuses to legitimate the standard use of the Pasiphae story to equate female desire with degraded lust: “For all that Pasiphae was fole, you shouldn't read in
your school that all women are such, for there are many worthy ladies.”

This comment refers to the centrality of the Latin texts of Ovid in the grammar curriculum; educated males—such as the implied male reader of Othea's epistle—would have read Ovid in the privileged and homosocial space of the classroom. The Pasiphaë in the Othea stands as a countermemory to Ovidian versions of the story, whether the Latin text authorized by the schools or the vernacular adaptation that circulated more widely, the Ovide moralisé.

The fable in the Ovide moralisé lingers for 243 lines on the dissolute nature of Pasiphaë's desire, which is condemned as transgressive: “she loved the bull against nature. Loved? No, she didn't. What was it then? Debauchery.” One day Pasiphaë, seated at the window, sees a particularly spectacular bull (“Un fier tor merveilleusement,” 8.727), whose sheer masculinity inflames her: “Pasiphaë passionately looked at the beauty of the bull, possessing his heart, his body, his eyes, and his cock.” The author expansively describes the dangers of female desire when a woman possesses the gaze, since Pasiphaë’s sighting of the bull inevitably leads to bestial desires. The Ovide moralisé devotes considerable attention to the symptoms of Pasiphaë’s desire and the elaborate artifice of the cow she has Daedalus build so that she can satisfy her desires.

The texte of the Othea refuses to read Pasiphaë’s story as proof that women are generally dissolute; this refusal is further intensified in the glose, which refuses to retell the literal terms of the myth. The bestiality of the Ovidian tale is avoided in the Othea glose: “And some fables say
Figure 5. Andromeda rescued from the monster by Perseus. Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea*. British Library MS Harley 4431, fol. 98v. 1406–8. Reprinted by permission of The British Library.
that she was a very dissolute woman, especially because she loved a bull, by which is to be understood that she had relations with a man of base rank." This insistence that "some fables" offer an interpretation of the bull as "a man of base rank" repeats a mythographic explanation of the Pasiphaë story. As Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski traces it, this explanation originates in Hellenistic texts, is later echoed by Servius, and appears in commentaries ranging from William of Conches on Juvenal to commentaries on Dante. According to this explanation, the word for bull, taurus, is understood as the proper name of the secretary to Pasiphaë's husband Minos, so that she mates not with a bull but a socially inferior man. In her phrase "some fables say," Christine appeals to the authority of the mythographic tradition to undermine the Ovidian tradition that associates Pasiphaë with transgressive bestiality and all women with excessive sexuality. Such an authoritative revision invites the reader to contemplate a wider range of interpretive possibilities regarding female sexuality.

If read apart from the image, Christine's text would appear to defend women from misogynist charges of excess sexuality. Her Pasiphaë miniature, however, opens a space in which Pasiphaë's desire for the
bull is presented to the reader in a tranquil composition suffused with a gentle sensuality (figure 7). Set in a pastoral atmosphere, the scene represents cows grazing in the foreground and the bull of the herd in the background, a depiction that situates Pasiphaë harmoniously within the natural world and refutes the accusation of the Ovidian text that her actions are “against nature.” Her purposeful embrace of the bull expresses Pasiphaë’s eroticism in visually pleasing terms. Pasiphaë’s stroking of the bull’s neck eroticizes her agency and constructs her as the subject of desire.

Figure 7. Pasiphaë embracing the bull. Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea. British Library MS Harley 4431, fol. 116r. 1406–8. Reprinted by permission of The British Library.
By contrast, the combination of the image and the 369 lines of narrative in the Rouen manuscript of the *Ovide moralisé* relentlessly presents Pasiphaë's desire as grotesquely transgressive (figure 8). The single miniature used to illustrate the Pasiphaë narrative isolates the encounter between the bull and Pasiphaë against the patterned background typical in this manuscript. The absence of signs of nature, combined with the pillowed bench on which Pasiphaë sits, suggests a courtly setting that the bull has penetrated. The glistening white of the bull's rolling eye, his wildly disordered forelock, and the disappearance of his left front leg behind Pasiphaë's body depict the initial moment of embrace between beast and woman. Pasiphaë sits demurely, the heavy folds of her garment signaling her immobility; she responds to the bull's sexual advances with a gesture of submissive embrace that acknowledges the bull's dominance.17 By focusing the viewer's attention on the excited bull's lunge toward the seated Pasiphaë, the *Ovide moralisé* miniature reinforces the text's insistence that the transgressive nature of Pasiphaë's desire exemplifies the excessive tendencies of female sexuality overall.
Where the Ovidian Pasiphaë is seated and nearly overpowered by the lunging bull, in the Othea miniature, Pasiphaë asserts her dominance by her upright posture and her possessive gesture of embrace (figure 7). In validating Pasiphaë’s agency, this visualization directly contradicts the standard cultural purpose of bestial myths; as J. E. Robson comments: “Bestial myths . . . have the effect of defining what sexual behaviour is suitable for a woman: a woman must submit to an appropriate male, and must not herself be the instigator of the sexual act.”

Even in glossing the object of Pasiphaë’s desire as a man rather than a bull, Christine does not suggest that Pasiphaë should have been submissive. In the Othea, neither texte, glose, nor allegorie invites the reader to be disturbed by this image. Indeed, the glose assures the good knight that he need not be disquieted by Pasiphaë’s story, since women are generally not like this. Both the Ovide moralisé and the Othea allegorize Pasiphaë as the soul. In the Ovide moralisé this soul is sent to the devil; Christine, on the other hand, reads Pasiphaë tropologically as the wayward soul whose return to God creates great joy in heaven. Christine’s allegory recuperates Pasiphaë from the condemnation associated with sexual sin.

Pasiphaë’s desire for the bull stands in stark contrast to a vision experienced by the twelfth-century mystic Christina of Markyate when she was faced with a culturally accepted rape in a forced marriage. In her vision Christina “saw herself standing on firm ground before a large and swampy meadow full of bulls with threatening horns and glaring eyes.” This vision appears to express the more normative view of sexuality and power relations (“She woke up, and interpreted . . . the bulls [as] devils and wicked men”).

By contrast, the Othea’s dreamlike image of Pasiphaë stroking her bull emphatically envisions Pasiphaë’s erotic agency in a visual medium that goes beyond the language of the text and its mythographic revision: the image enables the viewer to read the textual material as a critique of heteronormative stereotypes.

In the course of the Othea, the myth of the bestial encounter allows Christine to interrogate the cultural assumptions regarding female desire. Early in the Othea, Andromeda faces an encounter with the predatory beast, and in the middle of the text, the Pasiphaë story recuperates the allure of the beast. Toward the end of the text, in chapter 98, Circe appears as a powerful and effective queen who has mastered the bestial encounter. The mythical Circe marks a stopover for both the Trojans and the Greeks in the aftermath of the Trojan War. In Homer, Circe poses a
threat to Ulysses on his way home to Ithaka; in Virgil, Circe threatens to enchant and divert Aeneas from his founding of Rome. Circe is the classic figure who embodies what Elizabeth Grosz terms the cultural fantasy and cultural projection that women’s sexuality provides them with a terrifying power:

The fantasy of the *vagina dentata*, of the non-human status of woman as android, vampire or animal, the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible and unknowable, cold, calculating, instrumental, castrator/decapitator of the male, dissimulatress or fake, predatory, engulfing mother, preying on male weakness, are all consequences of the ways in which male orgasm has functioned as the measure and representative of all sexualities and all modes of erotic encounter.\(^{40}\)

The *Ovide moralisé*, following Ovid, embellishes the Virgilian treatment of Circe’s story as an example of what Grosz would call a narrative of the “amorously imperilled male.”\(^{41}\) Aeneas is warned by one of Ulysses’ men to avoid Circe’s territory. The elaborate description that follows recounts Circe’s abilities as a sorceress. The Ovidian text vividly renders the dangers of her seductive hospitality in its graphically detailed description of the process by which a human is transformed into a pig. The miniature in the Arsenal *Ovide moralisé* shows men half transformed into beasts, literally visualizing the text’s elaborate description of the moment—typical in Ovid—of human terror at the dawning awareness of metamorphosis (figure 9). The *Ovide moralisé* proceeds from this passage to describe Circe’s frightening abilities as a sorceress.

The image, *texte*, *glose*, and *allegorie* in Christine’s chapter on Circe display an especial integrity. The *texte* warns the reader/viewer: “You ought to avoid the port of Circe where the knights of Ulysses were all turned into pigs. Remember her coasts.”\(^{42}\) This elliptical comment alludes to the narrative tradition of the Circe episode as part of the Troy story transmitted from Homer’s *Odyssey* (which was, of course, unknown to the medieval West) through Virgil’s *Aeneid*, only to be reworked in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.\(^{43}\) The warning in the *Othea texte* that Hector, the addressee of the frame epistle, should avoid the port of Circe very closely echoes the *Ovide moralisé* passage in which Eneas is warned that he
should avoid transgressing the shore of Circe's island ("You will act wisely to guard against entering Circe's shore"). The Othea thereby locates its mythical focus in this moment of advice that the knight avoid the dangerous shore; the text suggests that this story of Circe is indeed an example of the predatory nature of female sexuality.

Representations of Circe in Boccaccio's De cleres et nobles femmes visualize the sexuality inherent in her sorcery; in such images she enchants Ulysses' men through the use of seductive feminine wiles. For example, in the Circe miniature in a Boccaccio manuscript produced in 1403, Bibliothèque nationale de France fr. 598 (figure 10), Circe has so completely captivated the encircling group of men that they court her, totally unaware of their incipient transformation into beasts. The viewer, however, unmistakably registers the bestial status of Circe's half-transmogrified audience. Boccaccio and these miniaturists represent Circe's power to tempt and deceive, along with its horrifying results, as the central aspect of her feminine sexuality.

In the Othea, the illustration of Circe's encounter with Ulysses' men stages its scene outside a strongly walled city, its entrance blocked from the viewer's gaze by the overpoweringly large and regal figure of Circe.
herself (figure 12). Ulysses’ men, who have just disembarked from the ships in the foreground, receive Circe’s answer to their request for safe haven in the form of the negligent gesture with which she turns two of them into swine. This representation of Circe appears in the same opening and opposite the illustration to chapter 97 of the Othea on the fall of Troy. The illustration to chapter 97 depicts a dense mass of Greek warriors penetrating the burning city, an image that emphasizes Troy’s vulnerability. By contrast, the placement of Circe’s body at the entrance to her city renders it impenetrable and thereby represents in visual terms Circe’s easy thwarting of male aggression (figures 11 and 12). Circe’s crown clearly signals that the responsibility for defending her city is hers. Circe, a woman on her own, succeeds; the great warriors of Troy fail.

The glose in the Othea includes a description of Circe as a queen (“une royne”) who received Ulysses’ knights under the guise of courtoisie and served them an appetizing beverage of such power that they were transformed into pigs. Christine’s glose spells out several possible meanings for the figure of Circe: she might stand for a land or country where knights are placed in a vile and wretched prison; she might also represent a woman full of instability and fickleness (“une dame plaine de
vaguété"). Yet the *allegorie* reads the port of Circe as hypocrisy. Although both the *glose* and the *allegorie* acknowledge the tradition of Circe as a terrifying enchantress whose seductive dangers threaten the knight’s masculinity, this commentary must be contextualized within the entire chapter on Circe. The warning against the port of Circe in the initial four-line *texte* is understood as a warning against the life of hypocrisy by the time the reader has completed the *allegorie*. The ships in the foreground of the illustration emphasize the navigational decisions of Ulysses’ men, which are analogous to the interpretive responsibilities of the reader/viewer. The Circe chapter ultimately places the responsibility on the reader/viewer to steer carefully through images and texts rather than to rely on received tradition. The relationship between text/image and reader creates a queer space, a queer desire; as Elspeth Probyn argues: “Following queer desire turns us into readers who make strange, who render queer the relations between images and bodies.”
terplay between the text and image of the Othea chapter on Circe suggests that it is not female sexuality that is inherently dangerous, but the unchecked aggression of the male voyager. Christine’s Circe is no longer an exemplum of the terrifying power of female sexuality but a figure who validates female desire outside the heteronormative paradigm.

Christine’s epistolary frame—this is, of course, a letter from Othea, the personification or goddess of wisdom, to the youthful Hector—functions to tutor Hector and to discipline his gaze as the male viewer of images. In the myths of the bestial encounter, the Othea contradicts the standard disciplinary gestures of medieval mythography that attempt to shape and control female sexuality. Instead, Othea recuperates the gaze of Andromeda, the bestial desire of Pasiphaë, and the sexual power of Circe in order to articulate an outlaw theory, that is, in O’Driscoll’s terms, to “investigate the ways in which the breaking of sexual taboos can call identity categories into question without necessarily constituting an
identity." If the Othea potentially constructs an ideal masculinity for Hector as representative of the knightly elite who is being tutored to question his culture's fear of female sexuality, it at the same time deploys the bestial encounter as the only image available of the female as the subject of desire.

Notes

An early version of this essay was presented in a session titled "The Metamorphoses of Greek Myth in Diverse Cultures" at the 1994 meeting of the College Art Association. We thank the organizer, Helene E. Roberts, whose acceptance of our paper started us on the road of a fruitful and most enjoyable collaboration. It was also delivered at the October 1995 conference "Christine de Pizan: Texts/Intertexts/Contexts" at the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton University. At the kind invitation of E. Ann Matter, a later version of this paper was presented at the University of Pennsylvania under the auspices of the program in Medieval Studies and, in response to the invitation of graduate students in medieval studies, it was read at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We thank all of these audiences for their engaged responses. For special permission to work together on manuscripts central to our project, we would like to thank the librarians of the Manuscript Room of the British Library, the Bodleian Library, and the Bibliothèque Municipale, Rouen. For expert advice regarding all our translations from Old French we thank Robert L. A. Clark. For assistance at various stages of our research we thank Lois Drewer of the Index of Christian Art, Carol Weisbrod, and Diane Wolfthal.


2. Both the nature of Christine's reinterpretation and her intended audience have been central topics in the scholarship on the Othea. Rosemund Tuve (Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966]) sees the Othea as a conduct book combining two allegories and aimed at a young, male reader/viewer. Sandra L. Hindman (Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othéa": Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986]) concentrates on a political reading of the Othea, concluding that "the pictures were designed—at least in part—in order to amplify the political views presented in the texts" (xiii). She is specifically concerned with manuscripts such as Harley 4431 that were illustrated under Christine's supervision and argues that these manuscripts were produced for specific members of the French court.


10. For illustrations in Ovide moralisé manuscripts, see Carla Lord, “Manuscripts of

11. "We have to rethink our modern notion that reading is the rapid relay of information and see it as a far more meditative meandering, in which images are not so much illustrations of an already pre-existing text as part of the process of reading itself" (Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 162).


16. The *Ovide moralisé* obsessively returns to this point: "He is able to see her uncovered" (*Veoir la puet sans couverture*, 4.6640).

17. "Cuida que fust forme mabrine / Qu'en eüst la painte et portraite / Et en semblant de feme faite, / S'il ne la vei'st larmoier / Et les crins au vent baloier" (4.6629–33).


20. For a description of this manuscript and a bibliography, see catalog entry no. 8 in C. M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066–1190* (A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles, vol. 3, general ed. J. J. G. Alexander) (London: Harvey Miller, 1975), 77–78. For a representation of Andromeda similarly tied, though clothed, in a manuscript from the second half of the fourteenth century which is probably French, see Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz MS. lat. oct. 44, fol. 4v (Glanz alter Buchkunst: Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin [Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1988], 129).

21. On this manuscript, which has about 450 miniatures, see Carla Lord, “Three Manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé*,” *Art Bulletin* 57:2 (June 1975): 161–75. François Avril has identified Rouen O.4 with an entry in the inventory of the estate of Clemence of Hungary, the widow of Louis X of France, which indicates that it was purchased by Philip VI of France (François Avril, catalog entry in *Les Fastes du Gothique: le siècle de Charles V* [Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1981], 284–85, no. 230). Building on the work of Alison Stones, Avril has attributed this manuscript to the Fauvel Artist or his workshop (Edward H. Roesner, François Avril, and Nancy Freeman Regalado, *Le Roman de Fauvel in the Edition of Mesire Chaillou de Pesstain: A Reproduction in Facsimile of the Complete Manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français 146* [New York: Broude Brothers, 1990], 42–48). Carla Lord has added evidence that the manuscript was made for Clemence and Louis (Carla Lord, “Marks of Ownership in Medieval Manuscripts: The Case of the Rouen *Ovide moralisé*,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 18:1 [fall 1998]: 7–11). For a collation of these Ovidian images with reference to the *Othea*, see the tables in Hindman, *Christine de Pisan's “Epistre Othéa,”* 194–203.

22. For a discussion of the *Othea* image in relation to earlier treatments of the subject, see Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs and their Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 1:27–29. Meiss emphasizes the role of the artist: “This representation by the Epitre Master is historically important not only for its novel drama but also for its iconography” (27). We would add that the innovations in the image of Perseus and Andromeda are demonstrably consistent with the overall revisionary nature of the *Othea*.


24. “qui est a entendre que tous chevaliers doivent secourir femmes qui besoing de leur ayde aront.”


26. “Pegasus, li chevaulx appers, / Chevaucha par l’air en volant, / Et Andromada en alant / Il delivra de la belue, / Si lui a a force tolue” (“Riding Pegasus the marvelous horse, he flew through the air, and, in flight, delivered Andromeda from the monster, taking her from him by force,” ll. 5–9).

ton University Press, 1973), 285. In his notes on this canto, Singleton observes that Thomas Aquinas considered bestiality a more serious sin than sodomy.


29. Erwin Panofsky, "Letter to the Editor," Art Bulletin 30 (1948): 242. We would like to thank Diane Wolfthal for bringing this letter to our attention.

30. "Pour tant se Phasiphe fu fole, / Ne vueilles lire en ton escole / Que teles soient toutes fames, / Car il est maintes vaillans dames." As with the modern French fou, the middle French word fole denotes a wide range of meanings from mad or insane to foolish, licentious, or silly.


33. "Pasiphe curieusement / La biaute dou buef avisa; / Son cuer, ses iex et son vis a" (8.728-30). In an Ovide moralisé manuscript of ca. 1325–50 (Arsenal 5069), the miniature accompanying this passage shows Pasiphaë in a tower looking out and pointing at a bull who frolics flirtatiously before her.

34. The Ovide moralisé thus recapitulates the Roman visual tradition, which repeatedly represents the moment when Pasiphaë selects the actual heifer the great technician is to replicate so that she can position herself inside it. For an example, see Gilbert Picard, Roman Painting (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), pl. 40.

35. "et dient aucunes fables que elle fu femme de grant dissolucion, et mesmement / que elle ama un thorel, qui est a entendre que elle acointa un homme de vile condition." The Second Vatican Mythographer recounts that Pasiphaë had sexual relations with Taurus, the notarius of Minos, which led to the birth of twins, one a son of Minos and the other of Taurus, instead of the Minotaur. In his gloss of a reference to Pasiphaë at lines 10–12 in the First Satire of Juvenal, William of Conches writes, "Minos had a secretary by the name of Taurus whom Pasiphaë loved" ("Minos habebat cancellarium nomine Taurum quem Pasiphae adamavit") (Guillaume de Conches, Glosae in luisenalém, ed. Bradford Wilson [Paris: J. Vrin, 1980], 111). In his commentary on Dante's Inferno, 12.12–13, Guido da Pisa (1328–33) writes, "The truth of the story is this: In the realm of Crete, there was a certain secretary of King Minos named Taurus whom Queen Pasiphaë loved, and she slept with him secretly in the labyrinth" ("Veritas ystorie est ista: In regno namque Cretensi fuit
37. For an analysis of the gesture of dominant embrace and the power relationship it encodes, see Pamela Sheingorn, "The Bodily Embrace or Embracing the Body: Gesture and Gender in Late Medieval Culture," in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan E. Knight (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 51–89.
41. Ibid., 283.
42. "Eschever dois le port Circes, / Ou les chevaliers Ulixés / Furent tous en porcs convertis; / Souviegne toy de ses partis." For a discussion of Circe as she is treated elsewhere in Christine's corpus, see Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Reading Myth*, 176–181.
44. "Garde toi, si feras que sage, / D'entrer ou circien rivage" (14.2359-60).
45. This representation stands in strong contrast to the episode from this narrative selected for visualization in Roman painting, as exemplified by the Odyssey frieze. Here Circe opens the gate of her palace to welcome Odysseus, then pleads for her life after he fails to succumb to her magic potion and exposes her stratagem. Even in its setting, the interior of Circe's palace, the Odyssey painting implies Circe's penetration by the male power visibly signaled in Odysseus's drawn sword. For a representation of this painting as well as a generously illustrated discussion of Circe in ancient art, see Diana Buitron et al., *The Odyssey and Ancient Art: An Epic in Word and Image* (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Bard College, 1992), 77–94 and fig. 6. For a general discussion of the Odyssey frieze, see Roger Ling, *Roman Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 107–112.
47. For a consideration of the *Othea* as a chivalric handbook addressed to Hector, see Kellogg, "Christine de Pizan as Chivalric Mythographer," 100–123.
The opening meter or poetic chapter of Alan of Lille’s *Plaint of Nature* (ca. 1160–70) introduces its readers to the technical grammatical metaphors employed in this work to denounce the practice of male same-sex copulation, which Alan condemns on the grounds that it requires one of the two male partners to play an inferior passive—or female—role in sexual intercourse. Alan’s first grammatical trope in the *Plaint* figures this transgression in terms of misaligned subjects and predicates (verbs):

The active sex shudders in disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex. A man turned woman blackens the fair name of his sex. . . . He is subject and predicate: one and the same term is given a double application. Man here extends too far the laws of grammar.

As Jan Ziolkowski glosses Alan’s grammatical figure, “a man should modify, through sexual intercourse, a woman, just as a predicate [verb] modifies a subject.” Too often, Alan laments here and elsewhere in the *Plaint*, men, who should be the active predicate by virtue of their biological gender, take the part of the passive female subject, overturning the laws of both nature and grammar.
Alan employs three further metaphors in meter 1 to decry the male sodomite, both homosexual and heterosexual: that of the hammer and anvil, of the plowshare and furrow, and of the stamp or seal and the wax it imprints. In proper (that is, teleologically procreative) usage, the male sexual member (hammer) should strike the female sexual organ (anvil) and forge or coin a new artifact, just as the plowshare (penis) should prepare the furrow (vagina) for the entry of seed, and the signet should shape the wax into its own image. However, the Plaint asserts that in Alan's perverse era too often the hammer strikes an anvil that has become any part of a man or woman's body and "issues no seeds" (69), the plowshare does not enter nutritive (female) earth, but "scores a barren strand" (ibid.), and the signet makes no mark on the wax, "imprints on no matter the stamp of a parent-stem" (ibid.).

Alan's mechanical metaphors appear to concretize his opening abstract figure of man the predicate modifying woman the subject. But, I argue later, Alan's imagery of hammers, plows, and stamps does not so much clarify as undercut his grammatical figure by revealing how the grammatical trope turns against its apparent task of extirpating sodomy and makes a place, however nominally despised, for sexual perversion. I take as my starting point Alexandre Leupin's observation that "one of [the Plaint's] most prominent features is that the very discourse of censorship effects a return of repressed sodomy," a view amplified in Jordan's compelling study of the manifold irrepressible ironies in the Plaint. I shall argue that it is specifically grammatical discourse that effects sodomy's return and lies at the heart of what Jordan finds to be the Plaint's failed attempt to construct a coherent case against same-sex copulation.

The first project of this essay is to explore the ironic turns and dilemmas that awaited Alan in medieval grammatical and poetic theory, which inextricably linked deviance with poetic production and enabled biologically nonreproductive sodomy to issue its mark. I begin with Alan's Plaint because it "represents one of the most significant attempts of the Middle Ages to account for all the inferences of this period's poetics." I next examine how one of Alan's most anxious readers, Jean de Meun, attempted—but failed—to rewrite the Plaint in order to forestall sodomy's return. Within this context of frustrated attempts to sever the link between poetry and perversity, I conclude by rethinking the import of the new approach to literature contained in the Aristotelian prologue of the early thirteenth century. I shall suggest that what A. J. Minnis calls
"the medieval theory of authorship" discards the unreliable argument from grammar and nature and employs the heterosexualized scientific discourse of causality to secure poetry against perversion. But I begin by returning to Alan and his conflicting set of mechanical and grammatical metaphors.

**Sodomy's Progeny**

Alan's tool metaphors in meter 1 and elsewhere in the *Plaint* (prose 4 and 5) encode conventional medieval opposition to sodomy as nonproductive, hence "unnatural": the hammer emits no sparks of life when struck on an illicit anvil, the plowshare delves into sterile sand in vain, the seal leaves no impression on its wax. While Alan's mechanical metaphors focus attention on improper objects as receptacles—illicit anvils, infertile earth, resistant wax—their real animus is directed at the result of such copulation, an outcome that is nothing less than nothing. No progeny, no offspring issues from these misaligned unions.

The clear and conventional nature of the condemnation of sodomy in Alan's mechanical metaphors contrasts sharply with the dense and unexpected argument against sodomy packed into Alan's grammatical metaphors. To parallel his argument from tools, Alan's grammatical metaphor of sodomy should lead to the conclusion that the improper coupling of predicate and subject also produces nothing, in this case, meaningless discourse, the lack or absence of verbal meaning. Yet, try as it might, Alan's grammatical argument fails to reach the same straightforward conclusion. Instead, the grammatical metaphor tangles itself and ironically attributes to sodomy the outcome of a product, albeit a monstrous and aberrant one.

When man becomes both subject and predicate, Alan continues his critique of sodomy in meter 1, he becomes a "barbarian in grammar" and "disclaims the manhood" nature gave him. Grammar has no tolerance for man's abdication. She does not find favor with him but "rather a trope." Yet such a transposition cannot really be called a trope (*tropus*), Alan decides; it falls more correctly within the category of grammatical vice (*vitium*). In a striking oxymoron (as well as complex pun), Nature later categorizes *vitium* as the offspring of man's perverted same-sex coupling: "he deflowers the flower of pulchritude by having it bloom into vice" (135). The dreamer's own mind, Nature warns, is subject to
impregnation by the seeds of this potent vicious bloom: "if any herb from an evil seed should dare to sprout in the garden of your own mind, remove it by a timely use of the cutting hook" (166).  

Alan's oxymoron that improper grammatical coupling bears the fruit of vice resonates loudly throughout Jeffrey T. Schnapp's paraphrase of the opening of meter i:

The unnatural conversion of one gender into another, Alan insists, is nonproductive. It yields a trope that is not really a trope, a figure that is not really a figure. What, then, might one call this grammatical nonentity? Alan's response is that it belongs to that null grammatical category known as "verbal vices" or "defects of speech."... These grammatical deviants... were seen [in Latin and medieval rhetorical and poetic theory] as the progeny of licentious and indiscriminate verbal couplings: that is, as literary monsters.

Schnapp's paraphrase replicates Alan's self-contradiction: "nonproductive" verbal coupling "yields" a "nonentity" that is its monstrous "progeny." The false trope-that-is-not-a-trope may belong to the "null"—invalid—grammatical category of vitium, but it is not the corollary of the nonexistent issue, the absent result, of the action of hammer, plow, and stamp in Alan's mechanical metaphors. Vitium is indeed something, a pseudo-trope, not a nonentity. In order for Alan to mount a parallel grammatical argument against sodomy on the conventional medieval grounds of nonprocreativity, illicit verbal coupling would have to effect nothing, silence, or discourse lacking meaning, babble. At most, Alan can only argue that "vicious" language leaves its audience "barren of the truth," a less obvious and asymmetrical lack of procreativity than the nonproductivity of hammer and plow. When instead it produces something, the deviant offspring vitium, Alan's otherwise straightforward argument snarls into self-contradiction.

**Hic et Hic: Grammar and Disorderly Fertility**

Although Alan's grammatical argument appears to turn against the Plaint's project by imputing a fecundity—however aberrant—to same-
sex copulation, there are other ironic twists in the work, which, Jordan observes, "is hardly a seamless representation of orderly fertility" (72). "Everywhere we turn [in the Plaint]," Jordan continues, "Nature's rules seem to spawn their own violations in same-sex fertilities" (86). To Jordan, these irrepressible ironies point to the intended message of the Plaint: Alan attempts to "suggest the limits of Nature as a guide in morals" (87). Nature cannot effectively argue against same-sex copulation because she is "too various and variable to enact convincing regulations" against same-sex perversion. Her attempts to legislate orderly—married, heterosexual—reproduction on the basis of natural rules "must end in incoherence" (80). Jordan concludes that what Nature needs is Christian Scripture traditionally read, especially the Pauline condemnation of same-sex copulation:

Nature does not have the right word for this sin, much less the right myth. The right word would be "Sodomy," and the myth is the medieval reading of Genesis 19. Alan's title by now has become a pun. The Plaint of Nature is not only a complaint against sexual sin, it is [Alan's] complaint against Nature's failure to speak satisfactorily about those sins. (87)

If, as Jordan implies, Alan's Plaint makes a subtle plea to employ the term sodomy and thus discard the unreliable natural argument against same-sex copulation in favor of the more accommodating conventional one, the Plaint also reveals the even more compromised position of those who would condemn same-sex intercourse on grammatical grounds. Indeed, when Alan reaches for the abstruse figure of the male predicate modifying the female subject at the very opening of meter 1 to prove grammar's opposition to same-sex copulation, he tacitly avoids the more rudimentary and better-known, hence more compelling, case grammar makes for same-sex conjunction: nouns and their adjectives must be of the same gender, or hie with hie. As Ganymede phrases this law in the popular and influential "Debate between Helen and Ganymede" of the late twelfth century, grammar insists on sameness, not difference, in the coupling of nouns and adjectives:

Opposites always disagree; the right way is like with like.
Man can be fitted to man by elegant conjunction.
If you don’t know this, look at the gender of their articles [i.e., adjectives]:
Masculine should be coupled with masculine by the rules of grammar.¹⁵

Ganymede’s disputant, Helen, offers no rebuttal to this grammatical argument in favor of (male) same-sex copulation, for, indeed, none is available. Instead, the “Debate” secures its victory over Ganymede by an act of allegorical fiat—and of circular logic: Reason steps in at the end and declares Helen the winner. Helen’s position is deemed the reasonable one because Reason has declared it to be so. Another near contemporary of Alan’s, Gautier de Coinky, did attempt to refute Ganymede’s argument for same-sex copulation by logic rather than fiat, maintaining that even though Grammar couples hie with hie, “Nature curses this coupling.”¹⁶ In other words, Ziolkowski explains, unlike Alan, Gautier takes care to differentiate regular grammar (the equivalent of Ganymede’s grammar) from Nature’s grammar, to note that there are “broad discrepancies between school grammar and natural grammar.”¹⁷ Yet, as Jordan has shown, in the Plaint, Alan’s Nature does not, in fact, consistently “curse” same-sex coupling, a failing that distresses Alan, and the discrepancies between Nature’s grammar and regular school grammar in the Plaint are far less broad than Gautier would portray them. Alan cannot appropriate Gautier’s solution because the Plaint has impugned too thoroughly Nature’s moral authority, which for Gautier is the source of Grammar’s moral authority. Based on a morally “variable and various” Nature, Alan’s Grammar is even less able than Nature to enact regulations against same-sex copulation.

Poetry and Perversion

Nor can Alan find his way out of the grammatical conundrum by following what Jordan sees to be Alan’s exit from the natural dilemma: to take refuge in the term sodomy and condemn same-sex copulation on conventional grounds. As a moralist, Alan might dissociate himself from nature by resorting to scripturally based human law, but as a poet he cannot disentangle himself from grammar and its close associate, rhetoric. The conflicting metaphors from meter 1 discussed earlier illustrate the double
trap in which Alan the poet thus finds himself enmeshed. As a writer, he is bound to grammar, and grammar is implicated by its own metaphors in perversion. Elizabeth Pittenger notes that "even as Nature's seminar seeks to eliminate the bad seeds of 'perversion,' the [grammatical] metaphors plant them afresh." Errant hammers and plows make no mark, but illicit grammar does, and the latter mark, vitium, is inextricably bound to the stuff of poetry, the mark Alan himself makes. Vitium, stylistic vice, and tropus, literary contrivance, Ziolkowski explains, were closely related in medieval thought: "the two were considered similar, in that neither conformed perfectly to accepted grammatical usage." They were antonyms in the sense that the trope, the figure of speech in which a word is turned around from its proper signification, is deemed an excusably improper use of words, whereas the false trope Alan laments is judged an inexcusably improper use of words. But, as antonyms, each implies and invokes the other, indeed, polices the other to provide its own definition and demarcation. A necessarily fine line divides the creative use of words and the illicit use of words, the poet and the pervert.

Alan generalizes this link between poetry and perversion in the parallel oppositional bond he constructs between orthography, "straight" or "proper" writing, and falsigraphy, "false" writing. In orthography, the pen (penis) inseminates the writing surface (pagina or vagina) with the seeds of meaning that bear the fruit of words on the page. Falsigraphy should leave no mark on the page, for in sodomitical writing the deviant pen would go astray and scatter its seed anywhere but upon its "proper" recipient, pagina/vagina. Yet again Alan skews the conventional polarity between purity and perversion, orthography and falsigraphy. His errant stylus indeed makes a mark, and a poetic one at that. Falsigraphy is responsible for creating both analogia and anastrophe, rhetorical figures of inverted order recognized by Donatus, Quintilian, and others. Like the difference between tropus and vitium, that between Alan's orthography and falsigraphy is one of style rather than substance.

The conventional boundaries between proper and perverse writing further collapse in the actions of Alan's Genius, Nature's alter ego, who configures the relationship between orthography and falsigraphy differently than does Nature herself. When Nature tires of the act of orthographic writing (generation) and decamps to "the delightful palace of the ethereal region" (146), she enlists Venus as her replacement and bestows upon the Cyprian "an unusually powerful writing-pen" (156). Nature
also instructs Venus not to allow this pen to stray from orthography, the
“path of proper delineation,” into falsigraphy (ibid.). Venus is to “con-
centrate exclusively in her connections on the natural union of the mas-
culine and feminine gender” (157) and avoid various grammatical vices.
In due course, Venus’s writing does go astray and the Cyprian “destroys
herself with the connections of Grammar” (164). Ultimately, Venus gives
up writing altogether.

As Nature’s scribe, Genius participates in the scriptive act of gener-
atation too. When he also tires of reproductive writing, however, he does
not delegate it to a subordinate, but switches the pen from his right
hand to his left, which signals his withdrawal “from the field of orthog-
raphy” to falsigraphy (217). Genius’s left hand comes to the aid of his
right “as if it were helping a weary sister” (216), Alan further writes. This
sororal imagery, Pittenger notes, recalls the relationship between Nature
and Venus, one sister aiding another fatigued by writing. Yet it also em-
phasizes how much closer Nature’s orthography is to Venus’s falsigra-
phy when the two types of inscription exist within Genius:

The two agencies are now compressed into one body, the secre-
tary Genius, and then bifurcated into the agency of his scribal
hands. Two opposed kinds of writing—orthography repre-
sented by Nature, and falsigraphy represented by Venus—are
compressed into an image of a single body with opposing
hands that produce orthography and falsigraphy and that are
then represented as if sisters.

Through Genius, Alan not only situates falsigraphy close to orthogra-
phy, but allies it to himself the poet. The final figures Genius’s left hand
scripts into life are the classical writers Ennius, “who crossed the
bounds of metrical practice in unrestrained license,” and Pacuvius, who
“place[d] the beginning of his discourse at a stage that points backward”
(217). Classical poets have come under Nature’s attack earlier in the
Plaint for writing falsehoods, particularly for attributing the vice of ho-
mosexuality to the gods, yet here the tragic poet Pacuvius, praised by Ci-
cero and Quintilian, is condemned for wrong order, for beginning in
medias res. Alan could not have missed the irony: the Plaint also begins
at a stage that points backward. Alan is as much written by—the prog-
eny of—falsigraphy as is Pacuvius.
The proximity between orthography and falsigraphy that Alan creates in Genius plays a central role in modern readings of the *Plaint*. Pittenger argues that it implicates both kinds of writing in a common materiality that stands over and against divine inscription, the transcendent Book. The forever potentially perverse materiality of writing makes even Nature vulnerable to falsigraphy. Were it not for God's guiding hand, Nature admits that her hand might stray off the page: "my writing-reed would instantly go off course if it were not guided by the finger of the superintendent on high" (146). What lies beneath Alan's bundling of straight and deviant writing into the hands of one figure, Pittenger implies, is the abhorrence of matter, which is itself the basis of a dualistic position Alan had to condemn. Although it appears counterintuitive, Pittenger concedes, dualism licensed asceticism and nonprocreative sexuality, for both express contempt for matter. In its extreme disregard for matter, dualism licensed even sodomy. Alan thus finds himself trapped in a "perverse position" and can only resolve his dilemma by searching for another exit, which Pittenger locates in transcendent reading.

Alan's compression of orthography and falsigraphy into the single figure, Genius, prompts Leupin to reach a rather different conclusion: their forced coalescence emphasizes falsigraphy's riotous triumph over orthography. I would propose yet a third reading, which emerges from attending closely to the event that follows Genius's two-handed writing and concludes the *Plaint*: Genius puts down his pen, ceases writing with either left or right hand, and speaks the final words of the work, the excommunication of those who break Nature's laws. To pronounce this sentence, Genius changes his iridescent writer's garb (ever changing in hue, like Nature's own) into "priestly dress," leaving behind his role as the agent of creation and of mutability and taking on his sacerdotal function. Genius transforms the discourse of the *Plaint* as well, for he reinvents Nature's opening accusation of man's deadly vices against her. In that diatribe (41), as in the narrator's opening lament, Nature figured same-sex copulation as grammatical vice. The remainder of man's sins Nature excoriates in literal language or with figures drawn from other fields (e.g., banking and commerce).

Genius's excommunication twice pronounces anathema on sexual sinners. Those who "block the lawful path of Venus" (221) are first condemned. Next, he "who makes an irregular exception to the rule of
Venus" (221) is damned. In both instances, Genius invokes Venus, now reinstated in her role as Nature's obedient vicar, and mutes the natural grammatical argument against sexual perversion. He does not silence the argument altogether, for it resonates faintly in Genius's reference to "irregular exceptions" to rules. The rules no longer belong to grammar or nature, however, but to Venus.

Implicit in Genius's echo of grammatical imagery is his return to the sin that preoccupied the narrator and Nature at the opening of the Plaint: same-sex copulation. As Genius guides the Plaint to its conclusion, he sidesteps the oxymoronic self-contradiction that vitiated the grammatical argument against same-sex copulation. Genius ascribes no evil progeny to sodomy, no linguistic fruit or vitium. Invoking Nature's and the narrator's laments, Genius rephrases them. He then takes one final step to assure that he has unequivocally erased the Plaint's earlier ironic privileging of same-sex sodomy with fertility: Genius decrees that all who make irregular exceptions to the rule of Venus shall be deprived of her "seal" (221), castrated.

If Nature never finds the right word, sodomy, much less the right myth, for the sin of same-sex copulation, Genius edits out the wrong words she has used for it, those that attribute fertile bloom to supposedly sterile vice. Genius's correction of Nature, however, highlights his failure to resolve his own earlier contradictory stance as ambidextrous writer. When Genius puts down the falsigraphic pen, quits his role as poet-artifex, dons priestly robes and pronounces an anathema that reformulates Nature's unreliable grammatical argument, he neither transcends nor solves the problem inherent in Alan's linkage of true and deviant writing, orthography and falsigraphy. Escaping into a new oral discourse of morality, Genius the priest leaves the dilemma behind, deeply inscribed into the text of the Plaint and into poetry as well. But Alan's most significant near-contemporary reader, Jean de Meun, detected Genius's lapse and in his Romance of the Rose (ca. 1267–78?) attempted to do for Genius what Genius had done for Nature, as I next explore.

THE (ANTI)FEMINIZATION OF NATURE IN JEAN DE MEUN'S ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

The last quarter of Jean's Romance, a prolonged allegorical narrative of the narrator-dreamer's amorous quest for his beloved rose, encapsulates
Alan's *Plaint of Nature*. Jean incorporates Alan's work into the *Romance* at the point that the dreamer's pursuit of the rose has been stymied by Shame, Fear, Jealousy, and others. The God of Love, whose army has come to the narrator's aid, delivers a diatribe against those who refuse to serve his cause. In the section that recapitulates Alan's *Plaint*, Jean's Nature next appears and complains about humankind's sexual perversity as she confesses to her priest, Genius. Nature sends Genius to excommunicate all those in the God of Love's retinue who refuse to further her work through procreation. Genius delivers a lengthy sermon that exhorts Love's soldiers to pursue procreative sex and includes a "long diatribe against homosexuality." Here Jean's direct use of Alan's *Plaint* ends, and the *Romance* proceeds to its own conclusion. Venus takes over, and in due course Jean's lover achieves his goal: he plucks the rose.

Earlier readers and scholars focused on Jean's debt to Alan. More recent critics concentrate on what they find to be Jean's differences from Alan, particularly in his treatment of the figures Nature and Genius, which play such a prominent role near the end of the *Romance*. My concern here is not with the broad differences between the *Romance* and the *Plaint*, but with the specific ways in which Jean's Genius labors to correct those unresolved aspects of Alan's Genius and Nature that leave sodomy deeply inscribed in the text of the *Plaint* and bind poetry to perversion, orthography to falsigraphy. Jean makes two major moves in the *Romance* to clear it of the oxymoronic ambidexterity Alan fails to remove from the *Plaint*. The first involves Nature, the second Genius.

Most strikingly, Jean minimizes and simplifies Nature's role in condemning homosexuality. He does so in part by conceding at the outset, as Alan did not, that Nature is too "variable and various," too wayward herself, to regulate human behavior, sexual or otherwise. In allegorical terms, she is conventionally feminine in her actions and behavior, as Genius's speech in the middle of Nature's confession emphasizes. While Genius grants that Nature has a valid complaint against humankind, he undercuts her ability to guide her human creations by observing that, as a woman, Nature is a "very irritable animal" and by citing case after case in point of Virgil's dictum that "no woman was ever so stable that she might not be varied and changeable" (276). Genius's antifeminist "digression" is anything but a departure from the main issue at hand: sidelining Nature's moral authority.

To such an unreliable and unstable—feminine—figure as Nature, Jean entrusts none of the arguments against same-sex copulation that
Alan invested in her. Most significantly, Jean deletes her grammatical argument against homosexuality, affording Nature no chance to weaken the case against sexual perversity with grammatical metaphors that are so easily challenged by the counterexamples—hic with hic—that occur in the Ganymede-Helen debate poems and elsewhere. Instead, Jean prefabricates the case for her: Nature condemns sexually perverse man as a “lazy sodomite” (317), sodomia already the prejudged sin that requires no further testimony against it, as Jordan establishes. Jean supplies Nature the “right word” against homosexuality and other sexual vices to preclude her speaking all the wrong words about them, the mixed messages, she uttered in the Plaint.

Jean also removes the pen of creation from Nature’s hands, perhaps in response to Alan’s warning about Nature’s writing in the Plaint; when Nature tired of inscription there, she handed over the pen to Venus, who strayed from orthography to falsigraphy all too soon. The one allegorical tool of creation that Jean issues to Nature is the hammer (270–71), and it never misses its proper target, the anvil. Indeed, Jean limits the exposure of Nature’s activities at her forge and shifts attention to a discussion of Art’s inability to compete with Nature’s smithy: no matter how hard Art tries, she will “never catch up with Nature” (272). Nevertheless, as Jordan has observed about the Plaint, Jean supplies feminine Nature with a conventionally masculine tool, the hammer, and thus, like Alan, produces something less than a “seamless representation of orderly fertility” (72). Neither author can escape the taint of perversity in making Nature God’s agent of creation, for grammar traps them into attributing masculine agency, the hammer, to a female figure (Latin natura). The point that I would emphasize here, though, is that Jean works to contain the spread of the contamination of disorderly fertility into poetic theory. His Nature wields no pen; no errant writing occurs in the Romance. The only figure allowed access to the stylus is male, Genius, as I examine in the next section, and Jean’s rewriting of the Plaint participates in the larger project of reordering male-female relationships.

Jean’s demotion of Nature goes far beyond the Plaint, yet it takes its cue from the gender asymmetry that develops toward the end of Alan’s work. As Winthrop Wetherbee observes, Alan locates Genius’s final authority in the assertion of his superior masculine gender. In the kiss between Alan’s Nature and Genius just prior to the concluding excommunication, Genius “reassumes something of his true masculine authority,” and, for Wetherbee, “[w]ith this reassertion of Genius’ ‘manhood,’ and the
cosmic reestablishment of right relations between male and female, the poem reaches a tentative resolution. The traditional “right” relationship between male and female, of course, mandates woman’s subordination to man, Nature’s submission to Genius. Jean not only further suppresses the authority of Alan’s Nature by submitting her to Genius’s charge, but elevates Genius into the sole prosecutor of homosexuality. Genius’s case against same-sex copulation comprises the second major revision Jean made to straighten out the incoherent case against it in the * Plaint.*

**Jean’s Genius as (Re)Writer**

The central measures Jean’s Genius takes to secure conventional fertility in the *Romance* are the expropriation of Nature’s pen and the overhaul of Nature’s most troublesome figurative device in the *Plaint:* the trope of writing for sexual reproduction. Before Nature confesses, Jean has already deprived her of the stylus as a metaphorical tool of generation, limiting her to the hammer and forge. After her confession, Jean continues to withhold the pen from her, barring her from writing out the excommunication and pardon Genius is to deliver to Love’s army. Nature must dictate this text to Genius; after he records her words (320), she seals them, and Genius makes his way to Love’s barons to read Nature’s sentence aloud.

In serving as secretary, Genius assumes the position of Nature’s textual intermediary and, if need be, her censor. Jean never discloses what Nature actually dictates to Genius; instead, he gives verbatim the text that Genius inscribes and reads out to Love’s assembly. Presumably, what Nature dictates in the *Romance* and what Genius records coincide, yet as Genius apparently moves beyond Nature’s text into his own sermon, his first task is to straighten out Nature’s deviant metaphor of textuality in the *Plaint.* The implication is that Jean’s Genius stood equally ready to correct Nature in the *Romance* had she strayed into the disturbing self-contradictions that Alan’s Nature did.

When Jean’s Genius pronounces anathema on those who refuse to do Nature’s generative work, his sentence employs three of the *Plaint’s* metaphors for sexual intercourse: the hammer striking an anvil, the plow furrowing a fertile field, and the stylus writing on the tablet. As does Alan’s Nature, Jean’s Genius curses the perverse use of the plow and the hammer. He condemns those who would avoid the fecund earth
to plow in the "desert land where their seeding goes to waste" (324). "desert land" recalling Alan's "barren strand" and the burning sands of Sodom. And Jean's Genius condemns those whose hammers do not forge "as they justly should on the straight anvil" (323), recalling the Plaint's lament over hammers that do not strike the proper anvils. Those who prefer to flee Nature's anvils and fallow fields "might as well be buried alive," Jean's Genius opines (ibid.). Jean's Genius excoriates a further misuse of plow and hammer, that is, their lack of use. If, for sixty years, all men avoided their tools, the human race would perish unless God replenished it, Genius warns.

Although Jean's Genius echoes the Plaint so far, he parts company with Alan's work in the remainder of his sermon, for he overhauls the figure of stylus and tablet so that it coheres rather than conflicts with his other tool metaphors that promote orderly fertility. The deviant stylus in the Romance does not oxymoronically produce falsigraphy, the stylistic vitium of tropus, as it does in the Plaint. Instead, Jean's Genius explains, the perverse pen fails "to write a letter or make a mark that shows" (322) when it inscribes a tablet other than Nature's designated one. Like the plow that thrusts into "desert land" (324), the errant pen produces nothing, not something, albeit a monstrous progeny, as Alan's Nature misconstrued the matter. In renovating the stylus metaphor, Jean's Genius goes a long way toward untangling Nature's snarled case against sodomy in the Plaint.

Queer Poetics: Orpheus, Apollo, and Hyacinth

Jean's Genius does not altogether succeed, however, in rewriting Alan's errant Nature. He extirpates her troublesome grammatical argument, and he adjusts her stylus metaphor so that it does not attribute reproductive fecundity, however aberrant, to sodomy. Yet Jean's Genius stumbles when it comes to his treatment of the classical bard and pederast, Orpheus, and for a brief moment, like his predecessor Nature in the Plaint, Genius allows sodomy—homosexual sodomy—to reinscribe its mark. Genius's ironic mishap stems from the fact that in Orpheus Ovid coalesced two figures, the bard and the pederast, and try as they might, the medieval writers who inherited this intertwined figure had difficulty separating the poet from what medieval society viewed as the pervert.
Ovid writes of Orpheus twice, in the *Art of Love* and *Metamorphoses*. In both works, Ovid describes Orpheus as the poet par excellence, and in the latter he credits Orpheus with introducing the custom of boy love into Thrace. In the *Art*, Ovid briefly sings the praise of the Orpheus who “with his lute charmed rocks and trees and wild creatures, / Even the Furies of Hell had to succumb to his spell.” Ovid lightly hints at Orpheus’s homosexual identity in the *Art*, but does little to develop it. He uses Orpheus’s charming poetic ability as a case in point that “song is a winning art, and girls should certainly learn it; / Men who are cold to a face yield to a beautiful voice” (162). By a rhetorical sleight of hand related to transumption, Orpheus’s audience becomes the men who yield to Orpheus’s beautiful voice. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid narrates the fuller story of how the bard-in-exile Orpheus, deprived of his beloved wife Eurydice because he turned back to look at her, “shunned all love of womankind” and gave “his love to tender boys . . . enjoying the spring-time and first flower of their youth.” Orpheus’s interest in boys may constitute his metamorphosis: the former devotee of Eurydice now gives his sexual attention to young men. In any case, Orpheus’s poetic ability remains unchanged, and Ovid goes out of his way to stress the continuing art of the “bard of Thrace” even after the possible change in his amorous pursuits.

The remainder of *Metamorphoses* records Orpheus’s songs about “boys beloved by gods” (Ganymede by Jupiter, Hyacinthus by Apollo), “maidens inflamed by unnatural love” (Myrrha’s passion for her father), Pygmalion, who long lived untouched by woman until Venus brought to life his beloved female statue, and others such as Venus and Adonis (10.151–54). The recounting of the Orphean songs that constitute the bulk of *Metamorphoses* is lengthy enough that at times Ovid’s own narrative voice wears through his fictive quotation and merges with Orpheus’s voice. Indeed, a significant parallel exists between the two poets, mythical Orpheus and historical Ovid: both were grief-stricken exiles. And, like Orpheus, Ovid perhaps saw no shame in the love of boys. Whatever Ovid’s own sexual proclivities were, the significant point here is that Orpheus’s supposed metamorphosis into pederastic sodomite has no consequence upon his poetic abilities. After he begins to shun women in *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus continues to be a powerful artist. His subject matter alone changes; he sings of catamites such as Ganymede and Hyacinth. Moreover, Ovid figures Orpheus’s power to inspire
SODOMY'S MARK

in metaphors of fecundity. Having lost Eurydice, the "heaven-descended bard" sits on a grassy hill and generates through his songs a rich grove of trees and vines ripe with fruit (10.85–105).

As Metamorphoses II opens, Ovid continues to stress Orpheus's artistic fertility, reiterating the praise he had earlier offered the fictional poet in the Art of Love. Orpheus's verse draws trees into existence, enthralls beasts, and constrains stones to follow him (II.1–2), his generative powers potent enough to vivify inanimate rocks. It is this very artistic potency, in fact, that undoes Orpheus, for it draws the attention of the "crazed" Ciconian women, who fly into a rage that Apollo's electrifying bard scorns them in love. The women begin their attack on Orpheus as he sings. One throws a spear directly at the "tuneful mouth" of Orpheus to no avail; another casts a stone at him, but the stone is overcome by the "sweet sound of [Orpheus's] voice and lyre" and falls at the bard's feet (II.8–13). These deadly assaults against Orpheus are "harmless" (II.15), for his charmed, regenerative song holds them off. But the Ciconian women grow even more frenzied, and at the height of their "mad fury" they begin to roar and howl and sound discordant horns, drums, and flutes. Their clamorous uproar drowns out the sound of Orpheus's lyre, and finally his art can no longer stave off death: "at last the stones were reddened with the blood of the bard whose voice they could not hear" (II.17–19). The "savage women" (II.36) rush upon Orpheus and beat him to death with hoes, mattocks, and grubbing tools, agricultural implements ironically transformed from fructifying to annihilating ends by their maddened wielders. The women tear the poet to pieces; his limbs are scattered about on the ground, his head is borne by the sea to the shores of Lesbos, where Phoebus (Apollo) appears and saves it from the final calumny of a serpent's jaws.

Ovid concludes the myth of Orpheus by mourning his death and reuniting his shade with Eurydice; he also recounts the revenge taken upon the Thracian women who saw the "impious deed" by Bacchus, who grieves for "the loss of the bard of his sacred rites" (II.68–70). The offending women slowly turn into oak trees, their rough and hardened exterior emblematic of their pitiless treatment of Orpheus. This constitutes the major metamorphosis of the Orpheus episode and points to the narrative's cautionary message: hell hath no fury like the Ciconian women scorned. Ovid impugns neither Orpheus nor his poetic capacities, which remain as fecundating after he shuns the love of women as
before. Indeed, the potency of Orpheus’s generative song serves to measure how crazed the Ciconian women who overcome this art are and helps to establish the antifeminist caveat of this episode.

Although Ovid ascribes to Orpheus a poetic fecundity that, aside from its magical power of charming, appears to imitate heterosexual reproduction, a closer examination of the source of this fertility—Jove via the maternal Muse (“ab love, Musa parens” [10.148])—reveals its untraditional gender configuration, its disorderliness. By virtue of their grammatical gender, the nine Greco-Roman muses were female, and their relationship to the male poets who worshiped at their feet was typically figured in maternal or heterosexually amorous terms. However, in manifesting the creative stimulus for homosexual Orpheus’s pederastic songs in *Metamorphoses* 10, Ovid negotiated a queer mix of masculine and feminine, of Jove and the maternal muse:

> From Jove, O Muse, my mother—for all things yield to the sway of Jove—inspire my song! Oft have I sung the power of Jove before; I have sung the giants in a heavier strain, and the victorious bolts hurled on the Phlegraean plains. But now I need the gentler touch, for I would sing of boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty for their lust. (10.148–54)

Befitting the same-sex unions of “boys beloved by gods” that he is about to narrate, Ovid’s Orpheus himself calls upon a male deity for inspiration. But Orpheus’s requested masculine poetic influence is to be mediated by the maternal muse: “from Jove,” she is to inspire Orpheus’s verse. The bard’s artistic inspiration must be tempered by the Muse’s “gentler touch” to synchronize it with the patriarchal notion of the catamite himself as “gentle”—passive, effeminate.

*Metamorphoses* 10 soon articulates yet another queer poetic as Orpheus sings of the poet Apollo’s love for Hyacinthus. Accidentally striking Hyacinthus with a discus as the boy sported with him, Apollo (Phoebus) takes the dying youth in his arms and promises him immortality of a kind. The boy shall become the instrumental means by which Apollo expresses his grief: “thee shall be my lyre, struck by my hand, thee shall my songs proclaim” (10.205–6). The catamite Hyacinthus is “struck” by Apollo in several senses, literally in his accidental death, metonymically in his passive sexual role with an older man, figuratively
as the musical medium of Apollo's lament. Converting the familiar classical and medieval trope of the writer as male and the text as female, *pagina* likened to *vagina*, Hyacinthus will also assume the feminine role of the leaf upon which Apollo "incribes[s] his grieving words," the flower upon which Apollo draws "the marks, AI, AI, letters of lamentation" (10.215–16). If homosexual verse is as fecund as heterosexual art in Ovid, its poetic restages patriarchal views of male same-sex love as the union of active and passive, agent and instrument, man and boy. The catamite is not simply feminized but "effeminized," made effeminate, womanish; that is, he does not merely take on conventional female attributes or behaviors, but does so for the express purpose of becoming the object of male passion.

**Re-membering Orpheus in Jean's Romance**

However patriarchal Ovid's view of a homosexual poetic was, he apparently saw no embarrassing conflict between art and pederasty. Yet medieval writers did, according to Kevin Brownlee, who contends that both Alan and Jean cordoned off Orpheus's identity as pederast from his identity as poet. In the *Plaint*, Brownlee elaborates, Orpheus is mentioned twice, "once as homosexual (VIII, 54f.), then as poet (XII, 102)"; furthermore, in the *Romance*, Jean's "characterization of [the homosexual] Orpheus . . . is such as to exclude the *vates* component of his identity," which identity, Brownlee concludes, Jean appropriates for himself. But closer examination discloses that the separation between Orpheus the pervert and Orpheus the poet is far from absolute in either the *Plaint* or the *Romance*.

In the *Plaint*, Nature opens her indictment of humankind's perverse sexuality in prose 4 by contrasting her own song, which consists of "modulated strains," with the disordered "notes of mad Orpheus's lyre" (133). Man alone, Nature laments, "turns with scorn" from her cithern to "run deranged" to his. Man prefers mad Orpheus's art to hers, Nature immediately adds, because "the human race, fallen from its high estate, adopts a highly irregular (grammatical) change when it inverts the rules of Venus by introducing barbarisms into its arrangement of genders" (ibid.). In other words, sexually perverse humankind chooses unnatural over natural art, the homosexual Orpheus's lyre over Nature's. To be sure,
Ovid's Orpheus is a pederast for a time, although Ovid never describes him as "mad." Alan's Nature displaces Ovid's characterization of the crazed Ciconian women who dismember Orpheus onto Orpheus himself. But just as Ovid’s pederast is also a bard, so too is the "homosexual" Orpheus of Alan's Nature in prose 4 also an artist, albeit one who inspires deranged response. Orpheus is not simply "the homosexual" whose other identity as poet has been cordoned off, as Brownlee suggests.

Nor, when Nature mentions Orpheus for a second time in the _Plaint_ (prose 6), is he exclusively the poet, fully shorn of his "homosexual" identity. Describing the power of avarice, Nature observes that if "money whispers in the judge's ear," its voice would stifle even "the lyre of Orpheus, the song of Amphion, the muse of Vergil" (176). If anything, Alan's Nature alludes here to the stifling of Orpheus's song by the Ciconian women in _Metamorphoses_ 11, which in turn recalls why these women so hated the bard: he shunned heterosexual love.

This same commingling of poetry and perversion in the two appearances of Orpheus in the _Plaint_ saturates the sole representation of Orpheus in the _Romance_ by Genius. In his sermon, as he works himself up to pronouncing the sentence of castration on all those who practice the "dirty, horrible sin" of sodomy, of not plowing "straight" (324), Genius characterizes all those who "do not write with their styluses . . . on the beautiful precious tablets that Nature did not prepare for them to leave idle," those "who receive two hammers and do not forge with them as they justly should on the straight anvil," and those who "go off to plow in desert land where their seeding goes to waste" as followers of Orpheus (ibid.). Orpheus, Genius then explains in a brief aside, "did not know how to plow or write or forge in the true forge"; "may he be hanged by the throat," Genius imprecates (ibid.). As the exemplar to those who misapply—rather than fail to use—their styluses, hammers, and plows, Genius's Orpheus cannot help but recall Ovid's lover of boys. In turn, Genius's allusion to Ovid's pederast in the context of metaphors of inscription ironically reinvokes Ovid's bard, the poet Ovid has made inseparable from the pervert.

In the larger sense, Genius's hapless reference to Orpheus muddies his attempt in the _Romance_ to clarify the logic of Alan's Nature. As Genius argued in correction of Alan's Nature at the beginning of his sermon, the evil of sodomy is that it "fails to make a mark that shows," just as plowing in deserts is a nonproductive waste of seed. Homosexual Orpheus's writing, however, did indeed make a mark, and when Genius invokes
this Ovidian figure later in his sermon, he unwittingly joins the ranks of those in Alan’s *Plaint* who promote disorderly fertility. Even so vigilant a scourge of nonprocreative sexuality as Jean’s Genius cannot, it seems, sever the ancient connection of poetry and pederasty, of creative fertility and homosexuality. The Ciconian women sought to dismember the sodomite Orpheus, yet Ovid prevailed by re-membering his pervert-poet for ages to come. And Genius’s wish to castrate perverse writers like Orpheus—“may their styluses be taken away from them” (324)—not only recalls but empowers Ovid’s bard by reminding us that homosexual Orpheus made a lasting mark indeed.

**Genderizing Passivity and the Medieval Theory of Authorship**

Nature’s intertwining of grammar and perversity in Alan’s *Plaint* and the eleventh-hour failure of Jean’s Genius to rectify Nature’s error point to the irruption of the ancient connection between verbal creation and homosexual sodomy in the high Middle Ages. Ovid’s figures of Orpheus and Apollo specifically associate the poet with the pederast, troping the male lover of boys as artistically fertile. More commonly, however, the earlier medieval (male) poet had been figured as the *scop* (shaper). This trope encodes the message that the poet is an active force that works upon passive material. So too, of course, does Ovid’s queer poetic in *Metamorphoses* to present an agent at work upon a passive recipient: Apollo strikes his beloved Hyacinth as a lyre and later inscribes his grief upon the leaves of the metamorphosed youth, and after Orpheus becomes the pederastic lover (penetrator) of boys he “[smites] his sounding lyre” (10.89) and produces a verdant grove of vines and trees, including Cyparissus (cypress), another catamite of Apollo.

As I shall briefly explore in the remainder of this essay, the more common earlier medieval figura of *scop* shares with Ovid’s queer poetic the underlying concept that the poet is the active force “at work” upon the passive partner or material. Orpheus penetrates and Apollo strikes just as the *scop* forges, hammers, or otherwise shapes. But the defining difference between the two paradigms is the degree to which they disclose the gender of the figural recipient of the poet’s agency: Orpheus’s and Apollo’s passive erotic partners are clearly male, whereas the *scop* hammers on an anvil of unspecified gender. As Alan’s *Plaint* evidences,
anvils could be troped as either female or male, proper or improper. What I suggest in closing is that the emergence of the so-called Aristotelian prologue in the thirteenth century, which coincides with the flourishing of heterosexual courtly poetry, uses a new discourse that legislates what remains at most implicit in the figure of the scop: the gender of the receptive party is female. The Aristotelian prologue works to rewrite the trope of scop in scientific and securely heterosexualized terms, thus differentiating it from and buttressing it against the ancient same-sex poetic that disrupts Alan's _Plaint_ and Jean's _Romance_. Based on Aristotle, what Minnis terms the "medieval theory of authorship" began to appear in the early thirteenth century. Minnis explains that at this time Western scholars consistently began to adopt the discourse of Aristotelian causality to think and talk about literature:

The 'Aristotelian prologue' was based on the four major causes which, according to Aristotle, governed all activity and change in the universe. Hence, the _auctour_ would be discussed as the 'efficient cause' or motivating agent of the text, his materials would be discussed as the 'material cause,' his literary style and structure would be considered as twin aspects of the 'formal cause,' while his ultimate end or objective in writing would be considered as the 'final cause.'

More germane here than Minnis's claim that the new Aristotelian prologue of the thirteenth century shifted attention to human authority is that this approach heterosexualized the dynamics of literary creativity. Whether in scientific or philosophical terms, Aristotelian causality was always already a heterosexualized phenomenon: both Aristotle and his medieval followers restricted _causa efficiens_ to masculine agency, and this agency (be it male sperm or male author) shaped a passive _causa materialis_, by definition female (the _menses_ or literary matter).

Although Aristotle articulated his theory of the four causes that govern all change and activity most fully in the _Metaphysics_ and the _Physics_, he commonly discussed causality in terms of heterosexual reproduction. In the _Metaphysics_, for instance, Aristotle defines (efficient) "cause" as "the source of the first beginning of change or rest, e.g. the man who plans is a cause, and the father is the cause of the child"; in the _Physics_, he offers the "fertilizing [i.e., male] sperm" as an example of the primary or efficient agent. And in the _Generation of Animals_, Aristotle squarely
aligned the four causes on a biologically heterosexual axis: male sperm, the "active and efficient" cause, quickens and shapes passive female menses, the material cause, into the foetus. He immediately analogizes male sperm to the carpenter and female menses to the wood that the carpenter acts upon to craft his product, his metaphoric offspring.

This new scientific approach to medieval authorship raises at least a few tantalizing questions. Was it the explicitly heterosexualized as well as masculinized dynamic of Aristotelian causality that made it attractive to scholastic literary theoreticians? Did this so-called theory of authorship enable academic literary critics to counter disturbing paradigms of the verbal artisan in which male hammers go astray and strike male materia, hic with hic, as Alan's Plaint so fears? By linking the auctour to the biological father via Aristotelian causality, thereby necessitating the gendering of the material cause as female, did the medieval theory of authorship attempt to succeed where both Alan of Lille and Jean de Meun failed by modeling a tangle-proof case against the validity of the ancient perverse poetic and its unruly same-sex fertility?

Further questions arise from the fact that the heterosexualized Aristotelian theory of authorship displaced, although never fully replaced, the problematic humanist prologue of the twelfth century, which figured the human author of sacred texts not as active, but as passive, not as productive, but as receptive. Founded on the notion of man as God's instrument, reminiscent of the catamite Hyacinthus's instrumentality in Ovid, this queer literary agency developed where one might least expect to find it: in the so-called humanist school of Christian scriptural exegesis that flourished at Chartres and elsewhere. As Beryl Smalley observes, the Bible was the "most studied book of the Middle Ages," and in the earlier high Middle Ages of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the prevailing allegorical mode of scriptural interpretation stressed divine rather than human agency in the creation of the Bible.

The allegorists did ascribe to (male) human beings a role in writing the Bible, of course, but it was a secondary, effeminate or "queer" one: passive, receptive, transcriptional, instrumental. Man was the scribe to whom the auctour, God, dictated the text, or, as Saint Gregory had earlier figured it in his commentary on Job, he was merely the pen itself with which a great man writes a letter. The Christian God replaced the Muses or Jove. Medieval visual artists typically represent the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, seated outdoors with pen and parch-
ment, gazing upward to receive (and transcribe) inspiration from on high. This oxymoronic stance of passive literary agency was precisely the role medieval women writers seized upon as defensive cover for their literary activity. From Hildegard von Bingen in the twelfth century through the later Middle Ages, women writers, especially visionary ones, likened themselves to the passive recipients and reproducers of God-authored texts. The feminized model of literary activity women used to authorize themselves proved a successful strategy, but when appealed to by men, even holy men, or applied to them, it was potentially transgressive, for it tinged them with the aura of effeminate receptors of same-sex motivation. The Christian God may have replaced the Muses, but in terms of sex, he became the equivalent of Zeus, to whom homosexual Orpheus directed his plea in Ovid.

Minnis argues that the Aristotelian literary prologue developed in the early thirteenth century because Aristotle's major accounts of causality were contained in works that made their way into the university curriculum at this time, the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Yet, as I have suggested, it may not have been simply the new availability of Aristotle's theory of causality that moved its accommodation to literary theory, but an apparent need to make explicit and to validate the heterosexual paradigm of literary creation in the face of competing—and irrepressible—same-sex models that surface in such works as Alan's *Plaint* and Jean's *Roman* and that bear perhaps an all too obvious resemblance to the concept of human authorship in twelfth-century exegetical reading of the Bible. These and other implications of "sodomy's mark" create a fertile field indeed for a new exploration of medieval poetics.

**A Millennial Postscript**

The material that I have discussed in this essay prompts consideration of responses to the prominence of homosexuality in the later twentieth century. Cultural authorities in the place and period examined in this essay, western Europe of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, grappled with the irruption of literature written more than a thousand years earlier that often presented unruly sexuality and its accompanying unconventional gender roles in a benign, sometimes positive, light. A pervasive medieval response was denial. Allegorizers attempted to rationalize dis-
turbing ancient narratives such as Orpheus's invention of boy love as man's appropriate love for manly things. Latin's grammatical gender, especially when it mandated that a valorized thing or concept was female, presented a more difficult conundrum to the medieval mind and evoked different responses, one of which I explored: the tool-wielding female natura was not normalized, but derogated as morally unreliable, a campaign that Alan begins and Jean escalates. The resort to (pseudo)science that occurs in the rise of the Aristotelian or scholastic literary prologue registers yet a different response to what John Boswell calls the "flourishing of gay culture" in the high Middle Ages. Rather than deny or defame same-sex love, the scholastic prologue defends heterosexuality by privileging it as the sole paradigm of creativity.

It would be tempting to argue that medieval attempts to buttress heterosexuality, to draw the wagons 'round, forecast the triumph of a classically inspired toleration of homosexuality in the Renaissance. But many readers of this essay will recognize repetitions of these earlier responses to literary homosexuality in the lives we led at the end of the millennium that Alan and Jean began. Like Orpheus's queer sexuality, ours has been deemed impossible and rendered invisible. Or, like Nature, we have witnessed overt hate campaigns designed to impugn our moral authority. And, most recently, we see massive efforts to privilege heterosexuality through the promotion of concepts that encode it—family values, for instance. As the new millennium opens, we must not fail to recognize the recent flourishing of gay and lesbian culture, nor fail to interrogate its security in light of the past.

Notes

1. Later in the Plaint, Alan expands his definition of sodomy to include heterosexual adultery, but his opening salvo in meter 1 takes aim at male-male sexual intercourse. Mark D. Jordan, The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 80–81, observes that Alan's Nature never uses the term "sodomy" (sodomia) in the Plaint. But Jordan notes that some medieval readers employed the term sodomy in reference to the Plaint (81n.68). All subsequent quotations of Jordan's Invention are cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

2. Alan of Lille: The Plaint of Nature, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 67–68. All subsequent quotations of this translation are cited parenthetically by page number in the text. In instances where the original wording is critical to my argument, I cite in my notes the Latin passage with page number and line


4. “Cudit in incude que semina nulla monetat. / Horret et incudem malleus ipse suam” (807, ll. 27–28).

5. “Nullam materiem matricis signat idea / Sed magis in sterili litore uomer arat” (807, ll. 29–30).


9. Steven F. Kruger, “Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale,” *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 127–28, describes what should logically be the consequence of linguistic perversion for Alan but, I argue, is not: “The barrenness of perverse sexuality, and particularly homosexual activity, is affiliated with a linguistic barrenness, with the inability to produce the ‘fruyt’ of meaning, and with an unproductive entrapment in the ‘chaff’ of ungrammatical, nonsensical language.”

10. “qui forme florern in uicia efflorendo deflorant” (835, ll. 66–67). Although Alan does widen his critique of sexual perversions in the middle of the *Plaint* to include heterosexual sodomy—for example, adultery, the progeny of which is logical but unlawful—at this point in the poem he is referring to same-sex (male) sodomy, for example, “barbarisms” in the arrangement of genders (133).

11. “et si qua praui seminis herba in horto rue mentis audeat pullulare, fake mature sectionis extirpes” (850, ll. 182–83). That is, Alan would have to say that the errant hammer, plow, and stamp produce distorted products to parallel his grammatical argument that perverse verbal copulation issues “literary monsters,” but Alan does not ascribe any progeny to hammers, plows, and stamps that miscouple.


13. That is, Alan would have to say that the errant hammer, plow, and stamp produce distorted products to parallel his grammatical argument that perverse verbal copulation issues “literary monsters,” but Alan does not ascribe any progeny to hammers, plows, and stamps that miscouple.

the “filth of immorality and weak language by depicting its unclean figures as unintelligible, unable to communicate” (102). In particular, the Sodomites “deny words their power to mean. . . . The Sodomites’ words do not carry significance, as do signs in an ordered semiotic system; they become a bestial braying which means nothing” (102; my emphasis). At the same time, however, Cleanness snarls its charge of nonfecundity against the unclean language of the Sodomites and Babylonians by claiming, in Potkay’s paraphrase, that their “filthy language can be just as efficacious as clean speech, but what it effects is sin” (103; my emphasis).


17. Ziolkowski, Alan of Lille’s Grammar of Sex, 36.


19. Ziolkowski, Alan of Lille’s Grammar of Sex, 17. Vance, Marvelous Signs, 245, repeats the point: the later scholastics saw metaphor, a trope or turning of verbal signs from their proper to improper signification, as an act of “improper supposition,” but they distinguished between “good” metaphors (those that lead to the truth) and “bad” metaphors (those that leave one barren of the truth). The latter tropes are “vicious.”

20. Cf. Leupin, Barbarolexis, 67: “the reader might easily believe that sodomic falsigraphy is no more than the avatar of what ancient rhetorical theory had long before termed poetic license. The principal figures of poetic license are all defects that Alan attributes to sodomic writing—metaphasms, barbarisms, linguistic vice and such. And true to fact, those vitia that condemn the mediocre poet are interpreted merely as so many signs of the master’s genius. . . . But the difference here is that the falsigraphic poet, far from deploring his improper (vitiosus) use of the language, revels in it.”


25. Ibid., 236–37 and 240n.31.


27. Jane Chance Nitzsche, The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 101, notes Genius’s return to the sins that both the narrator and Nature mentioned at the opening of the Plaint.

28. “Qui a regula Veneris excceptionem facit anomalam” (878, l. 150).

29. Cf. Nitzsche, Genius Figure, 109–14, who finds Genius’s roles as poet and priest or philosopher complementary, whereas I read Genius’s change of garb and medium (writing to speaking) as indicating a split in his function.


33. Cf. Denise N. Baker, “The Priesthood of Genius: A Study of the Medieval Tradition,” *Speculum* 51 (1976): 284, who argues that the authority of Nature in the *Roman* is “radically diminished.” Keiser, *Courtly Desire*, 131–32, takes Nature's relative silence on same-sex relations as evidence that the *Roman* articulates a lower level of homophobia than does the *Plaint*, whereas I shall argue that Jean’s Genius reserves to himself the all-important task of condemning same-sex relations.

34. “et pareceus et sodomites” (3.77; l. 19204).

35. Douglas Kelly, *Internal Difference and Meanings in the “Roman de la Rose”* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 113, observes that the only sexual vice Nature names, sodomy, is polyvalent, and includes homosexuality, virginity, and so on. As I argue later, however, Genius’s reference to Orpheus associates Jean’s scriptive metaphor for sodomy specifically with homosexuality.


37. “por escrivre letre / ne por fere anprainte qui pere” (3.87, l. 19534–35).

38. Jean’s Genius aims his diatribe not only at perverse sexuality but at celibacy. He condemns both those who will not wield the plow, pen, hammer and those who plow and forge incorrectly, that is, those who pervasively “plow in the desert land” (324) and who do not forge “as they justly should on the straight anvil” (323). He cautiously skirts direct mention of incorrect writing through ambiguity: “May their styluses be taken away from them when they have not wished to write within the precious tablets that were suitable for them” (324) (“Li greffe leur saient tolu, / quant escrivre n’ont volu / dedanz les pre- cieuse / qui leur estoient convenables!” 3.90, l. 19643–45).


40. Rolfe Humphries, trans., *Ovid: The Art of Love* (Bloomington: Indiana University
SODOMY'S MARK

Press, 1957), 162. Subsequent quotations of this translation are cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

41. Leonard Barkan, Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 43–44, discusses different kinds of verbal transumption: "It may be defined as a movement across tropes, sometimes understood as, let us say, from trope A to trope B; or else, as a movement across from trope A to trope C while suppressing the semantically necessary trope B. . . . In all instances, there is a rhetorical sleight of hand, a kind of bathos, a momentary sinking out of sight of the normal chain of signification or of filiation; when meaning re-emerges, it has been transformed.”

42. Frank Justus Miller, trans., Ovid: Metamorphoses, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (1916; repr. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), book 10, ll. 80–85. All subsequent quotations of this translation are cited parenthetically by book and line number in the text. I also cite the original Latin from this translation parenthetically by book and line number.

John Block Friedman, Orpheus in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 8–10, recounts alternative endings to the Orpheus legend in classical poetry and asserts that Orpheus’s homosexuality is not "central" to it, although my point here is that Genius’s reference to Orpheus the poet in the context of metaphors of writing and a diatribe against sodomy calls to mind Ovid’s pederastic bard.

43. I stress Orpheus’s possible metamorphosis from lover of women to lover of boys because Ovid does not specify that Orpheus is exclusively heterosexual before his loss of Eurydice.

44. Michael A. Calabrese, “‘Make a Mark That Shows’: Orphean Song, Orphean Sexuality, and the Exile of Chaucer’s Pardoner,” Viator 24 (1993): 282–83n.47, argues that “a discourse concerning sodomy does surround Ovid’s poetry, his life, and in an oblique way, the causes of his exile,” even if medieval commentators sought to dissociate Ovid from sodomy. Indeed, the extensive medieval attempts to sanitize Ovidian verse via allegorical readings bespeak considerable anxiety about Ovid’s reputation. Ralph J. Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid’s Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum (Munich: Bei der Arbeo-Gesellschaft, 1986), 74–75, cites a medieval commentator’s (doomed) attempt “to clear Ovid of the suspicion of homosexuality.”

45. Calabrese, “‘Make A Mark That Shows,’” 274, maintains that Orpheus’s “metamorphosis,” presumably into pederast, weakens his art, which then fails to withstand the Ciconian women’s assault. My reading differs substantially: the cause of Orpheus’s death is not his “homosexual exile” but female fury—that is, Ovid’s antifeminism.

46. “ipse suus gemitus foliis inscribit, et AI AI / flos habet inscriptum, funestaque littera ducta est.”

47. Brownlee, “Orpheus’ Song Re-sung,” 207. Calabrese, “‘Make a Mark That Shows,’” holds much the same view.

48. “[Orpheus] ne sot arer ne escrivre / ne forgier en la droite forge” (3.89–90, ll. 19622–23).

49. Orpheus does not, of course, write in the Metamorphoses but sings. When Jean’s Genius refers to Orpheus as a writer, he reflects the fact that Orpheus’s verse manifested
itself in written form to Ovid's medieval readers.

50. Kelly, Internal Difference, 132–43, suggests that Reason rather than Genius has the “last word” in the Romance, although Kelly concedes that Reason has limitations. Even so, my point here is that Jean’s Reason does not successfully rewrite Alan’s Nature either.


52. Ibid., 5.


55. Anthony Preus, “Science and Philosophy in Aristotle’s Generation of Animals,” Journal of the History of Biology 3 (1970): 8n.11, terms Aristotle’s notion that the menses is female sperm one of the more famous yet understandable of his “wrong guesses.” Preus also notes that Aristotle recognized cases of parthenogenesis, but only in plants, certain insects, and fish.


59. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship, 29. Aristotle’s theory of causality had earlier been partially available through Cicero’s Topics and in Boethius’s commentary on Cicero.

60. I pursue these implications more fully in my larger project on queer medieval poetics.
THE POSE OF THE QUEER

DANTE’S GAZE, BRUNETTO LATINI’S BODY

MICHAEL CAMILLE

Così adocchiato da cotal famiglia,
    fui conosciuto da un, che mi prese
per lo lembo e gridò: “Qual maraviglia!”
E io, quando ’l suo braccio a me distese,
    ficcâi li occhi per lo cotto aspetto,
si che ’l viso abbrusciato non difese
la conoscenza súa al mio ’ntelletto;
e chinando la mano a la sua faccia,
rispuosi: “Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?” (15.22–30)

Eyed thus by that company, I was recognized by one who
took me by the hem, and cried, “What a marvel!” And I,
when he reached out his arm to me, fixed my eyes on his
 scorched face, so that the baked features did not prevent
my knowing him, and reaching down my hand toward his
face, I answered, “Are you here, ser Brunetto?”

This moment of profound, human recognition in the Divine Comedy,
when Dante is confronted on the burning plain of the seventh circle of
Hell by his old friend and teacher, Brunetto Latini, has never been so
evocatively, nor so daringly, visualized as in the lower margins of an
early fourteenth-century manuscript in the Musée Condé, Chantilly.
There he stands, the first “flaming queen” in medieval art and the most (in)famous sodomite in all of medieval literature, his figure posed prominently on the slightly curving parchment, his right arm raised to address Dante and Virgil. His left hand, even more audaciously it might seem to us, is poised perfectly on his wide hip. Elegant but naked, his body is quite unlike those of his scorched fellow sodomites, doomed to their eternal run over the burning sands on the right. Our eyes come to rest where the left-hand verso and right-hand recto page meet, and where the two great Florentines come together across the great divide of death. For the artist of this miniature, as for Dante himself, the problem was renegotiating the relationship between two men in the space of Hell. The problem for me as a twenty-first-century sodomite and scholar of the Middle Ages is that, even though I do not believe in Hell, I cannot help but see myself, metaphorically at least, fully implicated in Brunetto’s position, even if only in the eyes of (some) others. I cannot incorporate Brunetto as Carolyn Dinshaw does Chaucer’s queer Pardoner, who “still walks by the side of the other pilgrims ... his person an unwelcome but insistent reminder—get used to it—of heterosexual incompleteness.”

Brunetto is clearly separated as other, and is unable, in the text and on this page, to walk side by side with Dante, who most commentators argue, is scandalized and horrified to find his old teacher here. The most significant eyes in this picture are those of Dante himself, which, in direct contra-
diction to the text, are not fixed on Brunetto’s “scorched face” (15.26) but look down, aghast. It is only later in the canto as, on their different levels, they talk and walk together that Dante lowers his head “like one who walks in reverence” (15.45). How do we account for this strangely oblique look here, this shift of Dante’s gaze from Brunetto’s face to his body? And what is the meaning of the latter’s pose, so redolent of queer codes and corporealities in the contemporary gay imaginary, for medieval viewers of this manuscript and readers of Dante’s poem?

**The Body’s Erasure**

My urge to ask these questions needs to be placed in the context of a long tradition of Dante scholarship that has erased the body from the text as violently and as consciously as that which has been physically obliterated from the parchment in a miniature of this same scene in a contemporary Paduan manuscript of the *Inferno* in the British Library. In medieval miniatures this tends to be the fate of devils, demons, naked women, idols, and other images that, even on this small scale, were thought to possess the malefic “evil eye.” This is the first instance I have found of the feared image of the sodomite scratched out by some subsequent reader, in anger or in fear of its power as an image. Senator Jesse Helms has argued that a photograph of two men in leather jackets kissing encourages viewers to become homosexual. The medievals were more sophisticated, believing that, although contagion can pass through the visual rays and cause, for example, a woman who looks at a picture of a Moor to give birth to a black baby, it did not create an identity but merely encouraged simulation. Whether someone destroyed only Brunetto’s figure here from the same fear of the contagious gaze of the sodomite, it is hard to know.

There are other ways of visually effacing the power of images, however, which have happened in the more recent history of the Chantilly “portrait” of Brunetto. In Raymond de Becker’s pioneering 1964 anthology of the iconography of homosexuality, *The Other Face of Love*, only the lower part of the right hand, recto page is reproduced. The caption says, “Priests damned,” leaving the figure of Brunetto on the left unidentified. In a book supposedly about the homosexual body in art, this splicing away of the facing page, of Virgil and Dante as beholders, emphasizes
the sodomite, only to negate him, leaving him talking to nobody. Yet this is exactly how this enigmatic figure has been presented in the vast exegetical literature on the Divine Comedy, not from Dante’s viewpoint, but from that of the modern reader, a tradition we must briefly trace before we can begin to understand this drawing in relation to both the text and commentary of Inferno 15 and the peculiar pose of Brunetto within it.

Most modern dantisti, as Dante scholars like to call themselves, will no doubt be spending eternity in the circle of the textual fetishists, were there such a circle in the poet’s Hell—since most exegetes of the Divine Comedy seem intent on rubbing up against the text as if there were nothing else between its printed lines and their pressing desire for meaning, certainly nothing as corporeal as flesh. What is often forgotten, and what this essay will try to remember, is that writing (and reading) in the Middle Ages could not escape the flesh since it took place on flesh (the parchment surface of manuscript pages). Compared to its disembodied mediation in the neatly printed modern edition, the medieval manuscript was almost prosthetic in its extension and incorporation of the
body. If the philological approach to "textuality" has erased the corporeal aspect from reading the *Divine Comedy*, it has done so most blatantly in the exclusion of a particular group of highly charged and coded bodies—those of the sodomites in *Inferno* 15 and 16 in general, and of Brunetto Latini in particular. Almost all commentators either avoid the subject of sodomy altogether, or rewrite it in purely textual, scholastic terms, as a more general "sin against nature." When Virgil outlines the plan of their journey through Hell in canto 11, he mentions sodomy, along with blasphemy and usury, as sins against God, sodomy doing its violence by "despising Nature" (*spregiando natura*, 11.48), which is God's "art."

Although a richly documented early study, published in the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* in 1906, was titled "Die Homosexuellen in Dantes Göttlicher Komödie," association of the modern notion and especially the term *homosexuality* with Dante's sodomites was later questioned. This was not because of historicist claims about such sexual categories being modern (more specifically, late-nineteenth-century constructions of the kind that were later to be put forward by Foucault and others), but because scholars were scandalized by the very thought, the possibility, that the boy Dante might have had a body, his teacher Brunetto Latini might have had a body, and that these two bodies might have performed more than grammatical exercises. Despite the fact that the early commentators clearly see the sodomy of canto 15 in explicitly physical terms (Boccaccio, for instance, discussed how easy it was for "young" and "timorous" students to "obey both the proper and improper demands of their teachers"), modern exegetes have spent half a century trying to exonerate Brunetto Latini from this scandal. The first major revisionist critic, André Pézard (1950), noted that although medieval readers saw sodomy as a lesser sin than blasphemy, modern readers find it "more shameful, infamous, horrifying, and scandalous." This abhorrence is beside the point, since he goes on to argue that Brunetto's sin was not of the shameful contemporary type, but the "spiritual sodomy" of "extolling a foreign language at the expense of his mother tongue," the fact that Brunetto wrote his famous poem, the *Tresor*, in French rather than Italian. Richard Kay (1978) has suggested that Brunetto's sin against nature was his "failure to recognize the political supremacy of the empire" in being a Guelph leader. Since these two influential studies, a host of "sins" have been attributed to Dante's teacher in the scholarly literature, all of which exclude the particular kind of sodomy referred to as the sin
of coitus masculorum (anal intercourse) as defined by Thomas Aquinas in his Summa theologiae. Instead, his sin was being a member of a heretical sect called the Paterines (Armour 1983), having a “lust for fame” (Culbertson 1983), being a “proto-humanist” (Musseter 1984), perverting not human bodies but “verbal signs” (Vance 1986), and being a poet of carnal, rather than philosophical, love (Costa 1989). Peter Armour claims that Inferno 15 “entirely ignores the subject of ‘unnatural’ sexuality,” in an argument that is worth quoting in full:

[T]here is not a scrap of independent evidence that Brunetto Latini, Priscian, Francesco d’Accorso, or Andrea de’ Mozzi were sinners in this sense. Of course, if one interpolates an exclusively homosexual definition to the sin of Sodom from canto XI, one can find hidden references to it ad libitum: to gay Flemish sailors, Paduans, and tailors; to those who cruise the dark streets by night; to Dante himself, moving his hand towards Brunetto’s face and to Brunetto plucking Dante’s robe, and thus perhaps to some unknown incident when the older man made improper advances to the younger; to the temptations to pederasty which beset grammar-teachers; and to the phallic interpretation of the tigna’s “mal protesi nervi” (114). If one approaches the canto entirely without this prejudice and aware that in the Bible and in Dante’s time the sin of Sodom had much wider applications and associations, then these a priori suppositions begin to dissolve as extra-textual fantasies. 10

As Jonathan Dollimore has observed of this tendency to write sodomy out of early modern, rather than medieval texts, “the disavowals are now as much a part of the history of homosexuality’s actual absence as well of its presence, overt or repressed.” 11 Only Bruce W. Holsinger has recently attempted to take seriously “Dante’s own entanglement in this sodomitical web” and has argued that Dante’s scandalized surprise at his teacher’s punishment should be read “not as condemnatory, but as defensive, as the poet’s anxious attempt to distance himself from his master’s sodomitical desires.” 12 In this essay, I am interested not in separation but in identification, not in difference but in likeness and the peculiarly perverse dynamics that arise once we look at Dante’s Hell as a visual field and not a purely textual one.
In the premodern period, as Alan Bray and Jonathan Goldberg have shown, sodomy did indeed have a wider semantic range than it does today, including anything outside procreative married sex—fellatio, masturbation, and bestiality, in addition to anal sex, and, by extension, heresy and political treason. But there is, at the same time, a growing body of evidence that the “persecuting society” of the thirteenth century, with its scholastic summae of sins, increasingly identified the biblical sin of Sodom with same-sex intercourse. This was true not only of theologians but also of medical theorists such as the Italian Peter of Abano, who, at the turn of the fourteenth century, distinguished between a “natural” and an “unnatural” form of the vice. Men whose irregularities of the anal passageway inclined them to have intercourse with men are not called sodomites, but those who have no physical defects and who perform the same acts are described as “damned by the polluted sodomitical vice.” With the help of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Peter conceptualizes sodomy as a form of perverse social behavior rather than essential identity. As Janet E. Halley has argued in her analysis of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the law “can be deployed, even in the same text, to target bad acts and/or bad persons.” Ironically, this was the view expressed by Brunetto himself, who, in his *Tresor*, describes the desire of males to have sex with other males (“gesir avec les malles”) as dishonorable.

Denial works for some modern gay and lesbian scholars, too, when writing about the Brunetto episode. David Greenberg, in his *The Social Construction of Homosexuality* (1988), citing Pezard and Kay, admits that “like others of his age, Dante often uses the term sodomy very loosely,” and for Michael Goodich in *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (1979), “no other source links these figures with sodomy.” But the debate is not whether Dante was engaged in some kind of “outing” of contemporary eminences, or whether the anachronistic concept of the “sexual identity” of these men can be proven. The issue surely is not whether or not Brunetto was a practicing homosexual, as understood either in our, or in his own, society’s terms. The historical fact that he fathered children, gleefully repeated by all the revisionists (as if, like the plea “But I’m married!” it proved their case!) has no relevance either. What is important is both Dante’s representation of Brunetto’s “sinning against nature” within the poem and what such acts meant outside it, in society. Crucial for my concerns is whether the illuminator of the Chantilly manuscript depicted Dante’s teacher
with a specifically coded body, a sodomitical body as understood in northern Italy in the third decade of the fourteenth century.

**The Body’s Margins**

The body we are interested in does not actually appear in a manuscript of Dante’s *Inferno*, but in one of the earliest commentaries written on the poem, by Fra Guido da Pisa, between 1327 and 1328. The Chantilly manuscript is the luxurious presentation copy of his text, containing fifty-four tinted drawings, mostly in the lower margins. This laborious line-by-line Latin exegesis was dedicated to Lucano Spinola, a Genoese nobleman who is depicted along with his horse and squire in the lower margin of the first page of commentary on folio 31r. For the Carmelite Friar Fra Guido, who writes that devotion to “you, Lucano Spinola . . . moves me to expound for you, to the best of my ability, every deep meaning of the lofty *Commedia*,” at least one thing is clear: this canto is about “the sin of sodomy,” “de peccato sodomie,” which stains both lay and clerical groups—“peccato clerici et layci maculantur.” He opens the *Expositio lictere* or literal exposition of the text, which is directly above the marginal scene on folio 112v, with the statement that this canto represents the author’s treatment “de abominabili scelere sodomorum”—“of the abominable sin of the sodomites,” especially as it refers to the clerical order, among whom this vice is most rife. In this particular commentary, written only decades after Dante’s death, sodomy is part of the “deep meaning” of the visual as well as the verbal register. Among the fifty-three illuminated copies of Dante’s work, the miniatures in the Chantilly manuscript, by a Tuscan artist and his assistants, are the most eloquent and subtle in their evocation of the text.

Guido’s commentary begins by quoting the first line of the canto “Ora cen porta l’un de’ duri margini” (“Now one of the hard margins bears us on,” 15.1). This refers not to the margins of the page but the physical terrain over which Dante and his guide move. The *margini* are the stream’s raised embankments, which not only allow Dante safe passage across the burning sand but allow him the vantage point to look down on the suffering souls below, although the famous simile comparing these banks to barriers built against flood tides suggests that the distance is not great. In the marginal image, the artist has suggested the
separation of this barrier from the red stream on which Brunetto stands by the tiniest of gaps. Although this represents the separation of Dante on the stone bank from the burning sand that keeps the sodomites in perpetual movement, it is the only place in the series of marginal illustrations running along the bottom borders of this book where Dante is separated from the object of his gaze. Only here has the artist separated the seer and the seen. The fold in the parchment, the inner crease separating them, puts an actual physical barrier, not a painted one, between the living and the dead (Dante’s teacher, some fifty years his elder, had passed away six years before the poem was written).

The lack of distance between them, the fact that the bank is not raised above the burning sand but is on a level with it, as well as the disjunction between Dante’s downward gaze and Brunetto’s, might at first be explained in terms of the mundane mechanics of medieval book production. When books like this were put together, the illuminator would have added this marginal image to the two-column text before the volume was bound. This meant that the two halves of the composition, Dante and Virgil as viewers on the verso and Brunetto and the sodomites on the facing recto, were probably produced independently of each other, or at least they were not brought together as we see them now until the very last stages of the volume’s preparation. When the artist painted Dante’s downward glance, he may have conceived of the facing figure being much lower, as described in the text. Millard Meiss, the art historian who has studied the fifty-four illustrations in the Chantilly manuscript most carefully, attributed them to two or three artists and, because of the practice of painting books when still unbound, believed that in some instances, what we see across an opening today was actually the work of two different individuals: “where the two poets appear only as spectators they were painted by a less vigorous hand than the unique scene at which they look.” In this instance, however, Dante’s gaze and Brunetto Latini’s body were painted separately, but surely by the same artist. This suggests that, rather than being an error in composing the two facing scenes, the equal confrontation of Dante and his teacher was preplanned and is indeed crucial to the interpretation of the scene.

Dante often used metaphors that involve the manuscript matrix itself—the turning pages “bound by love in one single volume” (Paradiso 33.86), the difference between the manuscript’s hair-side and flesh-side likened to the markings of the moon (Paradiso 15.50–51), and, most well
known, the “smiling pages” illuminated by Franco of Bologna (Purgatorio ii.82–83). His term for book is usually volume, sometimes libro or libello, and for the single leaves, carta or foglio (sheet). The designer of this book, or most probably the illuminator, is uniquely playing on the physicality of the site where these sheets came together, at the book’s central ridge. The great divide here is not horizontal, but vertical. Instead of having Brunetto reach out for Dante’s hem as did the illuminator of the “rubbed-out” Brunetto in London, this artist has depicted that moment of more mutual coming together. The old sod does not stretch out for his pupil’s flesh across the flesh of the page but gestures to speak to him, to touch him with his famous eloquence. Dante, leaning slightly forward, also raises his hand, the tips of his fingers now lost, trapped within the inner binding. These two hands can never touch because they are on different sheets of skin. They can never meet across the inner edge, the well where the parchment is bound and caught up; they are separated by this dark chasm. Dante’s metaphor that sees the carta or folio as a face, the “smiling pages,” is replaced by another, also current in the fourteenth century, which saw the book as a body, opened from behind and ready to be penetrated. Significantly too, it is Virgil’s massive figure that, once the book is closed, lies on top of Brunetto, bringing together a notorious ancient with a notorious medieval sodomite. Dante and Brunetto too face one another across the crack in the volume’s ass, only coming together, their bodies superimposed on top of one another, when it is closed.

THE BODY’S POSE

The unusual pose of the figure of Brunetto on folio 114r was noted by Meiss in his study of the illuminated manuscripts of the Divine Comedy; he saw it as a means of elevating Dante’s beloved teacher. “When he is distinguished from the other sodomites,” writes Meiss, “he has dignity and poise, especially in the magnificent figure by the Chantilly master.” But he also uses a loaded term to describe how “Brunetto stands talking to Dante, one arm akimbo with a hand on his hip, the other extended toward his old pupil, in a conspicuously formal oratorical posture.” What would the arm akimbo have suggested to a mid-fourteenth-century Florentine or Pisan? What it evoked was surely different from the associa-
tions it bears today. An interesting account of the modern textual history of the term *akimbo* appeared recently in Thomas A. King’s essay “Performing ‘Akimbo’: Queer Pride and Epistemological Prejudice”:

While the etymology of the word “akimbo” is uncertain, it seems to have been closely aligned with the Middle English words for a rooked stick or piece of wood (*cammock* or *cambock*). These in turn may be related to the Welsh noun *cambren*, a combination of *cam* (crooked) plus *pren* (wood, stick). A clever queer might know where I am going here; s/he might want to explore the association of crooked sticks with trickster figures. . . . [I]t is sufficient to note that there was something “bent” about setting the arm akimbo.28

In using the term Meiss was inferring, albeit unconsciously, a “queer” identity from this body, from the “bent” arm, crooked in opposition to Dante’s “straight” columnar form, and from the flamboyantly self-exposing pose, compared to Dante’s, which is almost hidden behind Virgil’s vast anti-body of drapery. The question for us is whether the range of associations with effeminacy, theatricality, and aristocratic excess that, as King shows, were the major associations of this stereotyped “akimbo” pose in eighteenth-century England, had any currency in fourteenth-century Italy. One only has to go to Italy today and see all those wolf-whistling groups of *ragazzi* adorning the piazzas and leaning on their Vespas with arms around each other’s waists and often at their hips, to realize that corporeal codes are highly differentiated not only historically but also nationally and that to label Brunetto’s bent pose as “gay” would be totally anachronistic. The pose of the queer, of course, like the queer himself, is a recent construction. George Chauncey points to particular instances of stereotypes in the twentieth century, such as a “gay sailor” in 1919 who claimed to be able to identify someone as “queer”: “He acted sort of peculiar; walking around with his hands on his hips. . . . [His] manner was not masculine.”29 Unlike the cover of the cheap paperback novel *The Man from Pansy* (1967), which has a statue of the stereotype as an illustration, Brunetto’s pose was produced in a culture where there was nothing necessarily effeminate about this particular stance. It appears in countless fifteenth- and sixteenth-century portraits, although its history and full range of meanings remains to be written. This very
formal posture would be part of what Dante would have called *cortesia*,
the polite etiquette of greeting in fourteenth-century Italy, which made
many social interactions almost like a dance—a social code that, even
in Hell, had to be followed. This ironic politesse is stressed in the text,
where even though their earthly positions have been reversed, Dante ad-
dresses a man superior to him with the formal “voi” and the title “ser”—
“Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?” (30) (“Are you here, ser Brunetto?”). The
master’s body likewise is coded in terms of class and status, made all the
more ironic by being totally and shockingly (to any fourteenth-century
viewer) naked!

Yet in all its formality, and even in its nakedness, it still strikes a
pose, responding to the gaze of another. In what remains the most pow-
nerful analysis of the cultural meaning of “posing,” Craig Owens has de-
scribed how the pose is either a mimicry that displaces the gaze of
surveillance (as argued by Homi Bhabha in the context of colonialism)
or an “apotropaic politics of pose,” in which “to strike a pose” is “to pose
a threat” (as argued by Dick Hebdige in relation to punk culture). Owens
goes on to develop his own psychoanalytic model, in which the mimicry
of the pose “entails a certain *splitting* of the subject: the entire body de-
taches itself from itself, becomes a picture, a semblance.”

Brunetto’s pose is likewise not so much a stance of opposition proclaiming an es-
secial, different identity but a simulacrum.

In this respect, Meiss was correct to see in the figure a visual refer-
ence to the antique, but he saw this classical reference solely as a means
of ennobling the figure. When Dante himself, however, uses a metaphor
taken from an ancient source—when he compares the intertwined bod-
ies of the three sodomites in canto 16 to oiled wrestlers as described in
classical authors such as Virgil—the image is always ambivalent. Statues
of Roman orators exist that have similar poses to Brunetto’s figure.
Meiss cites a sarcophagus at the Campo Santo in Pisa, available to this
artist, which has exactly the same speaking gesture. In Italy, antique
models were both feared and venerated, and the nude statue, associated
with the worst vices of paganism by Augustine and others, was nothing
more than an idol. It is representations of these demonic bodies, wor-
shiped by pagans but feared and destroyed by the early Christians as
“false gods,” that most closely parallel the Pisan artist’s representation
of Brunetto’s body. The same contrapposto stance and raised arm can be
seen in both contemporary representations of pagan idols and the clas-
Figure 3. The "queer pose." The Man from Pansy (New York, 1967).
(Photograph: Michael Camille.)

The abominations of idolatry and sodomy had been linked in the Bible in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (1:23–27), which describes how men have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image . . . and served and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator. For this cause God delivered them up to shameful
affections. For the women have changed the natural use to that which is against nature. And in like manner the men also, leaving the natural use of women, have burned in their lusts one toward another, men with men.

In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, idolaters are listed along with adulterers, effemimates, and abusers of themselves as those who “shall not enter the Kingdom of God,” and idolatry was often listed alongside charges of heresy and sodomy, as it was against the Knights Templar. Saint Bernardino of Siena, preaching against sodomy in Florence in the fifteenth century, would call the young men who went around in revealing clothes showing off their bodies “the fanciulli [who] are the idols of old men, who consider them gods.” The idol was the most common propaganda image of the “other” in medieval art, used to depict the Jew, the Muslim, and the sodomite, as I have argued elsewhere. One of the resonances of Brunetto’s pose to his contemporaries was with the ancient statue as an index of perverse pride and, perhaps, pederastic desire. Just as the image on the cover of The Man from Pansy is, oddly enough, a statue of a pose (see figure 3), Brunetto’s fleshly gestures are also evocative of his urge to self-statuary. Brunetto, statesman, orator, and translator of Cicero, in being a reviver of ancient Roman ideas, is described in this very canto as teaching Dante of the quest for immortality (“come l’uom s’eterna,” 15.85), eternal fame in the world that must have seemed very pagan to his contemporaries and which the artist has here inscribed, equivocally, upon his body in the very different eternity of Hell.

I say equivocally because at the same time as this pose points to negative ancient associations with idolatry, in Meiss’s words, “it does not look very antique.” What is so un-antique about it? First, its proportions are far too squat and wide and, second, its highly individualized features, almost hawklike nose, and ridged brows make it more like a naked “portrait” than an idealized nude. This aspect of the figure has to be related to another ancient discourse that enjoyed a new vogue, both among scholastic philosophers and in popular vernacular treatises in the later Middle Ages, but that created a very different syntax for the body—the art of physiognomy. Although the Old Testament sodomite can hardly be expected to appear in an ancient text such as the pseudo-Aristotelian Physiognomies, the best-known treatise of this type, the ambiguously gendered male body does:
the *Effeminate* is drooping eyed and knock-kneed; his head hangs on his right shoulder; his hands are carried upturned and flabby; and as he walks he either wags his loins or else holds them rigid by an effort; and he casts a furtive gaze around, for all the world like Dionysius the Sophist. Knock knees are a sign of effeminacy by congruity. *Thighs* bony and sinewy indicate a strong character, as in the male sex: but when bony and full, a soft character as in females.\(^{36}\)

These ideas were immensely popular in presenting the human body as a clear map of personality traits that could easily be “read off” and that, in many ways, essentialize the individual as either more or less male or female, or more or less prone to certain vices. The artist of our miniature was aware of this tradition in his depiction of Brunetto and the other sodomites, giving them soft, mellifluous bodies and the “furtive gaze” emphasized in Dante’s discussion of their strange peering eyes (15.18–21). The physiognomists described those who have “eyelids or eyebrows that are not entirely straight. . . . Then you may be sure that this is the profile of someone who is really feminine, even though you

![Figure 4. The idol of Janus. History of Troy. Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 562, fol. 204v. (After Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 1957.)](image)
may find him among real men.'" Straightness carries over from the upright stance of the hard body to the gaze itself, which should be direct and not oblique or bent to one side. This is where the direct glance of Brunette is less "queer" than Dante’s own. Like his “eagle-like” or aquiline nose, his straight look is a sign of a strong, proud soul. What this evidence suggests about the relationship between stereotyping and identity is that, even though sexual deviance was not thought to originate in a pathology (as in the modern idea of the pervert) or an essential identity (as in some recent biological models), it still denoted subjects and “types” and was not predicated simply on “acts.” Although anyone could engage in an act of sodomy, the physiognomic propensities of the sodomite literally marked his predilection on his body. If bodies, like books, were “readable” in fourteenth-century Italy, Brunetto bears another easily scanned sign in addition to his flamboyant, if ambiguous, antique posture and his sensuous, if perverse, physiognomy, a sign that in relation to all these others bears crucially on his role on Earth and his place here in Hell—the tonsure. This is what links him with his fellow sodomites who fill the rest of the page.

THE OTHER SODOMITES

In somma sappi che tutti fur cherchi
e litterati grandi e di gran fama,
d’un peccato medesimo al mondi lerci.
Priscian sen va con quella turba grama,
e Francesco d’Accorso anche; e vedervi,
s’avessi avuto di tal tigna brama,
colui potei che dal servo de’ servi
fu trasmutato d’Arno in Bacchiglione,
dove lasciò li mal protesi nervi. (15.106–14)

In brief, know that all were clerks, and great men of letters and of great fame, in the world defiled by one same sin. Priscian goes on with that wretched crowd, and Francesco d’Accorso too; and you could also have seen there, had you hankered for such scurf, him who was transferred by the Servant of Servants from Arno to Bacchiglione, where he left his sinfully distended muscles.
Dante was by no means the first to describe the particular torments of the sodomites as a group in Hell. In the fourth-century Apocalypse of Saint Paul, the narrator sees

other men and women covered with dust, and their appearance was like blood, and they were in a pit of pitch and brimstone and carried down in a river of fire. I asked, “Who are these, lord?” And he said to me, “These are the ones who committed the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, men with men, therefore they pay their penalty without ceasing.”

Even more fascinating is the passage from the 1196 vision of the monk of Evesham, who, like Dante, meets individuals on his trip to Hell whom he had known on Earth, suffering their eternal retributions. But in the case of the sodomites, the author is unable to name their sin, saying only that they had been “guilty of a wickedness in life that is unmentionable by a Christian, or even by a heathen or pagan.” “Huge fiery monsters,” however, perform “the same damnable crimes” on their bodies “that they had been guilty of on earth.” This is the trope, also crucial in the *Inferno*, of the sinner’s punishment being a distorted reinscription on his body of the earthly pleasure that it once enjoyed. It is also another example of the “unmentionable vice” that can only be figured through its eternal punishment. Confessors’ manuals warned priests not to discuss sodomy lest this give their parishioners dangerous ideas, which once again brings us to the heart of the being versus behavior debate, and suggests that homosexuality was not thought of as something inherent but just another vice to which anyone, given the opportunity, could succumb. Certain careers, for example, made one especially vulnerable, such as being a teacher. Among those fleeing the flames in the Chantilly miniature is Priscian, the fifth-century grammarian, who, early commentators agreed, “represents teachers of grammar, who seem to be commonly tainted with this vice—perhaps because the young men they teach are so easily accessible.” Has the common maxim *pedagogus ergo sodomiticus*—“teacher, therefore sodomite”—rubbed off on Brunetto Latini himself and perhaps “bent” his right-hand teaching gesture even further in the direction of the physiognomists’ licentious upward gesture of the hand? In a manuscript of Brunetto’s *Tesoro* in Florence, a drawing shows the fully clothed teacher looking down and addressing a group of youths with exactly this hand gesture.
Throughout the *Inferno* the body is the site for the figuration of sin. According to Robert M. Durling, it is Dante’s basic allegorical principle: “the individual’s actions and their significance are inscribed in his body and become legible there.” How, then, are we to read the bodies of the sodomites as representing a particular sin? In the text their bodies are not described at length, but in the flesh of parchment they are concretely realized. If the courtly meeting around the center of the opening represents one kind of body—that of the active pederastic pedagogue—the other sodomites who are shown rushing to the right, in the direction of reading, represent the other varieties of that sin and especially that of the far more shameful passive kind. Thomas Aquinas’s teacher, Albert the Great, recommended that “hairs from a hyena’s neck, burnt into ashes and mixed with pitch and smeared on the anus of a sodomite who practices anal intercourse will cure him of this vice”—not specifying whether the noxious unguent was meant to repel the active partner or put the passive partner off the idea of being penetrated altogether. Medieval texts make little mention of the distinction, which would become crucial in Renaissance discussions and laws about sodomitical acts, between active and passive roles. The Chantilly miniature, however, to my mind does make subtle reference, just like Dante’s text, to the way some clerics would have disagreed with the injunction that it is always “better to give than to receive.”

The sodomites are described as a “schiera” (troop), “famiglia” (company or family), “greggia” (flock), and “turba grama” (wretched crowd), all terms that suggest a body or mass made up of smaller bodies. As deviants, their fate is figured in the flocklike movement, the eternal *contrapasso* or “turning against” that the sin against nature merits. In some contemporary miniatures to this canto, some of the sodomites are painted touching each other suggestively, but in the Chantilly miniature they are stuck together in a different way, more amorphously, each figure separate from his neighbor, even though they often overlap. They are constantly running because, as Brunetto explains to Dante, whoever stops even for an instant “must lie a hundred years without brushing off the fire when it strikes him” (15.37–39). This explains the panicked shrieks of fear on their faces and their manic, jerky movements, compared to the smoother bodies of other damned souls on other pages. Their overlapping legs and thighs are especially emphasized by the artist’s brush, suggesting that brand of the sodomitical vice known since Peter Damian’s
Book of Gomorrah as a "pollution between the thighs" (*inter femora*). They flow into one another, and the illuminator has given their sinuous limbs a smoky, silky kind of softness, even those behind who are scorched red by the flames. In all of them the most prominent features are, first, their open mouths, yelling, gawping, and grimacing, all metonymic of other mucal orifices, since both anal and oral bodily openings were often linked in medieval discourse on the sins of the flesh. Second, and even more important, are their genitals. Tiny pricks dangle from hairless scrotums, either suggesting that the searing flames of hell have denuded these clerics of their pubic hair (the three sodomites in the next canto are described as having "blackened and hairless faces," 16.30), or serving to effeminize their already soft bodies further. All of them reveal some aspect of their sexuality, small penises, visible in three of the figures, or their buttocks, prominently exposed in only one of the eleven. This man wears his bishop's mitre, identifying him as the specifically passive sodomite, labeled but not named, in Dante's text, Andrea de' Mozzi, bishop of Florence (1287–95), who was removed from office by the pope because of his apparent vices and who died in Vicenza on the river Bacchiglione, where, Dante tells us in one of his most allusive lines, "he left his sinfully distended muscles" (15.114). Charles S. Singleton's commentary unabashedly interprets this as referring to the bishop's "body whose muscles had been 'ill stretched' in the sinful act of sodomy." The Chantilly image also helps us pinpoint a more particular muscle—the sphincter. Pushed out, as if still demanding penetration, the bishop's bulbous bottom figures on his body his own unfulfilled appetites in the headlong race into eternity.

In what is the only recent and extensive interpretation of canto 15 that examines the sexual aspect of sodomy in any detail, Joseph Pequigney makes much of the sporting theme as a trope of homosexual desire: "Figurative language makes a telling contribution to the representation of sodomy as sexual and male. Epic similes recall two specific sports, the foot race and the wrestling match, to bring to bear the athletic mode of men at play together." The Chantilly image, by contrast, shows that this race is a rapacious one, urgent, horrifying in its pain and never-ending exertion. I would not go as far as Pequigney, who figures "the lot of the sodomites projected onto eternity" anachronistically as "cruising' in vain," and who claims that "Dante imagined homosexual life to be filled more with yearning than with gratification." I see in the screaming runners
of the Chantilly miniature not play but what Dante calls “their eternal woes” (15.42), not lost expectation of desire but despair. This is because one cannot see these pictured bodies without an awareness of the bodies of actual sodomites in early fourteenth-century Italy.

Figure 5. The absent sodomite and the sodomite saved from the flames. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS lat. 5931, fol. 95r. Copyright Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
The Pose of the Queer

The Body's History

For some bodies the flames of Hell were more than theological speculation or poetic fantasy. Men and women experienced their foretaste in judicial punishment. A miracle occurred on 24 March 1320 at Avignon, according to an account written some years later by Cardinal Stefaneschi and conserved in a unique manuscript in Paris, which also contains a drawing by one of the most important Italian artists of the period, Simone Martini. A man and a thirteen-year-old boy were caught in the act of sodomy by the Rhône River and both were condemned to burn at the stake. For the elder sodomite, "his lust found its just reward," and, as luridly described in the Latin text, the crowd cheered as "his greasy body melted in the flames"—"confunditur inde voluptas . . . Urit et in guttas fusa pinguedine corpus." A different fate awaited the boy, whose pitiful cries moved onlookers. Just as the executioner was about to light the faggots, the boy was rescued from the flames by his prayers to the Virgin Mary, who appeared to him in person and loosened his bonds. Pope John XXII was so taken aback at this miracle that he had a chapel built on the site, Notre Dame des Doms, which was completed in 1327. Simone Martini's nearly full-page drawing of the event, which was produced to illustrate Cardinal Stefaneschi's poetic account in the late 1330s, is nearly contemporary with the drawings in Guido da Pisa's Inferno Commentary. It, too, shows a single figure damned in the flames stretching toward a more elevated pair, the boy kneeling at the stake, imploring the Virgin and Child for aid. But where is the other sodomite? He has not been erased or scratched out. He was never even represented in the first place. The unmentionable vice was also the unrepresentable one. The interesting question is whether this boy and his invisible, or perhaps already melted, sexual partner were thought of as a type, as sodomites, or whether they were just a man and a boy caught in a socially stigmatized act. Whereas the passive partner was, in many cultural contexts, seen as the more perverted (because of his effeminized role), in this account, he is seen as the victim and thus can be saved through divine intercession. Simone Martini can represent his body because it is not the body of a sodomite, hardened in his vice and thus erasable. The sodomite, like the heretic, was burned at the stake in the fourteenth century precisely to render him invisible, in order fully to disintegrate the feared and contagious body, but also as a foretaste of the eternal pains.
that, it was believed, awaited the sinner in the flames of Hell. The actual body burned in the papal fires at Avignon, the body erased from Simone Martini’s flames in favor of the turned, redeemed, and reformed sinner, makes a startling contrast to Brunetto’s body, so visible under Dante’s gaze in the Divine Comedy.

In Florence things were hardly different. The first mention “de puniendo sodomitas” in the statutes of the city council, the Podestà, occurs in 1325. The new law was more lenient than in papal Avignon, sentencing whoever “polluted” any boy with sodomy to have “both testicles and penis cut off.” Nevertheless, eight men were sentenced to be burned alive for acts of sodomy in Florence between 1352 and 1355. Historians have shown that homosexuality was a major social issue in the city in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and later warranted the creation of a “vice squad” by the civic authorities. This awareness of sodomy as a public threat, and its increasing persecution, began during the very decades during which Dante’s poem was being commented on and the Chantilly manuscript written and illustrated.

It is only set against this regime of increasingly repressive representations of sodomy that it becomes clear how sympathetic Dante himself was to the sodomites, placing them in a less damned position in the Inferno than soothsayers, hypocrites, and flatterers and more positively still in Purgatorio. But it is his representation of Brunetto Latini that argues most powerfully that Dante’s own thinking about sodomy ran counter to that of ecclesiastical orthodoxy. In the poem, Dante admits to his teacher that he wishes he were “not . . . banished from human nature” (posto in bando—excluded, marginalized) because of the “dear, kind, paternal image of you, when in the world hour by hour you taught me how man makes himself eternal” (15.81–85). This image that Dante holds in his mind of his dear teacher, unscorched and radiant in his learning, is surely what the artist of the Chantilly codex was also evoking in his isolation of the proud figure from the rest of the throng, as a beloved image as well as a fearful idol.

What makes Dante’s vision of the sodomites ultimately so powerful and important for the future negotiation of the place of gay and lesbian issues in medieval studies, is that medieval historians are often just as damning of their subjects as medieval authorities, only in more subtle ways. Studying the same period of the early fourteenth century in his vastly popular Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie wrote in these terms of a pedagogus ergo sodomiticus:
Later, Master Pons de Massabucu's school moved and Arnaud de Verniolles had other sleeping companions, including his teacher. To save bedding, Master Pons slept with two of his pupils. No one now made any attempt on young Verniolles's virtue. But the harm was done. A latent tendency was awakened, and Arnaud de Verniolles was doomed to become a homosexual.\textsuperscript{35}

Doomed? This locution is hardly different from the theological language of Aquinas or the medical discourse of Peter of Abano. The "homosexual," here defined pathologically rather than theologically, continues to be consigned to the flames. Rather than worry about whether it is correct to call Brunetto a sodomite or not, as most scholars have done, I have been more interested in whether, in one particular image, his body was displayed so as to articulate his desire as different or as the same. Dante says, "If my prayer were all fulfilled, I answered him, 'you would not yet be banished from human nature'" (\textit{Inferno} 15.79–81).

If the reader feels I have left Brunetto ambiguously perched on the edge of things, as marginal as ever, that is my intention; for ultimately, I would rather call Brunetto a queer or a queen than a homosexual (or a heterosexual), precisely because these terms do not so much define modern rigid stereotypes as open up possibilities. As David Halperin puts it: "'Queer'... demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative."\textsuperscript{36} No topography is more precise than that of Dante's universe where even those screaming "queen!" have their place. Among the penitent sodomites described in \textit{Purgatorio} 26, Dante names none other than Julius Caesar in exactly these terms: for he "once heard 'Queen' cried out against him; therefore they go off crying 'Sodom,' reproving themselves as you have heard, and they help the burning with their shame" (\textit{Purgatorio} 26.76–81). The name of the "unmentionable vice" is here repeated, again and again, by those who performed it, not as an eternal curse but as a purifying penitence. Likewise, in the Chantilly miniature the sodomites are represented as being self-conscious of their status and their sin. They do not go shouting "Sodom, Sodom!" but it is written all over their bodies. They have an identity insofar as all twelve of them, counting Brunetto (a significant number considering their apostolic clerical status), are performing, just as the reader turning the pages activates this manuscript as a body in performance. A single image like this one cannot dispel the fearful fantasies of those modern
critics unable to face sodomy in the Inferno, who have tried to make Brunetto's sin one of linguistic rather than corporeal perversion. They have never probably had to face that uncomprehending glare in Dante's eyes, that gaze of otherness in which one has to define oneself against another. Damned in the eyes of medieval and some contemporary churchmen, doomed in the writing of at least one famous twentieth-century medieval historian, and similarly positioned by that vociferous residue of the medieval crowd that cheered at the inquisitorial fires, the sodomite, like today's queer medievalist, can find few places in which to strike a pose like Brunetto's. As Peggy Phelan puts it in her study of postmodern performativity, "Representation is almost always on the side of the one who sees and almost never on the side of the one who is seen." But in the tiny space of the Chantilly miniature, the look across the book reveals a more complex dynamic in the history of the construction of the homosexual, in which Dante's gaze meets a body that performs in fourteenth-century terms, and that is too powerful and too complex to be rubbed out, torched, or simply ignored.

**Notes**

1. All citations of both the Italian text and the English translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* are from the edition with commentary by Charles S. Singleton, 6 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970–75). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text. This essay was first presented at the University of Chicago Workshop on Gay and Lesbian Studies. I have profited much from discussions both there and at the Queer Middle Ages conference held at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, and at New York University in November 1998.


5. Raymond de Becker, *The Other Face of Love* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 107; originally published in France as L'Érotisme d'en face (Paris: Pauvert, 1964). Previous re-
productions from the manuscript, such as that in J. Meurgey, Les Principaux Manuscrits à Peintures du Musée Condé à Chantilly (Paris: Pour les membres de la Société française de reproductions de manuscrits à peintures, 1930), pl. 22, had also isolated the verso page from the adjoining recto.

6. Undine Freiin von Verschuer's, "Die Homosexuellen in Dantes Göttlicher Komödie," Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen 8 (1906): 353–63, can be seen as part of the pioneering German scholarly movement in the early part of the twentieth century toward a cultural understanding of sex. For Boccaccio and the Anonimo Fiorentino’s commentaries, see Singleton, ed., Inferno, vol. 2, 269–70.


17. This passage in Li Trésors II, XXXX, 4, is cited and discussed by Thomas Nevin, "Ser Brunetto’s Immortality: Inferno XV," Dante Studies 96 (1978): 23, who describes Brunetto as being “like Dante . . . an unflagging Christian moralist. But was he, then, a hypocrite?” (my emphasis).


21. Dante’s comparison (15.1–12) of the built-up bank on which he walks, and which is clearly indicated as separate in the Chantilly drawing, is with two famous water dikes, one built in Bruges to hold back the sea and another in Padua to defend the city from the overflowing Brenta River during spring. These metaphors are important for understanding the spatiality of the image, and help explain the separation of the two travelers from the object of their gaze. The building of barriers against the flood tide in these two metaphors has been interpreted as a sexual one (Vance, Vicious Signals, 238–40), shoring up protection against penetration by the fluid force of “the spring of love, or semen.” Although Vance argues for the sexual metaphor here at the beginning of the canto, it is not carried through to his overtly textual reading of the later parts.


25. Virgil’s reputation as a lover of boys was discussed in this context in papers and dis-
cussions by James Miller and M. D. Feltham in the session "Dante on Fire Island" at the Queer Middle Ages conference held at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, and at New York University, 6 November 1998.


34. Camille, Gothic Idol.


37. Gleason, “Semiotics of Gender,” 394, here cites Polemo’s Physiognomy; she lists more evidence for “rapid movements of the eyes” and gazing as evidence of effeminacy (410–11). The pseudo-Aristotle and Polemo also associate “certain upturned gestures of the hand” (the opposite of our downward-turning “limp-wrist” gesture) with the cinaedus, or effeminate man.


39. Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence, 239, puts this best: “in early modern England the sodomite, though not an identity in the modern sense, could and did denote subject positions or types; ‘he’ precisely characterized deviant subject positions as well as denoting the behaviour of individuals.”


41. Visions of Heaven and Hell, ed. Gardiner, 210: “The most loathsome and severe of all remains still to be told, because all who were punished there had been guilty of a wickedness in life that is unmentionable by a Christian, or even by a heathen or pagan. Those therefore were continually attacked by huge fiery monsters, horrible beyond description. Despite their opposition, those committed on them the same damnable crimes that they had been guilty of on earth. Their cries were horrid until they apparently fainted dead, and then they again revived to be exposed to fresh torments.”

42. For same-sex sex in the penitentials, see James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 166–69. It was Michel Foucault who first saw the penitentials, and in particular the emphasis on confession in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, as the creation of a guilty self that had to name


44. Florence, Biblioteca Medici-Laurenziana, MS Strozzi 146, fol. 21.


46. Albert the Great, Man and the Beasts: De animalibus (Books 22–26), trans. James J. Scanlan (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 75, which anachronistically uses the word homosexual for Albert's more specific "sodomite." See the better translation in Jacquet and Thomasset, Sexuality and Medicine, 161, who argue that Albert was very clear about sodomy signifying "a sin against nature, of man with a man, or of a woman with a woman." This is an example of the medieval medical notion of like curing like since the hyena was a beast thought to practice same-sex intercourse. A miniature in a contemporary English Psalter, London, British Library MS Royal 2.B.VII, fol. 112v, showing two hyenas of the same sex mating, is reproduced in Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, figure 11.


48. The three sodomites of Inferno 16.22–24 who form a rota "[as] champions, naked and oiled, are wont to do, eying their grip and vantage before exchanging thrusts and blows," are also depicted in the Chantilly manuscript with an unusual corporeal classicism (Brieger, Meiss, and Singleton, Illuminated Manuscripts, 189c). They are shown with dancing postures, not as the wrestling metaphor suggests in the text (which has strong visual
associations with sodomy in medieval art), based on a statue of the Three Graces, known from an antique sculpture preserved at Siena. These “feminized” smooth bodies and intense, interactive glances (again suggestive of the physiognomic tradition) are totally unlike the charred, spotted, and burned figures found in other manuscripts.

49. Singleton, ed., *Inferno*, vol. 2, 272. Armour, “XV,” *Lectura Dantis* (Supplement): 197, of course reads this as a “synecdoche, referring to his entire musculature and frame.” For early commentators, as he himself points out (207n.14), the part of the body referred to by “li mal protesi nervi” varied and even included the penis in the commentaries of Benvenuto, Buti, the *Anonimo*, and Landino. For a more compelling anal reading of this passage as well as of the fig tree in *Inferno* 15.61–66, see Holsinger, “Sodomy and Resurrection,” 249–52.


57. Phelan, *Unmarked*, 25. Although I do not have room even to begin such an analysis here, Dante’s gaze, his gradual recognition of his teacher in *Inferno* 15.25–30, also needs to be examined in psychoanalytic terms as well as via medieval theories of cognition, as they are outlined in Patrick Boyde, *Perception and Passion in Dante’s Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 111, who calls Dante’s first words to his old teacher the “simplest and most poignant rhetorical question in the whole of Italian literature.” But why is it rhetorical? Why is it simple, and what is the relation between that verbal question and the visual look represented in the Chantilly manuscript?
The 1999 impeachment trial of President Clinton for perjurious state-
ments regarding his heterosexual relations reveals how medieval our
perimillennial discussion of sexual acts actually is. Michel Foucault im-
mortalized the premodern category of sodomy as “that utterly confused
category,” which helped to inaugurate the current studies of medieval
sexuality, including this volume. If sodomy both was and continues to
be “that utterly confused category,” as Janet Halley has argued in her
analysis of the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court decision Bowers v. Hardwick,
how much more utterly confused is and was heterosexuality? President
Clinton’s denial of sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, disingenuous
as it is generally considered to be, poses a problem for the representa-
tion of heterosexuality as the normative category of sexual identity and
behavior—a problem that could prove useful for understanding the inco-
herence in medieval representations of heterosexuality, as Susan Schi-
banoff documents in her essay, “Sodomy’s Mark: Alan of Lille, Jean de
Meun, and the Medieval Theory of Authorship.” The “crisis of the pres-
idency” under Clinton was, in fact, a crisis of heterosexuality derived
from a persistent historical incoherence in the category itself, dating
back at least to the Middle Ages. A queer historiography of premodern
heterosexuality has yet to be written, but the 1998–99 debate about
presidential sex affords us the perfect opportunity not only to "get medieval" on modern sexuality regimes but to "get modern" on the Middle Ages.1 By this I mean that we can begin to discern the ways in which our own theorizing and historicizing of medieval sexualities can inform and be informed by the public discourse about sexuality that swirled around the impeachment debate, as well as current theorizing about sexuality.

What defines and constitutes heterosexual sex? This is the question that subtends both President Clinton’s defense of his statement that he did not have “sexual relations” with Monica Lewinksy and Kenneth Starr’s indictment of him for perjury. Clinton explained in his testimony before the grand jury that, because the commonly accepted understanding of sex or sexual relations is sexual intercourse, he excluded oral sex from the category of sexual relations. Although this distinction furnished abundant material for late-night comedy monologues, it is not as outlandish as it might seem. First of all, in American culture, “sexual relations” always implies “heterosexual relations,” unless it is otherwise qualified. Second, intercourse has been the defining characteristic not only of heterosexuality but of sexuality itself. The loss of virginity, for example, is culturally marked by one act alone, that is, intercourse of the heterosexual variety. No amount of oral or anal sex, kissing, touching, or digital manipulation “counts.” We could extend this same heterosexist thinking to argue that Monica can provide oral sex to the president and still remain a virgin. As long as she has never had intercourse in her life, she can have as much oral sex as she likes and remain a “technical virgin.” Even intercourse with a cigar would not ruin her virginal state, for the only sex that counts for heterosexuality is intercourse between penises and vaginas, regardless of how metaphorical or symbolic “cigar sex” might be. It is this narrowness of definition in American cultural discourse about sex that President Clinton deployed when he insisted on intercourse as the exclusive definitive act constituting “sexual relations.”

Just when America was indulging in the absurdity of Clinton’s distinction, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a 1991 study that makes Clinton’s understanding of what constitutes sex more a national pathology than an idiosyncratic defense strategy. Two researchers at the Kinsey Institute conducted the study of 599 students from an undergraduate population of a state university in the Midwest, asking them the question that serves as the title of their report: “Would You Say You ‘Had Sex’ if . . . ?” The results, published in the 20 January
1999 issue of *JAMA*, confirmed President Clinton's distinction. Fellatio, cunnilingus, genital touching, kissing, and anal intercourse, among other acts, did not count as "having sex," according to the majority of the respondents. Eighty-five percent excluded manual stimulation of the genitals and 60 percent oral-genital sex from the definition of "having sex." Nearly 100 percent classified penile-vaginal intercourse as "sex." The researchers concluded: "The virtually universal endorsement of penile-vaginal intercourse as having 'had sex' in contrast with the diverse opinions for other behaviors highlights the primacy of penile-vaginal intercourse in American definitions of having 'had sex.'" This universal endorsement is narrowly heterosexual, of course, and it serves not only to confine even heterosexual sex to vaginal-penile intercourse but also to exculpate heterosexual participants in other forms of "not sex" sex from the guilt of having "had sex." President Clinton, apparently, thinks like a college student, but more importantly, he exploits a peculiarly American "confusion" about what counts as sex that underwrites a cultural heterosexism—one that permits the criminalization of sodomy, for example.

One last cultural assumption that framed the Clinton impeachment debate is that oral sex always signifies fellatio. In the course of the investigation of Clinton and Lewinsky, no one bothered to distinguish charges of fellatio from cunnilingus, nor did the thought ever seem to occur to Kenneth Starr, the grand jury, late-night talk-show hosts, the media, or President Clinton himself. Oral sex equals fellatio in American culture, and this is not only because of Clinton's limited sexual repertoire. Cunnilingus, like homosexual oral sex, is actually situated in a different category altogether because heterosexually organized sexuality is exclusively masculine-centered. The fact that "oral sex" means sex performed on men, usually by women, but also by other men, can be extrapolated from the voluminous testimony on the subject and the even more voluminous commentary and national joking idiom that has emerged from it. Why has oral sex been so narrowly limited to oral sex as it relates to men and male pleasure? The answer, I think, is that heterosexuality excludes not only women but also women's pleasure. Did Monica Lewinsky ever experience pleasure? All we have for the record is the endlessly replayed clip of the famous hug in which Monica's beaming face was read variously as evidence of Clinton's guilt or of her own scheming. The beret and the hair assumed greater significance in the clip than did any display of Monica's secret pleasure.
The absurdity of heterosexuality as it is culturally constituted and morally defended has never been so crucially represented in so many public discourses as it was in 1998–99, nor has its ideological foundation ever been so fundamentally exposed. The president’s truth or fraudulence is at stake in the sexual categories invoked, and the disingenuousness of heterosexuality is briefly and inadvertently rendered flagrant in the process. The question of whether oral sex constitutes sex is simply not a question that has meaning for queers. It is absurd, though not preposterous, since most queers are all too aware that heterosexuality has always deployed Clinton’s blinders about what constitutes sex. Yet if it is absurd, we as medievalists must begin to wonder about the staying power as well as the historical validity of heterosexuality’s supposed “normativity.” In the late-twentieth-century crisis circulating around Clinton and Lewinsky, we witnessed the self-contradiction of a normativity that recognizes and morally validates a single sexual act, heterosexual intercourse, and at the same time insists on the absurdity of this very kind of heterosexual denial in its relentless pursuit of “truth.” This is the same truth that Michel Foucault so eloquently described and critiqued in his first volume of the *History of Sexuality*—a truth that is derived from medieval confessional regimes and that resulted in our modern equation of sex (that is, heterosexual sex) with truth. What all this search for truth produces, according to Foucault, is more pleasure than truth: “pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open—the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure.”

President Clinton’s equivocation about his sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky takes an incoherence in modern heterosexuality for its text. Relying on the primary signifier of “sex” in this culture, sexual intercourse between men and women, it excludes all other sexual activity from the category in a way that is both consistent and coherent with contemporary heteronormativity. What is inconsistent with heteronormativity is the majority opinion in America that Clinton is merely equivocating, that oral sex constitutes sex and adultery as well. What counts as sex in this culture is continually shifting, as the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision showed, and its shifting is symptomatic not of changing definitions of heterosexuality but of an incoherence in the category itself and an attempt to mobilize its incoherence in favor of heteronormative pow-
ers and programs. This does not mean that critics of Clinton's definition of sexual relations are departing from heteronormative protocols when they insist that oral sex is also sex. On the contrary. Both sides of the issue serve heteronormative ends, not queer ones, for the effect of both is to shore up a heterosexual morality at the expense of heterosexual monolithicity, immutability, and unitarity.

What does this heterosexual uncertainty in 1999 have to do with the queer Middle Ages? As medievalists living in this time of heterosexual confusion, we are obligated to investigate queerness not only in deviant and excluded sexualities but in heteronormativity itself. If contemporary heteronormativity can be so volatile and contested, surely medieval heteronormativity bears some interrogating by queer histories and literary studies. Medievalists must be willing to ask the question that no one else will ask, namely, did heteronormativity exist in the Middle Ages, as queer scholars and traditional scholars have so far almost universally assumed? We must be careful in defining medieval heteronormativity not to make Clinton's mistake of taking the norm for granted and assuming it in all specific cases, or alternatively, assuming it over and against the cases of sodomy and deviant sexualities. Finally, it is incumbent on us to ask how "heteronormativity" as a concept has constructed our own ideas of queerness and to consider how we might go about constructing medieval queerness without heteronormativity. Clinton's semantics are not the only reason that we need to interrogate medieval sexuality; the essays in this volume suggest comparable absurdities in the category of heteronormativity as it is usually applied to the Middle Ages. The distinctions that are made in the Middle Ages never prove so clear-cut as we think they are, nor so intrepid as we sometimes claim them to be in our queer studies.

Susan Schibanoff extends the work done by Mark Jordan on Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature* by demonstrating how it "inextricably linked deviance with poetic production" at the same time that it failed to eradicate deviant forms of sex from Nature's rule, causing the uncanny paradox that perversion and normativity are "natural." It is not only deviance that is at issue in the poem, as Schibanoff argues, but poetic procreativity as well, and, here, deviance proves the more fertile poetic. Nature, and by extension, Alan of Lille, are powerless to prevent the alliance between poetry and perversion, between orthography and falsigraphy, between barren sex and fertile, procreative poetics. Jeun de Meun's attempt to
estrange the sodomite from the poet also fails, prompting Schibanoff to consider how medieval theories of authorship might have incorporated a “metaphorics of perversion” as well as of heterosexuality, particularly after the twelfth century.

This essay contains the most emphatic evidence of the imbrication of perversion and normativity in medieval theology and theories of authorship. The essay’s subject might seem far removed from Clinton’s troubles, but it points to a similar crisis, though one that is perhaps not so public nor so immediately political as the recent one was. Perhaps Alan of Lille’s and Jeun de Meun’s efforts to rationalize natural heterosexuality in conjunction with grammar and poetics can suggest the historical reach of the kind of heterosexual crisis we have witnessed and compel us to consider whether heteronormativity as a concept really existed for the Middle Ages at all. Although we can point to the heteronormativity of current Western culture that licenses moral, political, and poetic agendas, perhaps this was not so evidently the case in the Middle Ages. One way of considering this possibility is by asking whether the impeachment debate as it fumbles with the sexual categories of heterosexuality could have occurred in the Middle Ages, and if it could, in what terms could it have been conducted?

Refracted through the Middle Ages, the contemporary heterosexual absurdity becomes glaring. The question as to what constitutes heterosexual sex could never have puzzled medieval theologians, much less laypeople, for the simple fact that the category as a norm did not exist in the same way that it currently does. Because all sex was included under the Deadly Sin of Lechery in the first place, no public figure could have denied sexual relations on the basis of a heterosexually prescribed and circumscribed definition of sex as intercourse. The Middle Ages had a much more broad, diverse, and pluralized notion of sexual activity than we do, and, as Schibanoff and others, including myself, have suggested, the binary opposition that governs contemporary identity cultures does not seem to have governed medieval sexual acts. Perversion was always already a part of Nature and sexuality, even heterosexuality. Even a superficial reading of Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale reveals that the band of “heterosexual” sex that was regarded as normative was so narrow as not to constitute a category comparable to contemporary heterosexuality. Only procreative sex within marriage, excluding all assemblage that involves “fleshly delight,” escapes the sin of lechery. Procreation and chastity
more than heterosexuality are the reigning norms of medieval theological culture, and this makes a tremendous difference. Sodomy as a sub-category of lechery, although it is set apart as an abomination, is more or less on a continuum with other "heterosexual" vices in which desire waxes inordinate and gender roles morph. Had President Clinton somehow been held to a medieval standard, he would have had to say that he engaged in sodomy as well as adultery, and there would have been little doubt about his overall lecherous intent no matter what specific acts he had or had not committed. It is instructive to consider the "medieval case" of President Clinton insofar as it permits us to see our own complicity as medievalists in contemporary categories and as it enables us to see opportunities in medieval culture to challenge and contest them. Ironically, too, the medieval perspective accords more with a contemporary queer perspective, whose spectrum of sexual activity is considerably more expansive and pluralistic than the "sexual intercourse" standard of modern heterosexuality.

In his essay "The Pose of the Queer: Dante’s Gaze, Brunetto Latini’s Body," Michael Camille suggests parenthetically another way of contesting contemporary identity categories and modifying medieval categories in the process. In his analysis of Dante’s discovery of Brunetto Latini in Inferno 15 and the Chantilly manuscript image of the encounter, Camille identifies himself as a “twenty-first-century sodomite” and proposes labeling Brunetto a queer or a queen rather than a sodomite or a homosexual “precisely because these terms do not so much define modern rigid stereotypes as open up possibilities.” Camille’s self-identification shocks because of its medieval connotations and its simultaneous contemporary association with reactionary laws criminalizing homosexuality. Like the hypothetical medieval case of President Clinton, it mixes and confuses the medieval and modern legacies of the term sodomite. However, Camille should be equally careful in his use of the term to include not just Brunetto but all categorical sodomites, including women who desire other women and even women on top in heterosexual sex. The appropriation of sodomy is a potentially strategic form of resistance, but we must be careful not to do what modern heterosexuals have done, that is, to identify all deviant sex in this case with male sexual acts. In addition, Camille’s essay argues for a kind of metaphorics of perversions such as Schibanoff found in Alan of Lille and Jeun de Meun, only here, the metaphorics governs the language of books and bodies, "fleshly parchment
and human self-inscription." Camilla reconstrues Dante’s gaze at Brunetlo across “the crack in the volume’s ass,” converting the medieval metaphorics into a powerful critical one. Sodomy as a hermeneutic, not only for reading and interpreting images, but for the culture of manuscripts itself, provides an interesting and suggestive corrective to the heterosexual hermeneutics generally assumed for medieval texts.

Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, in their essay “Queering Ovidian Myth: Bestiality and Desire in Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea,” further complicate the “heterosexual imperative” that governs modern queer and straight readings of medieval culture alike. “Trans-species sexuality” has thus far not been seriously examined in connection with deviant sexualities, nor have we considered how it might intervene in medieval ideologies of sexuality and gender. Sheingorn and Desmond view bestiality in Christine de Pizan’s Othea as a way of reconfiguring female sexuality and desire by repositioning female sexuality as an “outlaw desire” that works to interrogate the masculine gaze as well. Much more study needs to be done of bestiality as it relates to the queer in medieval culture, and particularly, as the two authors maintain, as it revises female sexuality.

More important, their essay provokes us to “reconfigure spectatorship” more generally. How would Christine, for example, revise the spectacle of grave sexual misconduct raised to constitutional proportions fashioned by the media, Kenneth Starr, and politicians? This may seem an absurd question in itself, for Monica Lewinsky is no Circe (although she shares with the mythological queen and Christine herself a notorious blue dress), no Pasiphaë, no Andromeda; the media, no Ovid or Ovide moralisé; and we collectively as American medievalists, no Christine. Nevertheless, we might use the paradigm that Desmond and Sheingorn use of reconfiguring spectatorship in order to think about our own relationship to this defining cultural moment. We might ask the obvious question, for example, who or what is granted subjectivity of its sexualites and desires in the scandal? Perhaps the truest answer to this question is provided in a contemporary image that Christine could have appreciated, the 16 February 1998 cover of the New Yorker by Art Spiegelman, which featured a man’s crotch surrounded by microphones. It was titled “The Low Road.” As a queer female medievalist, I found this to be the only representation of the multitude of commentaries, news stories, editorials, and images I was forced to read, see, or hear that resisted the rampant philosophical and political inflation of “bad” heterosexual sex
into soaring claims about constitutional integrity, moral turpitude, marital fidelity, and most hysterical of all, the threat to children’s innocence everywhere. Why should this one image give me some relief from the merciless onslaught of patriarchal, heterosexist, masculinist discourse that so oppressed me during the relentless year of the scandal? Because it exposed the conditions of our spectatorship, a masculinist press under the influence, so to speak, of the president’s penis. No truth, here, though the power of the silent, veiled penis is palpable in the New Yorker image. Waiting for it to speak, the media gives it voice. No woman appears at all in the image. No woman is really necessary for heterosexuality to speak and be heard. The erasure of the feminine along with the tyranny of masculine sexuality in this case is both humorously and obscenely rendered. Although Christine would not have liked this image, I feel certain she would have understood it and applauded its visual spirit of antiphrasis, in which the artist resists representation through reductionism, diminishing its tyranny and stripping the vulgar masculinism of its ability to signify grandly.

Taking its cue from this crisis in U.S. politics, queer medieval scholarship might begin to question the whole grid of “heteronormativity” that we have so consistently used to delineate the queer. If a president’s precision regarding what constitutes sexual relations tells us anything as queer medievalists, it is that heteronormativity often balks and swerves, even today, after more than a century of ideological entrenchment and conditioning. The current absurdity of heterosexuality, however, calls attention to its recent “invention,” and should force us to reconsider whether it is historically accurate or even wise to assume a heteronormative grid for the Middle Ages against which we define the queer. The three essays I have discussed here, in conjunction with past experience, suggest that it is not, that heteronormativity may be no more than a residue on a blue dress or a paltry subset of Lechery, and an unnatural one at that.

Notes

3. There have been histories of heterosexuality that do not extend to the Middle Ages,
notably Jonathan Ned Katz's *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Dutton, 1995). The scare quotes in my text allude to the now famous remark in Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction*, which Carolyn Dinshaw has so brilliantly interrogated in her essay, "Getting Medieval: *Pulp Fiction*, Gawain, Foucault," in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 116–63. By "getting modern" on the Middle Ages, I mean only that we bring modern and medieval categories into conjunction with each other in order to examine their resemblances and dissemblances, that is, their points of intersection and deployment especially as that deployment is disguised as common knowledge.


8. In a paper delivered at the Queer Middle Ages conference at CUNY and New York University in November 1998, Jeffrey J. Cohen considered the ways in which human/animal interactions (and not necessarily bestiality) fit into the category of the queer, "Queer in Theory: The Inhuman Circuit."
Part II
THE SODOMITIC MOOR

QUEERNESS IN THE NARRATIVE OF RECONQUISTA

GREGORY S. HUTCHESON

In De la Andalucía islámica a la de hoy, historian Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz sums up the moral imperative of the Spanish Middle Ages thus: were it not for Reconquista, the centuries-long crusade to reestablish Christian hegemony on the Iberian Peninsula, “homosexuality, which was so widely practiced in Moorish Spain, would have triumphed.”¹ It would be tempting to attribute such broad claims to the reductionisms of positivist historicizing, in this case to the notion that sexual vice is an inherent characteristic of all civilizations in decline. Such is Leopold von Ranke’s reading of history, as Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage point out in the introduction to their Handbook of Medieval Sexuality. A consummate positivist, Ranke rehearsed uncritically all the prejudices of Romantic Europe when he maintained that fifteenth-century Italy, while not “incurably sick,” had suffered from “serious diseases”:

Pederasty, which extended even to the young soldiers in the army, and was regarded as venial because practiced by the Greeks and the Romans, whom all delighted to imitate, sapped all vital energy. Native and classical writers ascribed the misfortune of the nation to this evil practice. A terrible rival of pederasty was syphilis which spread through all the classes like the plague.²
Later historians would avail themselves of the neologism *homosexuality*—without, however, acknowledging semantic distinctions between that term and *pederasty* or *sodomy*. Homosexuality quickly gained currency as the catchall term for sexual vice, indeed, a synecdoche for all the ills besetting a nation. "Is not the common practice of homosexuality a fundamental debilitating factor," asks historian Norman Cantor in 1963, "in any civilization where it is extensively practiced?" Although the Roman Empire is certainly the best-known example of a civilization brought low by homosexual practice, Cantor points as well to "another great and flourishing civilization, the medieval Arabic, where homosexuality was also widespread" and which "similarly underwent a sudden malaise and breakdown."  

Evident in both Ranke and Cantor is the understanding of pederasty/homosexuality within the context of a social epidemiology, as a disease not inherent in civilized societies but to which civilized societies are nonetheless inherently vulnerable. Sánchez-Albornoz seems to fall into line with this understanding in that he suggests Christian Spain's own vulnerability, the possibility that it too might have fallen victim, as the Moors already had, to widespread practice of the vice.  

*Reconquista* is naturalized in this sense, projected less as a sociopolitical impulse than as the reflex of a healthy body to ward off disease. But there is far more going on here. For Sánchez-Albornoz, homosexuality is not only contagious but volitional, boasting the capacity both to infest and to "triumph." Afforded such agency, it cannot help but be conflated with the Moors themselves, whose cultural (and in some readings racial) difference already removed them from the sphere of Western cultural normativity as defined by a militant Christianity and an even more militant Latinity. Doubly queered, the Moors emerge from Sánchez-Albornoz's historical vision less as a civilization in decline than as a race bound in difference—the perfect foil to Spain's essential (hetero)normativity.  

We might identify the figure of the sodomitic Moor (to avoid the anachronism) at the margins—and in some ways at the obsessive core—of Spanish historicism throughout the modern age. He serves most obviously as a shorthand for Moorish queerness—the potent signifier of cultural, sexual, and racial difference. And yet I would like to argue that his is not a "natural" presence in Spain's discursive encounter with Islam. Neither is the conflation of cultural and sexual otherness necessarily inevitable in the ways societies construct the other; indeed, it is even implausible within the context of medieval Spain, where the con-
quest of 711 and subsequent Muslim presence on the peninsula were generally construed as divine punishment for Christian sexual transgression. The notion of Moorish sodomy is the invention of a later age, I shall argue, emerging out of the idiosyncrasies of Spain's cultural identity and the progressive recognition of its variance from the “normative” histories and identities of western Europe. I dare say it is the by-product of a sort of “homosexual panic,” Spain's defensive reflex against the realization of its own queerness.

**Locating Iberian Normativity**

Hrotswitha’s tenth-century account of the martyrdom of Saint Pelagius, studied most recently by Mark D. Jordan, is unambiguous in its projection of Córdoba, the capital of Muslim Iberia from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, as the “very city of luxury” (the phrasing is Jordan’s, the sentiment, however, Hrotswitha’s) and the caliph's sexual advances toward the youth as evidence of the broad-based practice of the “sodomitic vice” in pagan lands: Hrotswitha has her hero retort to the caliph that “he ought to save his kisses for his fellow Muslims, with whom he shares the stupidity of idolatry.” Her essentializing of Moorish (for her, Saracen) vice is little different from that of the Chanson de Roland, or indeed many European sources, both historical and literary, whose purposes are plainly ideological and which deploy the most rudimentary binarisms in their efforts to establish the absolute primacy of Christianity. The Chanson de Roland underscores from the outset an insurmountable difference between Christian and Saracen, the latter’s worship of a perverse company of gods that stands in stark contrast to the Christian Trinity. The Saracen operates as the negative projection of Christian goodness, an ancillary to the false prophet Muhammad whose preferred idiom is deception and in whom every virtue becomes its perverted opposite. So it is that Marsile’s pledge of fealty to Charlemagne is a mockery of the very idea of giving one’s word (it was commonly held that Muslims were incapable of telling the truth); kisses become in both Hrotswitha and the Chanson de Roland the sign of perversion and treachery—a perenniel reenactment of Judas’s betrayal; and Hrotswitha’s caliph is made the very essence of sodomy, the perfect foil for Pelagius in his opposition not to heterosexuality—a binarism that would have been incomprehensible to a medieval audience—but to a state of absolute grace. Indeed, in virtually
all texts the Saracen is at the very least implicitly sodomitic, less by reputation or as a result of empirical evidence than because he is already essentially evil, already subject to the spontaneous conflation in medieval moralistic discourse of idolatry, sorcery, treachery, and sexual perversion.9

So too do Iberian authors seem compelled by the pressures of a professed faith and the consensus of their coreligionists to participate in a totalizing Christian discourse. The Mozarab Eulogius recounts the martyrdom of his companion Isaac de Tábanos in Córdoba (851 C.E.) in terms one would expect of Hrotswitha, including the assertion that the Muslims profess an afterlife “full of rich foods and the sensuous movements of women,” that is, the complete indulgence of bodily, not spiritual appetites.10 And Alfonso X’s thirteenth-century account of the conquest of Visigothic Spain in 711 portrays the invading Moors not only in terms of blackness, cruelty, and inhumanity (“their faces were black as pitch . . . and their eyes blazed like fire”), but also as steeped in luxury and lust, given to “[wearing] silks and colorful cloths which they had taken as booty” and “[putting] the wretched women aside to dishonour them later” (19, 21). Also from the thirteenth century is the Poema de Fernán González, whose title character (the consummate Moor slayer of three centuries earlier) interprets the apparition of a “raging serpent” in even more extreme terms:

The Moors, you realize, are guided by the stars; they do not take God as a guide, but the stars; they have made of them [the stars] a new Creator, and hold that in them they perceive many marvels. There are others among them who know many charms, and can create very evil simulations with their spells; the devil teaches them how to stir up the clouds and the winds. . . . Some evil Moor who knows how to cast a spell made that devil take the shape of a serpent, in order to give you all a bad fright; they thought they could dismay us by such deceit. Since you are sensible men, you fully realize that he has no power to do us harm, for Christ took away his great power; you can see that anyone who believes in him [the devil] is mad. (57, 59)

Alfonso X’s demons and Fernán González’s dragons give every indication that this apocalyptic reading of Christian–Muslim relations is endemic to all of Christian Europe, indeed, inevitable within the context
of a clash of ideologies and creeds. (Satan always seems to spring up at these flash points in history.) But this is far from the exclusive mode by which Christian Iberians rendered their Muslim neighbors. Although Alfonso's likening of the invading hordes to the “wolf that comes at night to the flock of sheep” (19) certainly constitutes a rather thinly disguised call for redemption of Christian Spain in the form of Reconquista, most accounts of the Moorish conquest of 711 make it clear that it is the wickedness of the conquered that is in greater question, the treachery and license endemic to the Visigothic realm. Alfonso himself notes in his efforts to extract a moral lesson from the tale:

In the time of King Witiza and King [Rodrigo], who was the last king of the Goths, and in the time of the other kings who came before them, there were some who were raised to the throne by treachery, and others by the treacherous murder of their brothers or other relatives, observing neither the truth nor the right of succession which should have applied (they being urged on in evil and twisted fashion to win the crown for themselves). Hence the other men who lived in those times formed themselves on those models and resembled them in their sins; and for this reason the wrath of God was stirred up against them, and He abandoned the land which He had maintained and protected for them up to that point, and took away His grace from them. (23)

At more pointedly sexual turns in the tale, it is the sins of Rodrigo that take center stage, in particular his dalliance with La Cava Florinda, daughter (and in some versions wife) of the count Julián. Whether Christian blame is cast in collective or individual terms, the Moors operate as the long arm of divine law, an avenging angel whose own moral reprehensibility serves ultimately the ends of divine justice.

Departing even more radically from the rote discourse of abjection operative in greater Europe are those texts where virtue is cast as a universal rather than an exclusively Christian value, one defined by acts rather than professed faith; here difference is incidental, at times scarcely perceptible, reduced when it is present to the parameters of a historically defined enmity. Christians and Moors fight because that is what Christians and Moors do, their conflict being less apocalyptically
charged than it is part of a peninsular status quo. Although Moors may very well be denoted as pagans and renegados (this latter term implying, curiously, that they are Christians gone astray), they remain partners—albeit unequal partners—in the historical process of the peninsula and, what is more, sharers in a universal system of values. Their compassion, sadness, anger, and lust for vengeance do not spring from perversion, but rather from a humanity they hold in common with Christians. These Moors have little if anything to do with Hrotswitha’s caliph or Roland’s Saracens; they are fully human, the bearers of consistent values and reliable meaning, noble adversaries who serve in at least two epic tales (the Siete infantes de Lara and the Cantar de mio Cid) as the foil against which Christian, not Moorish, treachery is revealed.  

Such is the default register of Spanish epic, and to a limited if no less significant degree also of historical narrative. Chronicles make broad use of both Arabic and Latin/Romance sources in their reconstruction of historical events, and record dates in dual terms intended to impart meaning to readers steeped in either Christian or Muslim history. (“This was in the 4th year of al-Walid [Caliph of Damascus], the 91st year of the Arabs, Era 749, and the 7th year of Witiza’s reign,” says Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada at the outset of his account of the events of 711.) Even in the Primera crónica general, Alfonso’s baldly nationalistic history of Spain, the “lament of the Goths” uttered in the name of those Christians vanquished by the Moors is matched in manner and pathos by a Moorish lament for the loss of Valencia to the Cid more than three centuries later; translated from an Arabic original that was apparently contemporaneous with the event itself, here it is the Moors who are victimized, the Cid who is rendered as the lobo rauioso, “ravening wolf.” Both laments are generated from opposite ends of the cultural divide, and yet they meet at the point of a universal humanity: the grief of the vanquished in the wake of irrevocable loss. Significantly, both texts constitute for Alfonso a legitimate, even essential, chapter in the telling of Spanish history.

All these sources give evidence that the Moor is intimately woven into the fabric of Iberia’s history and identity. There is little “orientalism” in medieval Spain’s posturing toward the Moors; neither is there an overriding compulsion toward abjection, but rather a pragmatic give-and-take that lines itself up only exceptionally along the battlelines of crusade. Indeed, Christian and Muslim Iberia engage during much of the Middle Ages in a convivencia (the term is Américo Castro’s) a “living together”
that Richard Fletcher describes as a "long, intimate embrace," centuries spent "sharing a land, learning from one another, trading, intermarrying, misunderstanding, squabbling, fighting—generally indulging in all the incidents that go to furnish the ups and downs of coexistence or relationship." Within the context of this dynamic (if conflictive) *convivencia*, no binarism can be absolute (nor, indeed, would it have made sense to Alfonso’s contemporaries), no adoption/adaptation of a totalizing discourse comes without its nuances that serve to temper the extremes and admit to common ground. So it is that if the Moors are made to operate against nature, they do so in ways that Christians do, in excessive or illicit *heterosexual* activity, seldom in ways that provoke immediate sodomitic readings and open the floodgates of perverse desire. It is not insignificant that Eulogius has his antagonists longing for a paradise brimming with the “sensuous movements of women,” or that Alfonso’s invading hordes put the women aside for pleasure, while they violate the men with the thrust of a very real sword. (Sometimes a sword is just a sword.) Other references arise to Moorish sexual excess, almost always in a heteronormative mode. Says the Cid, for example, in an apparently documented speech guaranteeing just treatment to the recently conquered Valencians: “It is not my habit to go off with women or to spend time singing and drinking, as your former masters did, making themselves unavailable to you.”

It would be tempting to read here a reluctance on the part of Christian authors to render the Moor as sodomite, this as a defensive measure made necessary by the very conventionality of those familiarizing discourses that blurred the lines of cultural difference between Christian and Muslim. After all, the Moor, once conquered, would move in dangerous, uncontrollable directions, ultimately toward the queering of self against which Sánchez-Albornoz would be so careful to safeguard Spanish identity eight centuries later. I am disinclined, however, to locate here the roots of Spain’s “homosexual panic,” more inclined to believe that familiarizing discourses did not make queering of the Moor so much undesirable and dangerous as they made it irrelevant, even nonsensical. Moorish “straightness” (perhaps more aptly the illusion of “straightness”) is less a function of Christian Iberia’s efforts to re-create Muslim Iberia in its own image than it is the default mode in which Christian Iberia reads sexuality to begin with. Neither is there irony intended in the projection onto the Moorish subject of the power to punish Christian (sexual)
transgression, only recourse to a common pool of subjects—both Christian and Muslim—whose participation in historical events enabled their conscription as bearers of a broad spectrum of meaning. This would explain why it was that the Moors, even when demonized, could be conscripted to punish the sins of a dissolute Visigothic aristocracy; or why in the Cantar de mio Cid it can be the Moor Abengálbon who functions as counterpoint to Christian disloyalty (enacted graphically on the bodies of the Cid’s daughters by the infantes of Carrión).

I do not mean to suggest that Christian and Muslim Iberia were partners in a heteronormative contract, but rather that sexual binarisms—perhaps better rendered as sodomy versus purity, that is, absolute license of the body versus absolute self-control—were not spontaneously conflated with notions of racial/cultural difference during much of Iberia’s medieval period. Such binarisms may work well for Hrotswitha and a Europe for whom the Saracen, the unknown and unknowable other, serves readily as the archetype of perversion, but they lose their sharp edges in Iberia, where proximity to—indeed, cultural exchange with—Muslim communities breeds familiarity rather than alienation. Even in the Iberian monk Raguel’s account of the martyrdom of Pelagius, the Muslim identity of the antagonist seems less essential than accidental. It is revealing, for example, that he should never be named—he is identified solely as rex—this within a cultural context that demonstrates elsewhere an absolute fluency in the matter of Muslim dates and genealogies. Furthermore, Raguel tells his tale in terms that explode connotations rather than reducing them to sexual categories or the naming of a particular vice; as Jordan himself notes, “Raguel nowhere gives a special name to the sin that the king wishes to practice on the body of the young martyr. . . . The ensuing events are placed under other, more general categories of sin.”

The “sexual pass” is not irrelevant in Raguel’s account, nor is it irrelevant for the purposes of the Mozarabic liturgy that Jordan also studies, but it seems to serve less as a synecdoche for Moorish perversion (hence a driving force behind crusade, as Jordan postulates) than it does as the means to generate the moral charge of the tale.

In the final analysis, the essentialisms preached by an Albornoz-styled historicism (those essentialisms shared with Hrotswitha and her cohort) are not only ahistorical but scarcely substantiated within the texts and contexts of early medieval Iberia. What also caves in are the efforts of a “progressive” scholarship invested in tapping into Moorish
"homosexuality" as a touchstone for the writing of a universal gay history. Jordan quotes (with critical intent) John Boswell's assertion that in early medieval Spain (by which he means Muslim Iberia), "every variety of homosexual relationship was common, from prostitution to idealized love"; rather than engaging Boswell, however, Jordan opts not to "treat the complicated questions about the discourses or hypothesized practices of same-sex desire in the Islamic regimes." Others have been even less critical, going so far as to consider Boswell's remarks foundational, the legitimizing authority for the recovery of a homonormative society that stands in stark contrast to heteronormative Christian Europe. What is all too conveniently overlooked, however, is that Arabic authors, while certainly far more discursive on the broad range of sexual practices, are no less earnest in their positing of a heteronormative standard. Ibn Ḥazm, eleventh-century Córdoba's resident expert on matters of love, does indeed allude to incidences of same-sex desire in his highly influential *The Dove's Neckring*, but he also makes patent his disapproval, calling the sin of sodomy "loathsome and repugnant" and urging the stoning of both active and passive participants. Even Aḥmad al-Tifāshī's thirteenth-century *The Delight of Hearts*, which in its partial English translation reads as a riotous celebration of gay love, is in essence a scandal sheet whose impact as such depends precisely on heteronormativity remaining the rule.

Ultimately, reading Muslim Iberia as inherently "homosexual" serves less to create a space for productive inquiry (queering in a primarily intellectual mode) than it does to perpetuate the categories by which conservative scholarship would have us read history and text to begin with. That is to say, it buys into those very normativities that blind us not only to the potential commonalities between East and West, but also, even primarily, to the essential differences between the medieval world and our own modernity. If there is queerness to be had in Muslim Iberia, it is not because it represents some sort of homosexual utopia—an Oz for the ages—but rather because it forever stymies efforts to reduce it to modern Western notions of cultural and sexual difference. Neither can Christian Iberia be reduced to such notions, to hermetic spaces that bind it indisputably to the histories and identities of the West. Indeed, both derive from a "spectacular chaos and multiplicity of voices," as María Rosa Menocal has put it, from "the scattered and many selves that make up that lyrical and fragmentary world." Medieval
Iberia—whether Christian or Muslim—is bound always to be a queer space for the West, emerging in “disjuncture” not only with the West, but with Spain’s own modernity. And it is early-modern Spain’s increasing recognition of this queerness that produces the sodomitic Moor, or so I shall argue in the next section.

**THE EMERGENCE OF THE SODOMITIC MOOR**

The most delightfully transgressive creatures of Juan Ruiz’s pseudo-autobiographical *Libro de buen amor* (1330–43) are without a doubt the *serranas*, female guardians of the mountain passes who exact tolls on male travelers, at times in baubles, more often in sexual favors. La Chata in particular makes no bones about her intentions: when asked by the Archpriest-protagonist what her name is, she responds, “The backwoods girl [La Chata], / I’m the rugged country girl who ties men up” (strophe 952). Corralling him back to her hut, she feeds him a meal heavy in meats and cheeses before exacting her toll:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The frisky cow-girl} \\
\text{said: “Let’s wrestle a bit;} \\
\text{get up from there fast,} \\
\text{and get out of those clothes.”} \\
\text{She grabbed me by the wrist;} \\
\text{I had to do what she wanted.} \\
\text{Believe me, I made a good bargain!} \\
\text{(strophe 971)}
\end{align*}
\]

Most critics prefer to read these episodes as pure farce, as the carnivalesque inversion of gender roles that serves ultimately to reinforce the moral status quo (and so, implicitly, the male prerogative in matters of sex). In a more daring reading, Louise Vasvári sees these episodes as emblematic of a thematic constant in the *Libro de buen amor*: the verbal, conceptual, and at times literal “screwing over” of the protagonist at the hands not only of the *serranas* but of streetwise damsels, treacherous go-betweens, and assorted stock characters of the fourteenth-century urban landscape. It is La Chata who enacts most graphically this “screwing over” by throwing the Archpriest unceremoniously over her shoulder in
a gesture that deprives him of every prerogative and reduces him finally to an "empty scrotum." 28

Such a reading produces grave consequences for the text’s authoritative voice, especially if we fix that authoritative voice irrevocably within the moral systems and sexual economies of the West. But can we? As author, Juan Ruiz engages with equal alacrity in religious reverie, stock moralizing, and candid advice for the sexually aroused; as protagonist, in pilgrimages, the pursuit of love in an oriental mode, and submissive posturing to both the will of a vigorous Sir Love and the sexual caprices of the serranas. He is both auctoritas and exemplum, top man and bottom, an ambiguous subject who refuses to line up with strict categories of active/passive, sanctioned/illicit, sacred/profane, divine/human, hetero/homo. 29 And yet there is no contradiction here, no implied threat to the structure and boundaries of identity; the Archpriest’s effeminized/sodomized body emerges not as the harbinger of moral dissolution or the sign of crossed prerogatives, but rather as the spontaneous expression of a queerness that defies at every turn the normativities we as Western readers continue to project onto author and text. La Chata is entirely analogous in this sense to the woman with the strap-on dildo evoked by Jonathan Goldberg in his introduction to Reclaiming Sodom—here the act of sodomy is not defining, delimiting, the benchmark of categories and identities, but rather the site of “productive confusions and rigorous questioning of a range of presumptions and conventions governing gender, sexuality and the relations of fantasy and acts.” 30

Juan Ruiz's buen amor is undeniably love of God; so too is it undeniably human, the satisfaction of sexual appetite with diverse partners in diverse forms and positions. (The narrator leaves little doubt that he enjoyed his scuffle with La Chata: “Believe me, I made a good bargain!”) It is queer love in the broadest sense, a vital living out in the realm of desire of the “spectacular chaos and multiplicity of voices” that characterizes Juan Ruiz’s Spain. 31 Not so for Pero López de Ayala, the aristocratic statesman and littérateur who would deploy buen amor as unambiguous signifier scarcely half a century later. López de Ayala’s Rimado de Palacio is a 2,107-stanza poem composed in the meter of the Libro de buen amor, but intended—this in stark contrast to Juan Ruiz’s work—as a spiritual/political catechism for an increasingly xenophobic aristocracy. Here buen amor is strictly defined as love of God, and the likes of Juan Ruiz censured for their gratuitous mixing of the sacred and the profane:
It is distressing to see how some priests handle [the Sacrament], how they take it in their hands with no trace of good love [buen amor], without having confessed, and what's worse, after spending their nights in altogether different “pains.” (strophe 221)\textsuperscript{12}

So too are Juan Ruiz’s concessions to human nature (the craving for nourishment and sex) recast in terms that produce a definitive rift between the well-being of the body and the salvation of the soul:

If you’d like to guard yourself from such a sin, temper your eating, don’t be immoderate; forego the sight of women, think of naught else, and remember always that you are a mortal being. (strophe 48)\textsuperscript{13}

Buen amor is no longer the site of vital identities, dizzying signifiers, “productive confusions.”\textsuperscript{34} Bled dry, it is conscripted into service as a measure of cultural purity and religious orthodoxy, both cornerstones of Spain’s nascent national identity.

It is here, between these two works, each deploying buen amor in strikingly different ways, that I propose to locate the genesis of the sodomitic Moor. What happened between 1330 and 1380 is certainly one of the watersheds of Spanish history: the founding of a dynasty that would culminate more than a century later in the hegemony of the Catholic Monarchs and the dawn of Spain’s modern age. For much of the 1360s the kingdom of Castile was rocked by civil strife between Pedro I, legitimate heir to Alfonso XI, and Enrique of Trastámara, Alfonso’s bastard son, who had galvanized the Old Christian aristocracy against his half brother in a play for possession of the crown. Enrique’s defeat of Pedro in 1369 and the subsequent founding of the Trastamara dynasty was a victory won as much in the realm of discourse as it was on the battlefield; it might be said, in fact, that here is where Spain discovered the power of the propaganda machine. Pedro was subjected by pro-Enrique authors to a relentless campaign of abjection that portrayed him as despotic, insane, inordinately cruel, and his mistress María de Padilla as a practitioner of the black arts who held him bewitched in ways that de-
prived him of a man's natural faculties of reason and virtue. There is at least one allusion to the king's sodomitic relationship with a man (although it comes as entirely superfluous given Pedro's implicit sodomizing through capitulation to his mistress). More pointed is the coincidence between *perejil*, "parsley," a catchword for effeminacy, and *Pero Gil*, the Jew alleged to be Pedro's real father. Here Pedro is made both Jew and sodomite by his extraction from a *puto judío*, "bugger Jew," a term that would become virtually a cliché in the parlance of Trastamaran Spain.

That Pedro should be known as *el Cruel* down to the present day is attestation enough to the effectiveness of Enrique's propagandistic campaign. The greater legacy, however—far more subtle, but a vital subtext to the deployment of power and conquest throughout Spain's early-modern age—is the deliberate confusion of cultural and sexual difference, their subsuming under the single category of "sodomy." Sodomy in greater Europe carries a predominantly moral charge, only secondarily a cultural one. In Trastamaran Spain, however, what legitimizes sodomitic discourse and renders it relevant is its genesis from within the compulsion to shore up defenses against cultural contamination, the bid to reinvent Spain as a crusader state by making pragmatism yield to ideology, familiarity to contempt, diplomacy to conquest. Within such a context, the Moorish subject can no longer carry a positive or even a neutral charge, but rather must be rendered in defamiliarizing terms that reinforce the power and privilege of the hegemonic subject.

Curiously, it is less the Moorish subject who bears the name of sodomite in fifteenth-century Spain than it is the Christian subject associated in vital and dangerous ways with Moorish presence in Iberia. Among the more notorious figures is Álvaro de Luna, favorite to Juan II and virtual dictator of Castilian politics for almost forty years. Luna is already suspect because of his reliance on Jews and *conversos* (recent converts from Judaism) in his efforts to construct a centralist state, or so Pero Sarmiento, leader of Toledo's anti-*converso* revolt, gives us to understand in his manifesto of 1449. Here Luna is rendered dangerous not only through the bold accusation of collaboration with *conversos*, but more shrewdly through a rhetorical slide into a discourse of *Reconquista* that conflates the Toledo/Luna conflict with the archetypal battle between Christian and Moor:

> the said *conversos* have always shown themselves to be the enemies of [Toledo] and of its old Christian inhabitants; it was at
their instigation that the city was besieged by the condestable Don Álvaro de Luna and his followers, who waged a cruel war against us; such ills the Jews have always brought about ever since the passion of our savior Jesus Christ; even the Jews who lived of old in this city, finding it besieged by the Moors our enemies and Tariq their captain, struck a deal and sold the city and its Christian inhabitants, and so gave entrance to the Moors.  

Here it is the conversos/Jews who “give entrance” to Luna/the Moors; elsewhere it is Luna himself who is made to “give entrance” to “the filthiest of all vices, that thing most detestable to both God and nature, which has always been condemned most in Spain, especially among the people of your own realms, and whose repulsiveness is such that we cannot bring ourselves to name it.” Luna becomes, as the Jews had already been for centuries, a sodomite in the most perfidious sense—the site of manifold transgressions, an agent of permeation, the source of contamination for an as of yet vulnerable national identity.

As sodomite, Luna constitutes, much as Pedro had, cultural and sexual inflections of the abuse of power that would become formulaic throughout Spain’s earlier modern period. Such inflections are articulated most graphically perhaps in the case of Juan II’s son Enrique IV, as Barbara Weissberger demonstrates in her penetrating study of the discourse of effeminacy in Trastamaran Spain. Enrique’s predilection for Moorish custom is made so manifest in the historical record that he can scarcely be called Christian, or so some sources would have us believe. Says Alfonso de Palencia, chronicler for his reign (although hardly a friend to his cause), “even in his walk, in his food, and in his manner of reclining when eating, and in other secret and more indecent excesses, he had preferred the customs of the Moors to those of the Christian religion.” In Palencia, maurophilia occasions the contiguous charges of impotency and sodomy, indeed, the production of a master discourse (one Weissberger very aptly terms a “genealogy of sodomy and illegitimacy”) that inflects in significant ways the cries of “ja tierra, puto!” by which the king is dethroned in effigy in 1465.

What I wish to argue is that the sodomitic Moor does not arise in Spain in rote imitation of those discourses of abjection already deeply entrenched in the West. He seems, rather, a by-product of the forging of sexual, cultural, and gender difference into a serviceable discourse by which the Christian hegemonic structure might expose the “enemy
within,” that is, the heterodoxy and abuse of power rampant at its very core. The compulsion to eject the heterodox (construed as sodomite) from the inner sanctum of Spanish hegemony inevitably replicates the imperatives of *Reconquista*, while enabling in turn the deployment of an ideologically driven iconography by which Muslim–Christian relations are configured in terms of sexual normativity and the male prerogative. Jordan notes how the martyr Pelagius is progressively transformed from ephbe (a figure whose physical beauty could not fail to evoke dangerous desires) to bearded warrior—a rallying cry for *Reconquista* and icon of an unambiguous masculinity. So too does Isabel the Catholic’s re-gendered body operate as the catalyst by which Spain is empowered to eject the Moors at long last in the figure of Boabdil, king of Granada, in 1492. Here the Muslim king’s submission to a sword-bearing Isabel replays Juan Ruiz’s submission to the serranas of a century and a half earlier, only now it serves the purposes of an absolute normativity, no longer the “productive confusions” that obtain in *Libro de buen amor*.

The taking of Granada becomes implicitly the violation of the collective Moorish body by Pelagius the warrior or Isabel the virago in a phallic thrust so powerfully conceived that it would drive Spain’s conquering impulse into the New World. So too would it feed the obsessive rehearsal of Spain’s masculinity throughout its golden age, most notably in the ballad tradition and in a burgeoning national theater. Here is where Boabdil would submit over and over again to the shame of losing Granada, where his mother would chastise him (in terms intended to certify Christian Spain’s position “on top”) for “crying like a woman for the loss of that which he could not defend as a man.” And yet the very need for such rehearsal betrays at the heart of Spain’s modernity a chronic awareness of its own queerness, an inevitable identification with those very figures of abjection against which it strove to define its national identity. It is all too evident that the allegations of sodomy launched against Álvaro de Luna or Enrique IV derive less from the act of sodomy than from Spain’s compulsion to construct itself as uniquely impervious to sodomy—it is, after all, a vice “condemned most in Spain”—this in a striking parallel with a revitalized discourse of *Reconquista* by which Spain’s natural state is rendered as an orthodoxy barely tarnished by eight centuries of Muslim presence. Sodomy and heterodoxy feed the one into the other and seem to provoke a similar nationalistic, ultimately heteronormative response wherever they emerge.

Not surprisingly, post-*Reconquista* efforts to come to terms with
Moorish presence in the narrative of Spanish history could not help but split into curious modes of speech, not only into that hyperbolic discourse of (hetero)normativity whose roots we see already in López de Ayala, but also into equivocal modes that seek to control, repress, eliminate while at the same time giving expression to dangerous desires. It is this second mode that would generate the literatura morisca of Spain’s golden age, the stylized literary response to continued Moorish presence (in the person of Moriscos—Arab-speaking peoples converted at least superficially to Christianity) within an “ethnically cleansed” Christian Spain. Exemplary of the genre is El Abencerraje, a short novel composed anonymously in the mid-sixteenth century, although it revisits the Spain of a century and a half earlier, when Christian hegemony was all but assured on the Iberian Peninsula. Here the consummate Christian warrior Rodrigo de Narváez is projected as the paragon of esfuerzo, a masculine virtue defined almost exclusively through force of arms. His encounter with the Moor Abindarráez affords him the opportunity to deploy esfuerzo in deliberate and telling ways, at first routinely through the besting of the Moor in a border skirmish, ultimately through patronizing Abindarráez’s desire for the Moorish maiden Jarifa and active participation in a string of negotiations that reunites the two lovers at the novel’s conclusion.

Superficial readings would have Rodrigo engaging in a conspicuous display of virtue, a normative thrust into the queernesses inevitably aroused by Abindarráez’s cultural identity and his surrender to affairs of the heart: “I want you to see that my virtue can overcome your ruinous fortune,” Rodrigo comments to the lovesick Moor after hearing his tale. But it operates just as readily as a gesture of homosexual panic, the willful sublimation of those queer desires that slip out from between the cracks of his social intercourse with the Moor and lie always just beneath the surface, this from Abindarráez’s first appearance in the narrative. Like the Rodrigo whose indiscretions with La Cava Florinda led to the loss of Visigothic Spain, Rodrigo de Narváez’s own men, lustful for battle with Moors, hide among the bushes to spy on the unwary Abindarráez:

And watching very attentively, they saw a noble Moor on a roan stallion advancing over the road they had been following. He was of heroic physique and handsome countenance, and he sat his horse expertly. He wore a crimson marlota and a damask bur-noose of the same color, and both were embroidered with gold and silver. His right sleeve was turned back, and embroidered
on it was the figure of a lovely girl, while he carried in his hand a heavy and beautiful lance with two points. He wore a shield and scimitar, and on his head a Tunisian turban which, as it was wrapped around his head, served as a decoration as well as a protection to his person. (47)

Abindarráez is made the object of an equivocal gaze, one that admires his beauty (hermosura) as much as it does his strength (esfuerzo) and casts him only secondarily as antagonist to the impulse of Reconquista. The Moor succumbs to Rodrigo in battle only after Rodrigo's men have succumbed to the Moor, both to his greater physical prowess and to their fascination with his exotic figure. Indeed, they almost let him pass without incident, so "aroused" are they by the sight of him ("transportados en verle").

Rodrigo himself, although asserting his position on top through physical combat, is in turn seduced by the Moor's paradoxical declaration that "[y]ou can kill me, for you have me in your power, but only the one who has already defeated me can conquer me" (49). The reference is unequivocally to Jarifa, Abindarráez's beloved; nonetheless, it is cast in gender-neutral terms that blur the lines between male and female, literal and figurative, power and sex, and continue to push the tale in distinctly queer directions. Within this equivocal frame of reference, Rodrigo's imprisonment of the Moor is less real—the consequence of military conflict—than it is the homosocial turn of Jarifa's figurative imprisonment of the Moor through a courtly mode of discourse. So too do the attentions Rodrigo pays to the Moor's wounded body and his subsequent magnanimous gestures smack less of protocol than they do of courtship. By tale's end, the gozo, "pleasure," that should define Jarifa's enjoyment of Abindarráez's body cannot help but inflect in significant ways Rodrigo's use of the term in a letter he addresses to the lady: "Abindarráez has not wished to let me enjoy [gozar] the real triumph of his imprisonment which consists of pardoning and doing good; and since never was enterprise so worthy of a Spanish captain offered me in this land, I should like to enjoy it all [gozarla toda]" (81). Jarifa operates ultimately as a stand-in for Rodrigo, or rather, as a sort of heterosexual release valve for Rodrigo's homosocial (if not homoerotic) desires. Her presence allows for sustained intimacies between the Christian and the Moor, a figurative lovemaking that is scarcely suppressed by the novel's neat (heteronormative) conclusion.
The Moor seems always to emerge in early-modern Spain's rescripting of Reconquista as the emblem of a conflictive identity, the specter of Spain's own queer past from which it would be hard-pressed to exorcise itself entirely. He is an object of both abjection and desire, a necessary foil to Spanish normativity—El Abencerraje makes perfectly clear that Spain's collective esfuerzo is most readily obtained by "[warring] against the Moors" (43)—and yet an insidious threat to that normativity in the desires he inevitably provokes. Sánchez-Albornoz's "homosexual Moors" of three centuries later are only the latter-day turn of early-modern Spain's "warring against the Moors," the perpetuation in a revitalized idiom of categories of difference deployed along the vectors of race, culture, gender, and desire long after the Moriscos were expelled from Spain in the first decades of the seventeenth century. They serve as the emblem of what Spain is not, to wit, "an Africanized country, infected with an oriental virus, deprived of any creative impetus, the scraps of Islam." And yet even an extremist such as Sánchez-Albornoz cannot help but fall into contradictions, get mired in paradoxical formulations, ultimately stumble upon the very essence of Spanish identity in the body of the other. "Only in one respect," he confesses almost in spite of himself, was Islam not detrimental to us. As the essence of Arabic-Spanish culture—its art, its literature, its philosophy, and its science—spread through European Spain, it produced exceptionally fertile fruit: it cultivated the Spanish spirit and prepared the way both for an early reception of the Renaissance on our soil and the marvelous blossoming of the golden age.

Spain is both impervious to the "virus oriental" and yet infected by that same virus, made "queer" in a vital, transforming, prolific sense that ushers in no less than Spain's golden age. Just as Rodrigo's heteronormative gestures are both compelled by and disrupted by queer desire, so too is Sánchez-Albornoz's reactionary historicism compelled by and disrupted by the indisputable and intensely seductive presence of the Moor within Spanish cultural identity. We need only reread his words—those with which I opened this essay—to appreciate their nervousness, the way they undo themselves and begin to spawn ambiguities even as
they struggle to produce essentialist categories: "homosexuality, which was widely practiced in Muslim Spain, would have triumphed." "Homosexuality" may very well claim agency as the subject of the sentence, but it operates simultaneously as the implied object of Moorish practice, and so enters into a spin within which agency is rendered utterly meaningless. The very use of the term practice, so neatly coinciding with positivists Ranke and Cantor, pulls us always back to the epidemiological model, to the notion of homosexuality as "temporary aberration" (to borrow Foucault's term), as curable disease. Moorish Spain begins to slip into the cracks between acts and identities, and even Christian Spain loses its value as a constant—as the geographical and moral antithesis to the Moors, uniquely impervious to homosexuality—by suggesting itself as a victim in potentia (the use of the conditional is telling) to homosexuality's "triumph."

The slipperiness of Sánchez-Albornoz's formulation can certainly be attributed at least partially to the instabilities of pre-Foucauldian discourse on matters of sexuality. (So too does Cantor slide into unintended essentialisms by claiming that imperial Rome was "vitiated from its earliest days by homosexuality.") I hope to have demonstrated, however, that it has far more to do with the fault lines inherent in Spanish historicism, with a chronic ambivalence toward Moorish presence in Spanish history that can be traced to the dawn of Spain's modern age. Crucial to the moment was the invention of Moorish queerness, the definitive construction of categories of difference (embracing culture, gender, sexuality, and eventually race) that fueled the conquest of Granada and enabled both Spain's reinvention as an orthodox state and its apparent integration into a pan-European normativity. And yet the Moor has remained a fixture throughout the modern period, inescapably present in Spain's architectural landscape, in its language and literature, in its historical moment, in its imaginary, in its very bloodline—all unsettling reminders of the degree to which abjection of the Moor compromises Spanish claims to normativity. Ultimately, Spain's enigma has been this: if it was compelled to essentialize Moorish queerness, so too was it compelled to resist such essentializations, to foster ambiguities in its encounter with the Moor from which it might conjure at least the illusion of a "normative" history and identity.
My sincerest thanks to both Josiah Blackmore and Peggy McCracken for their constructive feedback on preliminary versions of this essay.


4. Following the lead of renowned Hispano-Arabist E. Lévi-Provençal, Antonio Arjona Castro makes similar claims for Muslim Iberia in particular: “If during the period of the taifas kingdoms this social phenomenon of homosexuality had an enormous increase, it might be explained by the zeal for pleasure of a society that had lost its high moral standards and was marching on the road of degeneracy toward its own destruction” (*La sexualidad en la España musulmana* [Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 1985], 41; my translation).

5. I prefer the term Moor (moro in Spanish) here and throughout this essay, not only because it is the stock term employed in virtually all the sources I will be considering, but also and primarily because it underscores the difference between the historical fact of the Ibero-Muslims and their ideologically charged reinvention by Christian Iberia. On the problems of terminology, see L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain: 1250–1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1.


7. Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 21. Jordan notes that this description has been read all too ingenuously as “a bit of evidence for social history” by some scholars (see 21n.44), an issue I will take up later in this essay.

8. Note, for example, the explicit reference to the Saracen “Trinity” in verses 2696–97: “They lament their gods, Tervagant, Mohammed, / and Apollo, whom they have no more” (*Chanson de Roland*, trans. Gerard J. Brault [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984]). My thanks to Peggy McCracken for tracking down this passage for me.


11. See Israel Burshatin’s reading of the *Crónica sarracina* in particular in “The Moor

12. In the Siete infantes de Lara, Ruy Velázquez, who betrays his brother-in-law Gonzalo de Gustiôz by setting an ambush for his seven sons, is despicable to both Christians and Moors. Gonzalo’s son by a Moorish woman (in some versions sister to Almanzor, then ruler of al-Andalus) is the one to avenge the death of his half brothers, this with Almanzor’s implicit blessing. In the Cantar de mio Cid, it is the Moor Abengálbon (the Cid’s “friend in peace”) who exposes the treachery of the Cid’s sons-in-law, the Christian infantes of Carrión.


15. Richard Fletcher, Moorish Spain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 8. For a more protracted discussion, see Fletcher’s chapter on convivencia (131–56) in the same volume. David Nirenberg is far more critical of Castro’s notion of convivencia, positing that “violence was a central and systematic aspect of the coexistence of majority and minorities in medieval Spain” (Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9). He is quick to point out, however, that violence does not preclude relationships of interdependence, even cooperation.

16. Smith, Christians and Moors, 117; my emphasis. My discussion here and throughout would have benefited greatly from implementation of the categories of male sex and gender deviance adduced by David Halperin in his “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality” (GL 6:1 [2000]: 87–123). In allusions to Moorish sexual excess cited here, we might read a discourse of effeminacy because, as Halperin notes, effeminacy was “for a long time defined as a symptom of an excess of what we would call heterosexual as well as homosexual desire” (92). What remains true, however, is that sodomy, considered by Halperin as a separate category from effeminacy, is seldom if ever invoked in Spanish literary treatment of the Moors before the fourteenth century.

17. Jordan, The Invention of Sodomy, 16. Although he reads the term effeminatus (used by Pelagius against the caliph) as suggestive of male-male sodomy in particular, Jordan admits that it could also have been intended “in the general sense that connects any form of sexual self-indulgence with womanliness” (13). We might add that the misogyny inherent in Christian moral discourse would further equate with womanliness those more material things—“wealth, opulent clothing, precious ornaments, life in the court”—with which the caliph also attempts to seduce the boy.


22. Ahmad al-Tīfāshi, *The Delight of Hearts, or, What You Will Not Find in Any Book* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1988), abridged and trans. Edward A. Lacey, from René R. Khawam’s French translation, *Les délices des cœurs* (Paris: Phébus, 1981). By way of preface to his chapter on “homosexuals,” al-Tīfāshi maintains that “a great many of the literati, as well as the majority of the members of the upper crust of society, belong to the ranks of homosexuals. We have accordingly thought it wiser not to spell out their names, so as not to tarnish their reputations, the more so as quite a few of them indulge in these practices only out of a taste for elegance, impelled by a love much more intellectual than physical, finding in them principally an exercise for the mind, an enchantment propitious to the development of the intelligence, a method open to all for refining the faculties of understanding and discernment, as well as a manner of distancing themselves from the simplistic ideas about life held by the common people” (55). In his “Arab Civilization and Male Love,” Daniel seems to modify his conclusions about the Arab world’s indulgent attitude toward homosexuality when he admits that “the Qur’ān’s prohibition of homosexuality definitely made it impossible in Muslim countries to resurrect the homoerotic cults of the Ancient World” (63). See also Everett K. Rowson, “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 50–79.


28. “She took me firmly by the hand, / threw me around her neck / like a light shepherd’s bag, / and carried me downhill” (strophe 967). As Vasvári points out, *zurron* (shepherd’s pouch) is an utterly equivocal word in this context: “The empty pouch . . . , because it is made of hide and easily inflated or deflated, is a standard carnivalesque sign for the scrotum. At the same time in medical discourse the empty pouch is a reference to orchiectomy, a form of castration of domestic animals but also of diseased human male organs through the surgical excision of the testicles from the scrotum, which is not itself removed but remains as a little empty bag” (ibid., 146).

29. Daniel Eisenberg suggests that the narrator’s servant Don Hurón, described as an
“apostado doncel” (“handsome young man”), crops up in the final passages of the work as a veiled reference to the possibilities of boy love. For Eisenberg, however, the author/narrator operates throughout the work as an idealized heterosexual subject set in deliberate opposition to Moorish homosexuality, making inevitable his rejection of the boy in favor of the “dueña chica” (“little dueña”) who follows (“Juan Ruiz’s Heterosexual ‘Good Love,'” 262–63).


33. Here López de Ayala speaks specifically of the sin of fornication in its multiple modes, “some very grave; others, abominable (aborrecedas)” (strophe 47b)—terms that suggest sodomy, the “abominable vice,” as the extreme degree.

34. Goldberg, Reclaiming Sodom, 3.

35. Chief among these authors is the same Pero López de Ayala mentioned earlier. At first a partisan of Pedro’s, then an apologist for Enrique, López de Ayala emerges in late-fourteenth-century political discourse as the virtual inventor of the Trastamaran party line. For a critical analysis of anti-Pedro propaganda, see Louise Mirrer, The Language of Evaluation: A Sociolinguistic Approach to the Story of Pedro el Cruel in Ballad and Chronicle (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986).

36. Barbara Weissberger notes: “In his Compendiosa Historia Hispanica (c. 1470) Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo records the legend of the buffoon who, addressing Pedro I as he lies dying in the tent of Bernard du Guesclin, suggests that the king has had an unnatural friendship with him” (“‘A tierra, puto!’: Alfonso de Palencia’s Discourse of Effeminacy,” in Queer Iberia, 291–324; citation at 302).


38. Sarmiento’s “Sentencia-Estatuto” is published in its entirety in Eloy Benito Ruano, Toledo en el siglo XV: vida política (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1961), 191–96. The translation is my own.

39. This appears in the “Memorial de agravios” (Record of grievances) presented to Juan II by an intransigent nobility in 1440 (the translation is my own). For the full text of the “Memorial,” see the Crónica del halconero de Juan II, compiled by Pedro Carrillo de Huete, falconer to the king, in the edition by Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1946), 331.

40. For a lengthier deliberation on Luna as sodomite, see my “Desperately Seeking Sodom: Queerness in the Chronicles of Alvar de Luna,” in Queer Iberia, 222–49.

41. Quoted and translated in Weissberger, “‘A tierra, puto!’” 295–96; my emphasis.

42. “Eat dirt, faggot!” in Weissberger’s translation, ibid., 301.


44. Says Juan de Flores, official chronicler to the Catholic Monarchs, “not like a woman, but like a brave man she takes to heart the weight of such a great responsibility” (Weissberger, “‘A tierra, puto!’” 303).

45. New World conquest might easily be read as an extended and tragic playing out once again of the script by which Spain sought to consummate Reconquista and so invent


47. *Celestina* certainly falls into this category in its graphic representation of *alcahueteria*—institutionalized matchmaking—which had its origins in the urban culture of the Islamic world.

48. Here I differ with Carrasco-Urgoiti, who sees in works as early as Don Juan Manuel's *El conde Lucanor* (fourteenth century) the essence of *literatura morisca* (The Moorish Novel, 41–42). I would argue that the mythologizing of Reconquista as a fait accompli is utterly essential to the genesis of the romanticized Moor. For a concise account of Morisco presence in early-modern Spain, see Fletcher (*Moorish Spain*, 167–69).

49. As translated by John Esten Keller in *Antonio de Villegas' El Abencerraje*, a collaboration of Francisco López Estrada and John Esten Keller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 63. Subsequent references are given in the text.

50. My argument here coincides with many of the points made by Laura R. Bass in the “Homosocial Bonds and Desire in the Abencerraje,” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 24:3 (spring 2000): 453–71. Bass as well notes that “an initially exoticized, sensuous Abindarraez simultaneously attracts and destabilizes the alcaide and his squires, and it is precisely to contain the disruptive potential embodied by the Moor that Rodrigo ultimately sanctions and enables his marriage to Jarifa” (456). So too does Bass suggest the “homosexual panic” I ultimately read into the hegemonic structures of early-modern Spain: “[The order that Rodrigo embodies] has to negotiate again and again the challenge of female desire and agency as well as the potentially disruptive pull of an alluring, exotic ‘Other’” (465).

51. Burshatin notes that by the sixteenth century the Moor would operate textually as a paradoxical value between two extremes: “On the ‘villifying side,’ Moors are hateful dogs, miserly, treacherous, lazy and overreaching. On the ‘idealizing’ side, the men are noble, loyal, heroic, courtly—they even mirror the virtues that Christian knights aspire to—while the women are endowed with singular beauty and discretion” (“The Moor in the Text,” 117).

52. This in Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz’s *España y el Islam* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1943), 49; my translation.

53. Ibid., 44–45.
In a strikingly odd passage from the Old French *Perlesvaus*, an early thirteenth-century grail romance, the eponymous knight is described in terms that announce his extraordinary virtue, prowess, and sexual purity, while at the same time they seem to question the gender identity of the virgin knight. Perlesvaus’s sister describes her brother as “the chaste knight from a holy lineage. He has a golden head, the gaze of a lion, the navel of a virgin maiden, a valiant heart, and the highest virtues.” The “no[m]blil de virge pucele” describes the virgin male body with the image of the intact female body, but the gender shift seems out of place in the enumeration of chivalric attributes. The knight’s “navel of a virgin maiden” seems to suggest that the combination of chivalric prowess and sexual abstinence is not a fully masculine subject position in medieval romance.

Medieval romances situate the relationship between gender and sexual desire in the particular context of a heroic sexual economy in which great knights are great lovers. Grail romances introduce a new subject position into chivalric heroism: the great knight whose exemplary chivalry is rewarded not with privileged access to a woman’s body, but with a privileged access to God. Yet the new model of chaste heroism interrupts the sexual exchange that is part of the heroic structure of medieval romances. Masculine heroic bodies are defined not only through chivalric battle, but also through the desire for sexual reward, and grail
romances underscore the anomaly introduced into the sexual economy by the valorization of chaste heroism. Within the context of the conventionally intelligible identities in chivalric romances, the knight who renounces desire is a decidedly queer subject, a great warrior with the navel of a virgin maiden. In grail romances the chaste knight's withdrawal from desire places him outside of the reciprocal relationship of prowess and sexual love that defines chivalric identities, and provokes an anxious narrative negotiation of the gender of the chaste subject.

**Heroic Love**

There is perhaps no more exemplary figure of chivalric heroism in medieval romance than King Arthur's nephew, Gauvain. Although Gauvain's character may vary or evolve from romance to romance, he is usually portrayed as both a great knight and a great lover. Episodes from two thirteenth-century romances illustrate the extent to which the two identities depend on each other.

When Gauvain meets the Demoiselle de Lis in the *First Continuation* of Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du graal*, this young lady already loves him because she has heard that he has more wisdom, generosity, courtesy, and skill than any other living knight. She abandons her heart and her body to Gauvain, and he willingly accepts both. At the end of the afternoon they spend together, the young lady is no longer a virgin, and Gauvain has ridden away, promising to return and marry her. The lady's welcoming reception of Gauvain is not surprising since throughout Arthurian romance Gauvain's reputation as a great knight wins the respect of knights and the love of women. And Gauvain's easy acceptance of the damsel's heart and body suggests that sexual love is not an unexpected reward for chivalric prowess and reputation: because of his great deeds, Gauvain has earned love. Indeed, it seems that Gauvain's reputation entitles him to love whether or not it is offered, and if the love he has earned is not freely given, Gauvain takes it by force. When he describes the encounter to Arthur and his knights later in the romance, Gauvain claims to have raped the Demoiselle de Lis.

In Arthurian romance, Gauvain is known not only as an accomplished knight, but also as an accomplished seducer of women. In the *Perlesvaus*, Gauvain seeks lodging at the castle of Marin le Jaloux, but Marin's wife is reluctant to receive Gauvain in the absence of her hus-
band, who considers Gauvain a threat to his wife's fidelity: "Milord Gauvain never declared his love to a lady or to a maiden without having his way with her." Gauvain's renown as a great knight and a great lover illustrates the correspondence between love and chivalry in medieval romance. In the heroic structure of Arthurian literature, chivalric prowess and sexual prowess are linked in a valorization of exemplary victories on the battlefield and in the chamber.

The association of prowess and sexual reward is rarely interrogated within courtly narratives—most romances accept this relationship as a natural one. Women desire great warriors, knights desire beautiful ladies; sexual desire is usually both heterosexual and reciprocal. Romances certainly narrate episodes that escape these conventions and dispute the seemingly natural association of chivalric reputation and freely offered sexual reward—Gauvain's claim to have raped the Demoiselle de Lis is an example. Yet episodes like these are usually contained within the narrative by explanations, allegorical appropriations, or triangulated structures of desire. Gauvain's confession of rape is, for example, counterbalanced by the narrator's earlier account of the damsel's willing submission to the knight's embraces. Although accounts such as these may trouble the association of prowess and love in medieval romances, and critique the gendered hierarchies and sexual orthodoxies that this association promotes, they are ultimately incorporated into a narrative structure in which masculine prowess merits the sexual reward offered by the bodies of women.

In other words, courtly romances recount a world in which sexual and heroic economies are reciprocal, and in which the virgin knight is an anomaly. The knight who refuses sexual reward for his exploits disrupts the cycle in which chivalric prowess is rewarded with a sexual love that, in turn, inspires chivalric prowess. At the same time, of course, the representation of the grail hero introduces new values into the world of romance. The pursuit of what La queste del saint graal calls celestial chivalry, in which heroism earns spiritual rewards, replaces earthly chivalry, in which heroism earns sexual rewards.

Chaste Subjects

The anomalous status of the chaste knight with respect to the gendered identities defined through chivalric victories and sexual conquests may
be seen in two ways. First, as a noble man who does not reproduce, the chaste knight disrupts networks of influence, wealth, and power defined by lineage and succession. Second, the chaste knight refuses the sexual relationships with women that counterbalance and often define relationships between knights in the world of chivalric contests and alliances. Indeed, the announcement of the grail quest is coterminous with the redefinition of chivalric errance as a wholly homosocial undertaking in *La queste del saint graal*: knights are forbidden to take women on the quest; any knight who takes a wife or lover with him will be guilty of mortal sin.

Yet although the grail quest imposes a period of abstinence for those who undertake it, in *La queste* only three knights, Perceval, Galahad, and Bors, are identified as grail knights and bound to permanent chastity, and only two of them, Perceval and Galahad, have preserved the idealized bodily integrity of virginity, as a recluse explains to Perceval:

Biax niés, il est ainsi que vos vos estes gardez jusque a cest terme en tel maniere que vostre virginitez ne fu maumise ne empoiiree, ne onques ne seustes de voir quex chose est chars ne assemblemenz. Et il vos en est bien mestiers; car se tant vos fust avenu que vostre chars fust violee par corruption de pechie, a estre principaus compains des compaignons de la Queste eussiez vos failli, ausi come a fet Lancelot del Lac qui, par eschaufement de char et par sa mauvese luxure, a perdu a mener a fin, grant tens a, ce dont tuit li autre sont ores en peine. Et por ce vos pri je que vos gardez vostre cors si net come Nostre Sires vos mist en chevalerie, si que vos puissiez venir virges et nez devant le Saint Graal et sans tache de luxure. Et certes ce sera une des plus belles proeces que onques chevaliers feist: car de toz çax de la Table Reonde n'i a il un sol qui ne se soit meffez en virginite, fors vos et Galaad, le Bon Chevalier.

You kept yourself up to now in such a way that your virginity was not lost or ruined, and you never learned about the flesh or about its coupling. And it was necessary for you not to do so, for if your flesh had been corrupted by sin, you would never have become one of the principal companions of the Quest. Lancelot failed in this way. Through the passion of the flesh and through his sinful attachment to pleasure, some time ago he failed to
end the adventure that the others now pursue. And for this reason I beg you to keep your body as clean as when our Lord sent you into knighthood, so that you can come before the grail as a spotless virgin without the stain of carnal pleasures. And this will be one of the greatest feats that any knight ever accomplished: for of all those who belong to the Round Table there is not a single one who has not lost his virginity except you and Galahad, the Good Knight.

The chaste knights, Perceval, Bors, and Galahad, are also the best knights of the Round Table, and Galahad displaces his father, Lancelot, as the best knight in the world. Galahad’s unequaled chivalry and purity make him the primary representative of the new model of heroism introduced in the grail romances: the perfect knight whose body and spirit are untouched by carnal desire. Indeed, Galahad’s privileged status as a knight without sin is protected by God, who will not allow him to be tempted.

Whereas Galahad cannot be tempted to sin, Bors is still vulnerable to temptation, despite his dedication to chastity. Bors is not a virgin knight; he was tricked into intercourse a single time, but his subsequent dedication to chastity saves him from his earlier sin and from later seductions. In an episode from La queste, Bors is tempted by the devil in the form of a beautiful woman. The devil appears as a lady who has refused her love to many other knights because she desires only Bors. Bors does not know how to answer her desire, because “in no way does he wish to lose his chastity.” The lady asks him to sleep with her, and when Bors refuses, she threatens to kill herself if Bors will not comply with her wishes. She commands her servants to hold the knight and force him to watch as she climbs to the top of a tall tower with twelve of her maidens. They will all throw themselves down to die if Bors does not agree to have sex with the lady. Bors feels pity for these apparently noble ladies, but he does not waver in his resolve to resist sexual sin: “he would prefer that they lose their souls rather than to lose his own.” The ladies let themselves fall from the tower, Bors makes the sign of the cross, and the tower and the ladies disappear in the midst of a great tumult caused by their cries as they all change back into devils.

Bors is resolute in the resistance of sin, and God protects Galahad from temptation. Of the three grail knights identified in La queste, only
Perceval remains vulnerable to sexual temptation—and particularly to sexual temptations by the devil.

**Engendering Desire**

In *La queste del saint graal*, Perceval is stranded on an island and he is visited by a beautiful damsel in a boat. This lady offers him shelter from the hot sun, makes a comfortable bed for him, and, after he has taken a nap, she serves him a wonderful meal with lots of wine. The knight becomes hot (*bien eschaufez*), and desires to have sex with the lady. As he joins her in bed, Perceval sees his sword and remembers to make the sign of the cross. The damsel, the bed, and the tent all immediately vanish in a huge puff of smoke, and Perceval is left alone on the island, naked, his clothes thrown to one side and his weapons to the other.¹⁵

A man dressed as a priest then arrives in another boat and explains that the lady’s attempted seduction was the work of the devil: “The damsel to whom you spoke is the enemy, the master of hell, he who has power over all the others.”¹⁶ This explanation of the demonic incarnation is characterized by the devil’s shifting gender (the damsel who is a devil), and although devils are sexless beings that do not properly have a gender, the Old French text assigns a definite masculine identity to “*li anemis, li mestres d’enfer, cil qui a poësté sor toz les autres.*”¹⁷

This episode from *La queste* is one of several accounts of sexual temptation that accompany the valorization of chastity in Old French grail romances. These temptations are prominent in the later romances where they stand alongside other demonic temptations to sin, and they offer varied portraits of the devil in the form of a beautiful woman. The function of these episodes is to test the knight’s dedication to chastity, and accounts of the knight’s desire for the devil reveal the precarious state of the knight’s renunciation of sexual desire. Although Bors is resolute, ready to let the lady lose her soul by committing suicide rather than lose his own by having sex with her, Perceval does not put up any fight at all. He has a good meal and immediately thinks of having sex with the lady. But this episode and others like it demonstrate something more than Perceval’s vulnerability to seduction. The emphasis on the devil’s shifting gender suggests that the threat of the devil’s seduction is located not primarily in Perceval’s vulnerability to desire, but in the dangerous ambiguities suggested by his changing gender. If the devil’s am-
biguous corporeal incarnation in *La queste del saint graal* disrupts conventional categories of masculinity and femininity, as Jane Burns has suggested, it may also challenge the difference between the kinds of desire solicited by gendered bodies in medieval romances.¹⁸

In the episode from *La queste*, Perceval’s desire changes gendered registers when he learns that the devil is not a lady—he desires sex with the female apparition, he seeks battle with the male. “Sire,” Perceval says to the priest who has revealed the devil’s identity, “you have told me so much about this lady that I know well that this is the champion against whom I have to do battle.”¹⁹ The desire for sex would not seem to be interchangeable with the desire for battle. These are quite different kinds of desire, but in *La queste* they are presented as gendered forms of a single reaction: the desire for battle with a man is an alternative to the desire for sex with a lady.

Perceval’s desire to fight the enemy, like his desire to sleep with the lady, is a conventional expression of romance heroic desire. Knights seek battle to prove chivalric prowess; they seek sexual love as a reward for their exploits. In *La queste*, the representation of the two kinds of desire as alternate responses to the same encounter demonstrates the extent to which the knight’s desire is scripted by conventional romance definitions of heroic action. By showing battle as an alternative to sexual intercourse in an encounter with a single being, the text points to the potential confusion between the two forms of chivalric action and suggests that desire does not exist independent of the encounter with an object. In other words, chivalric actions—both love and battle—are defined not by a preexisting desire, but by the knight’s perception of the gender of the object of desire.²⁰

On the one hand, this seems painfully obvious—a knight sees a beautiful lady, he desires sex; a knight sees an enemy, he desires battle. And indeed, this is the conventional structure of desire in medieval romances, as I have already suggested. On the other hand, Perceval’s encounter with the gender-shifting devil troubles the separation of the two kinds of desire, and the ambiguous gender of the devil and Perceval’s ambivalent dedication to chastity are worth examining for what they suggest about the anxious incorporation of chastity into the world of medieval romance.

Perceval’s encounter with the devil-lady initially follows the conventional romance model of sexual reward for chivalric prowess. The devil-lady seduces the knight not only with her beauty and the wine she
offers, but also by her “soft words,” the “douces paroles” that she says to him—a seduction that includes the claim to have loved him for a long time: “I will do whatever pleases you. And know truly that however much you have desired to possess me, I have desired you even more. For you are one of the knights I have most desired in all the world.” The lady’s claim to have loved Perceval before meeting him implies that she knows his reputation, and in the link it proposes between the knight’s worth and the lady’s love, the speech resembles the profession of desire by the Demoiselle de Lis whom Gauvain encounters, possesses, and abandons in reward for his exemplary chivalric exploits. The devil-lady implicitly offers herself to Perceval as a tribute to his reputation. And she further solicits his attachment by appealing to him for help, presenting herself as a “demoisele deseritee,” a disinherited damsel who has been unjustly robbed of her rightful position and wealth in the world. She appeals to Perceval’s chivalric duty to come to her aid: “Because I know that you are a good and noble knight I have come here to ask for your help. And you must do it, for you belong to the Round Table; for none who belongs may fail to help a disinherited damsel if she asks for help.”

Perceval does not understand that the lady speaks allegorically, that the kingdom from which she has been disinherited is the kingdom of God, and he willingly agrees to help the devil who is disguised as this most conventional of all romance ladies, the damsel in distress. But when Perceval’s lovely companion is revealed to be a masculine devil, the form of the knight’s desire changes to correspond to the perceived gender of its object, in accordance with romance conventions of heroic action. The apparition, gendered female, offers a sexual reward for chivalric merit; the demon, gendered male, offers the challenge of battle.

Although Perceval’s desire for the devil seems to shift along gendered lines, the gender distinction is of course not a clear-cut one. The female apparition that transforms into an incorporeal being named by the masculine grammatical gender blurs the limits of binary gender identification and puts into question the basis of any sexual identification. Perceval’s claim that “this lady . . . is the champion against whom I have to do battle” leaves a lingering uncertainty about the categories in which sexual difference is recognized and enacted though love or battle.

Curiously enough, in La queste and in other grail romances, Perceval’s dedication to chastity fails only when he is confronted by the female incarnation of the devil: he is resolutely chaste when he encounters
women. And although Perceval's virginity is a feature of most grail romances, and although his chastity may be apparent to other characters in the romances, the knight's desire to keep his virginity is represented as a fragile resolve in episodes that recount attempted seductions by the devil. In these encounters the knight escapes sexual sin not through heroic resistance to temptation, but through a rote expression of piety: he remembers to cross himself before getting into bed, and when he makes the sign of the cross the devil loses its feminine form. The devil's temptations do not offer Perceval the occasion to demonstrate his dedication to chastity, as they do for Bors; rather, they demonstrate the knight's vulnerability to temptation, and to temptation of a particular kind. Immune to the charms of women, Perceval's chastity is threatened only by the desire solicited by the female body of the devil.

**Virgin Subjects**

In the texts in which Perceval is seduced by a devil, he is a virgin knight, and "virginity" and "chastity" are both used in descriptions of Perceval's physical purity. Perceval, like Galahad, is—in the terms used by the texts—both a chaste knight and a virgin knight. Yet in *La queste* the frequent use of *chaste* to describe Perceval seems to give a greater importance to his state of mind, his desire to remain pure, than to the state of his body. And the devil's seduction highlights and problematizes the relationship between Perceval's state of mind and the state of his body, and between the renunciation of desire and the gender of the chaste body.

Although the grail quest gives a new prominence to a Christian ethos, the grail knights are still bound by their affiliation to the Round Table and its rules of chivalric conduct, as the devil-lady's demand for Perceval's help demonstrates. And although virginity is valorized as a Christian ideal, and sexual purity is advocated for all the knights who participate in the grail quest, true chastity is attainable only by a chosen few. The chaste grail knights are not like other knights, nor are other knights capable of becoming virgin knights: as the recluse explains to Perceval in *La queste del saint graal*, "for of all those who belong to the Round Table, there is not a single one who has not lost his virginity except you and Galahad, the Good Knight." The grail knights are destined to remain chaste, just as they are destined to learn the grail secrets.
Yet although *La queste* situates the pursuit of the grail in a Christian world and clearly promotes virginity as a Christian value, the status of chastity is still anomalous within the heroic context of romance—and that is part of the point, of course. The chaste grail knights enact an anomalous withdrawal from the sexual economy of chivalric romance, and their unique position defines their privileged status as grail knights. But at the same time, the chaste knight is also outside the normative sexual economy that—at least in part—defines gender identities in medieval romances. The anxious representation of Perceval's encounter with the seducing devil points to the imperative to incorporate the virgin body into the gendered heroic economy of romance, to make a place for a body that is deliberately and necessarily out of place.

The scene of the devil's seduction juxtaposes the chaste body and the body whose gender is indeterminate, and links them in a relationship of desire. But the representation of the desire for sex and the desire for battle as alternately gendered forms of Perceval's response to the devil's seduction suggests a precarious distinction between forms of desire that depend on a recognition of gender.

**Chaste Desires**

In Manessier's *Third Continuation* of Chrétien's grail story, Perceval is seduced by a devil who takes on the semblance of his beloved lady, Blanchefleur. The devil-lady persuades Perceval to lie with her in her tent, and just as he gets into bed, Perceval sees his sword and remembers to make the sign of the cross. When Perceval crosses himself, the lady does not disappear, later to be explained as a demonic incarnation, as in *La queste*. In the *Continuation*, the lady seems to transform back into a devil while still in Perceval's embrace, and the account of Perceval's deliverance from the temptation questions whether the knight lies with a lady or with a devil: "[Perceval] crossed himself, and in this way he tricked the devil with whom he wished to have his pleasure in bed. It was a devil, do not doubt it, who had taken the semblance of his beloved, and who wanted to make him sin and who spoke of love to him. When Perceval made the sign of the cross, as he should and as God miraculously granted, the devil who was lying under him jumped up without delay and took away the tent and the bed."25
Although the devil is called *li deables* in this passage, the masculine identity of the demon is not emphasized as it is in the similar episode from *La queste*, and in the subsequent explanation of the deception by a wise man Perceval encounters, the gender of the devil moves from male to female when it takes a female form: "He sent another devil [*un autre deable*] here in a boat in the semblance of a maiden. And the devil enemy [*la deable anemie*] claimed to be Blanchefleur, your beloved, whom you left at Beau Repaire. But she [elle] lied, by the Holy Father. It was the devil [*deables*] who wanted to trick you in order to send you down into the shadows of hell." 26

The devil's shifting gender suggests an unclear distinction between the damsel's body and the devil's body, between the female body and the male body, between *un deable* and *la deable*. Indeed, in this passage the devil's position—lying under Perceval—may suggest that the devil is a succubus, an incarnation of the devil who collects male seed to use to impregnate women, and Dyan Elliott's discussion of this figure in theological texts elucidates the troubling gender transformations that some medieval authors saw in the demonic incarnation who collects semen from men and then inseminates women. 27

In accounts of Perceval's encounter with the disguised devil, the knight's inability to recognize the deception is not emphasized, and it is perfectly reasonable within the narrative that he should be duped by the devil's disguise. Perceval recognizes gender according to the subject positions scripted within the world of romance, where gender is an identity constructed by a position in a conventional heroic structure. The knight has no reason to question the gender identity of the apparently female and apparently noble interlocutor who claims to love the knight because of his reputation, and offers her body as a reward. And when the knight learns that the lady is really a devil, he resolves to fight him. As long as the devil is identified by recognizable social and gendered hierarchies, the knight has no trouble enacting the proper response. Yet if the knight's reaction to the devil's seduction conforms to a perception of the devil's gender, the uncertain relationships suggested in Manessier's *Continuation* (the devil lies beneath Perceval) may suggest the fantasy of a breakdown in the normative gender alignments that structure the chivalric distinction between battle with male bodies and sexual reward with female bodies. Indeed, the illegible gender performance of the devil is explicitly exposed in yet another thirteenth-century representation of Perceval's temptation.
In Gerbert de Montreuil's continuation of the grail story, the devil again attempts to seduce Perceval, but the knight sees through the devil's female impersonation because it does not conform to conventional representations of female desire and submission. Again, the devil appears to Perceval in the form of a woman. In the episodes I discussed earlier, the loss of chastity threatened by the devil's seduction is represented rather generally as a mortal sin that will corrupt the knight and prevent him from completing the grail quest. In the temptation of Perceval recounted by Gerbert, the devil specifically wishes to rob the knight of his chastity so that he can never learn the grail secrets, and in this episode, the devil attempts to seduce Perceval by offering him those very secrets: the devil claims to be the daughter of the Fisher King, and offers to exchange knowledge about the grail for Perceval's love.

In response to the exchange proposed by the devil-woman—sex for the grail secrets—Perceval answers with a claim that the demonic incarnation is unintelligible, that its appearance does not suit its actions: "I can see that you are not wise: you go about seeking pleasure and you are foolish and without restraint. I do not care for your love, for you speak like a bawd and are too eager to give your love. It does not suit a young woman as noble looking and lovely as you are." Perceval makes the sign of the cross and the demon disappears in a noisy tempest that shakes the entire forest.

The devil's deception does not work because its gender performance is inadequate. Here the link between desire and the gender and class identity of its object is readily apparent: the demonic incarnation does not provoke desire because its bawdy speech does not fit its lovely body. Perceval rejects the demon's bargain not because he knows that the lady is really a sexless devil, but because the female body he sees and the female voice he hears do not form a legible body of desire. The beautiful female body speaks a desire that does not conform to the conventional exchange of sexual favors—it offers not a reward for chivalric prowess or the opportunity for further exploits, but an end to the knight's quest. Perceval's recognition of what medieval romance constructs as an ambiguous gender performance—the beautiful body that speaks a bawdy desire—emphasizes that gender and desire are scripted in a mutually constructing relationship, and it ultimately suggests the uncertain gender identity of the body without desire.
Sexual temptations offered by demons who take a woman’s form are not invented in medieval romances, of course. They are part of a tradition of seduction narratives that includes the lives of the early Christian desert fathers. Peter Brown, Aline Rousselle, and others have discussed the extent to which the discipline of the flesh was defined as the elimination of sexual desire in early hagiographic accounts of the desert hermits. Although these vita offer what Peter Brown has called “a repository of vivid anecdotes concerning sexual seduction and heroic sexual avoidance,” the heroic structure of these biographies is clearly quite different from that of an Arthurian romance—even a grail romance. This rather obvious difference between the two genres not only points to their different audiences and historical settings, but also underscores once more the lack of heroic resistance to devilish seductions on the part of the grail hero. Perceval usually remains chaste not because of his resolve and dedication to the grail quest, but because he is saved from sexual sin by an almost thoughtless expression of piety.

The valorization of chastity in medieval chivalric romances produces an uneasy revision of the conventional heroic structure that defines appropriate partners in desire. I am suggesting that the repeated representations of the seduction of a chaste knight by an ambiguously gendered devil demonstrate the problematic invention of a new model of heroism situated outside of the conventional sexual economy of medieval romance. Although these episodes imagine potential couplings that are unintelligible in other contexts—does Perceval lie with a lady or with a devil?—the knight’s union with the paradoxical figure of the devil, grammatically gendered masculine and dressed as a woman, never takes place in romance narratives. The unvaried outcome of the chaste knight’s temptation (he remains chaste) suggests that the temptation of the knight does more than emphasize his continuing chastity; it demonstrates the mutually defining relationship of gender and desire. The chaste knight occupies—temporarily—the position of a masculine desiring subject. At the same time, though, the desiring relationship between the virgin and the devil points to shifting registers of desire and identification that ultimately undermine the normative alignments and identifications promoted by the knight’s participation in the cycle of battle and reward.
In other words, the chaste knight's temporary position as masculine subject of desire in relation to a disguised devil is undermined by the shifting and uncertain gender of the devil. If there are queer subjects in Old French grail romances, they are the chaste subjects who do not desire and whose withdrawal from desire is tested not by women, but by incorporeal beings who masquerade as desirable women.

I am calling the chaste knight an anomaly, though of course in some medieval discourses the chaste body is a normative body to the extent that it is idealized as the model Christian body. The valorization of chastity has a long history; however, in medieval romances, the chaste body is unusual. It introduces a new and contested heroic structure that redefines the relationship between chivalry and sexual reward in the figure of the great knight who vows to remain chaste.

In his study of sexual renunciation in the early church, Peter Brown has suggested that Christian writers used women "to think with," that is, in the Lévi-Straussian sense of the phrase, they used the figure of woman to verbalize concerns about the stance that the church should take to the world. Grail romances might be seen to use the devil's changing body "to think with," to explore anxieties about heroism, chastity, and the gendered body. In their representation of a relationship of desire between the chaste body and the ambiguously gendered body, these narratives suggest an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, the effort to gender the virgin body male by situating it in the masculine position in a heroic structure of battle and sexual reward, and on the other hand, the persistent anomaly of the chaste knight whose body without desire suggests a body without intelligible gender.

In the narrative of the devil's seduction of the chaste knight, an anxiety about gender identity is represented as an anxiety about desire. This anxiety is represented not primarily in the possibility that the knight will desire a body of the same (grammatical) gender as his own, or even in the potential for fantastic coupleings not usually imagined in romance narratives. Rather, it is ultimately the chaste knight's own gender identity that is questioned in the story of his quest to renounce all sexual desire. And the contested relationship between the gendered body and desire receives another representation in the description of Perceval's repentance for his seduction and his renewed renunciation of sexual desire in *La queste del saint graal*. After the devil-lady disappears, Perceval performs a sort of symbolic self-castration:
Perceval takes his sword from its sheath and strikes himself hard enough to embed the sword in his left thigh, and blood bursts out from all sides. And when he sees this he says, "Lord God, this is in payment for my misdeeds toward you." Then he looks at himself and sees that he is completely naked except for his undergarments, and he sees his clothes on one side and his arms on the other, and he laments, "Alas! What unhappiness! I have been so vile and evil that I was led to the point of losing that which no one can recover, that is virginity, which cannot be recovered once it is lost!" He withdraws his sword from his flesh and puts it in its sheath.

Perceval’s wound in the left thigh recalls that of the infirm king, guardian of the grail, who is wounded "between the legs" or "in the thigh." Whether or not the grail king’s wound is a castration—different texts give different accounts—it is linked to sterility and impotence, and to a general political and economic devastation that can only be repaired by the chaste knight’s discovery of the grail secrets. In La queste Perceval’s wound in the thigh is clearly a penance for sexual desire, and symbolically enacts the knight’s wish to renounce desire entirely, to become a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

If Perceval’s wound represents a renunciation of desire, it may also be seen to enact a renunciation of gender. Medieval writers follow earlier authorities in identifying the castrated man as an ambiguously gendered being. Aristotle claims that eunuchs are men changed into a female state; Galen says that castration makes men similar to women because it takes away the heat that gives them masculine characteristics. Twelfth-century contemporaries of Abelard, surely one of the most famous eunuchs
in history, questioned Abelard’s gender after his castration, and medieval
Byzantine writers classified castrated men as an ambiguous gender, nei-
ther fully male nor fully female. La queste does not state that Perceval
really castrates himself; however, the wound in the left thigh symboli-
cally enacts castration: it creates a body without desire.

In patristic texts, the chaste body may also be identified as a body
that transcends gender. In his discussion of Origen’s writings on virgin-
ity, Brown writes that “to reject sexuality . . . did not mean, for Origen,
simply to suppress the sexual drives. It meant the assertion of a basic
freedom so intense, a sense of identity so deeply rooted, as to cause to
evaporate the normal social and physical constraints that tied the Chris-
tian to his or her gender.” I do not mean to assimilate the representa-
tion of chaste grail knights to the valorization of virginity in the early
church or to any particular doctrine on virginity. Rather, I want to under-
line the gender ambiguity that is seen to accompany the renunciation of
sexual desire in a variety of discourses in the medieval West, and to sug-
gest that, in accounts of the devil’s seductions, grail romances partici-
pate in the interrogation of the gender of the subject who renounces
sexual desire.

In their representation of the male virgin knight, grail romances
construct and interrogate a subject position that is uniquely problematic
in the heroic structure of medieval romances. Although women may re-
fuse sexual relationships with knights in these stories, their refusal can
be ignored (as in Gauvain’s claimed rape of the Demoiselle de Lis), or
paradoxically defined as a participation in the economy of desire, as in
the case of the damsel who vows to remain a virgin as a sign of her de-
votion to Lancelot, who cannot return her love because he already loves
the queen. The knight who desires chastity occupies a more ambigu-
ous position in the heroic structure of medieval romance. He is anom-
alous because he escapes normative alignments of gender and sexuality
as they are constructed in the heroic exchange of chivalric prowess and
sexual love. Narrative attempts to incorporate masculine chastity into
the heroic economy of romance must maintain the anomalous status of
the virgin body that renounces desire, while making it legible in a struc-
ture in which gender positions are defined by participation in desire.
These narrative negotiations are successful—the chaste knight is a rec-
ognizable if not iconic figure of medieval romance. But episodes in
which Perceval is seduced by a devil reveal the difficult invention of the
chaste knight as a romance hero. In their ambivalent representation of the chaste male subject, grail romances point to the anomalous and ambiguously defined position of the subject that does not desire; that is, the representation of the chaste knight's encounter with the seducing devil shows not only that certain kinds of desire are normative for the masculine subject (sex with a lady, battle with a devil), but that desire itself is normative.

Grail romances invent and interrogate the possibility of a subject that does not desire, a queer subject whose ambivalent relationship to a normative sexual economy is scripted as a simultaneous participation in and withdrawal from conventional forms of desire. To see male chastity as a problem, as an anomaly in the romance heroic structure, is to recognize the extent to which the values of romance heroism are grounded on the exchange of women between knights. And to recognize the devil's seduction of the virgin knight as part of an anxious gendering of the virgin body as male is to understand the extent to which gender and desire are mutually defining categories in medieval romance. But the chaste knight may also speak beyond his particularly medieval context to interrogate the place of the body that withdraws from desire in modern conceptualizations of identity, particularly sexual identities, to the extent that these are defined with respect to a desiring subject. The queer hero of medieval grail romances makes visible possible contemporary chaste subjects who are out of place not because they desire outside of normative structures, but because they desire not to desire.

**Notes**


2. For a study of the character's evolution, see Keith Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980).


5. "... a force la despucelai," ibid., 1:10043. Manuscript P is the only one that does not recount the retelling of the episode as a rape. See vol. 3:4479: "ele ne m'an desfandi rien."

6. "... onques Messires Gavains ne porta foi a dame ne a damoisele qu'il n'en feist sa volenté." Perlesvaus, 74.


9. Ibid., 80.

10. "Et neporec, tot soit il ore veritez que cil chevaliers ait en soi plus proesce et hardement que autres n'aft, sachiez de voir que s'il se menoit jusqu'a pechi mortel, —dont Nostre Sires le gart par sa pitie, —il ne feroit en ceste Queste nes que uns autres simples chevaliers." Ibid., 116.

11. "Boorz . . . jadis se meffist en sa virginite. Mes il l'a puis ainsi bien amendé en sa chastée que toz est pardonnez icelui meffez." Ibid., 156.

12. "'Sire, fet uns chevaliers, vez ci la dame a qui nos somes, la plus bele dame et la plus riche dou monde, et cele qui plus vos a amé. Ele vos a atendu lonc tens, com ce cele qui ne voloit avoir a ami nul chevalier, se vos non.' . . . elle li requiert qu'il soit ses amis, car ele l'aime sor toz homes terriens; et s'il li velt otroier s'amor, ele le fera plus riche home que onques hom de son lignage ne fu." Ibid., 180.

13. "en nule maniere ne voldroit enfraindre sa chastée: si ne set que respondre." Ibid.

14. "Et il les esgarde et cuide veraiement que ce soient gentilx fames et hautes dames; si 1'em prent grant pitie. Et neporquant il n'est pas conseilliez qu'il ne vuille mielz qu'eles toutes perdent lor ames que il seuls perdist la soe." Ibid., 181.

15. Ibid., 104–10.

16. "La damoisele a qui tu as parle si est li anemis, li mestres d'enfer, cil qui a poeste sor toz les autres." Ibid., 113.

17. E. Jane Burns has studied this gender confusion in "Devilish Ways: Sexing the Subject in the Queste del Saint Graal," Arthuriana 8:2 (1998): 18–23. Whereas Burns is interested in the ways that representations of the devil's changing gender challenge conventional categories of femininity and masculinity, I am interested in how the devil's shifting gender may point to anxieties about the gender identity of the chaste knight.

18. Ibid., 24.

19. "Sire, fet Perceval, vos m'avez tant dit de cele dame que je sai bien que ce est li champions a qui je me devole combatre." La queste, 114.

20. James A. Schultz has argued that in Gottfried's Tristan desire is not determined by the identity of the subject, but by culturally determined kinds of desire that are indexed to the beautiful body. Although Schultz does not insist on gender in the same way that I do here, his essay has influenced my thinking about the relationship between chaste bod-

21. "... ferai quan que vos plaira. Et sachiez veralement que vos ne m'avez mie tant desirree a avoir com je vos desirroie encor plus. Car vos estes un des chevaliers dou monde a qui je ai plus baé." La queste, 109.

22. "Et por ce que je vos sai a bon chevalier et a prædome sui je ça venue, que vos m'en aidez. Et vos le devez bien fere, puis que vos estes compainz de la Table Reonde; car nus qui compainz en soit ne doit faillir a damoisele deserteec, por qu'ele le requiere d'aide." Ibid., 108.

23. Burns explores the gendering of the devil's "non-substance" ("Devilish Ways," 18–19).

24. "Se seigna, et par ce deçut / Le deable a qui son delit / Volloit faire dedanz le lit. / Deable estoit, n'an dotez mie, / Qui an simblance de s'ame / Le vost a lui fere pechier. / Et disoit que molt l'avoit chier. / Quant Percevaux ot lou seignacle, / Si con Diex vost por son miracle, / Fait desor lui, si com il dut, / Li deables qui soz lui jut / Saut sus, que plus n'i aresta; / Paveillon et lit am porta." Continuations, 5:38146–58.

25. "Un autre deable anvoia / Ci illuec an une nacelle / An simblance d'une pucelle. / Et dist la deable anemie / Que c'estoit Blancheflor t'amie / Que tu lesas a Biau Repere, / Mais elle manti, par Saint Pere; / Ainz fu deables qui sorprandre / Te vost por toi faire descendre / En tenebres d'anfer aval." Ibid., 5:38318–27.

26. "Dist Perchevaus: 'Aperchevoir / Me puis que n'estes mi sage: / Vous alez querant le musage, / Qui fol estes et sanz conduit. / Je n'ai cure de vo deduit, / Car troz estes baude parlicre / Et de vostre amour noveliere, / Et si n'afiert pas a pucele / Qui soit si gente ne si bele / Con vous estes, se biens m'aviege / De Dieu et d'onor vous sovigne, / De la sainte crois ou fu mis.' / Lors se saigne. Quant l'anemis / Voit qu'il a fait desor lui crois, / Lors s'en va et fist tel escrois / Par mi le bos et tel tempeste / Qu'il n'ot el bos oiseil ne beste / Environ a liue et demie / Que de paor ne s'en fremie." Gerbert de Montreuil, La Continuation de Perceval, vol. 1, ed. Mary Williams (Paris: Champion, 1922), vv. 2568—86.

27. For a reading of this disjunction in medieval literature and for an analysis of ways it permits a deconstruction of conventional definitions of women's speech, see E. Jane Burns, Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).


32. Such unions do, however, occur in stories about women seduced by devils in the form of a man. Merlin's mother is probably the best-known victim of such a union.
33. The relationship of the early Christian ideal of continence to Roman and Greek ideas about the body and sexuality is the subject of Rousselle's *Porneia*.


35. *La queste*, 111.


The King's Boyfriend

Froissart's Political Theater of 1326

Claire Sponsler

One of the most striking of the historical events recounted by Jean Froissart in his Chroniques took place in 1326, the year Edward II of England was deposed. A central figure in the king's downfall, in Froissart's version of the story, was Hugh Despenser with whom Edward had been brought up from his youth and who by virtue of his close ties to the king had become, along with his father, one of the richest, most powerful men in England. Edward's troubles, Froissart claims, began shortly after the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, when Robert Bruce reconquered Scotland and defeated the English forces. As a result of this military humiliation, a group of powerful barons gathered to discuss what to do about Despenser, whom they held responsible for the defeat, suspecting he favored the king of Scotland and so had deliberately misadvised Edward. Getting wind of their discussions and fearing he would be harmed, Despenser persuaded the king that the barons were set to depose him. In response, Edward had the barons seized and ordered twenty-two of them beheaded without trial. According to Froissart, Despenser next cunningly stirred up discord between Edward and his wife, Isabella of France, with so much success that the king refused to see her. Warned that she might be in danger, Isabella secretly escaped to the Continent with her son, the future Edward III, where the fourteen-year-old boy was betrothed to Philippa of Hainault and where the queen assembled a fighting force with which to confront her husband.
As Froissart presents it in the *Chroniques*, the resolution of this domestic quarrel took the form of a series of gripping political dramas orchestrated by the spurned queen. The lead role went to Hugh Despenser, who claimed center stage in the show’s spectacular climax played out before Isabella and the assembled citizenry in the main square of the town of Hereford shortly after the Feast of All Saints in November of 1326. What other contemporary accounts depict as largely the result of the magnates’ private dissatisfaction with Edward’s handling of power and patronage becomes in Froissart’s hands a highly visible and theatricalized battle between Isabella and Despenser for the king’s affections. Moving the battle from the relative privacy of the royal household to the public space of England’s roads and towns, Froissart’s dramatization locates the cause of Edward’s downfall in the person of Despenser, whose body, over which Isabella triumphantly rules, becomes the site for the enactment of a ritualized sequence of punitive and purgatory acts performed before the English people. Ascribing Edward’s downfall to social and sexual, rather than political, failings, Froissart’s version of events enlists a variety of heteronormative discourses, particularly those valorizing marriage and procreation, to attack same-sex desire and ratifies Isabella’s audacious coup by blaming Hugh Despenser, then violently purging him from the body politic. Isabella’s adroit manipulation of spectacle and ceremony, as recounted by Froissart, reveals how public performance could be used to authorize a particular interpretation of complicated political events, an interpretation that used sexual and bodily symbolism to justify a king’s removal from power. At the same time, Froissart’s narrative furthers the production of a compulsory heterosexuality, one founded on the excising of sexual difference.

Although long ignored by historians, Edward II’s sexuality and particularly the nature of his relationships with Piers Gaveston and, later, Hugh Despenser, have in recent years become matters of interest for gender studies and queer theory. In his groundbreaking study *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, John Boswell described Edward as “the last overtly homosexual monarch of the Middle Ages,” asserting that Edward’s political troubles were a direct result of his sexual proclivities. More recently, Jonathan Goldberg, in his analysis of Christopher Marlowe’s play *Edward II*, has argued that Edward’s “sodomitical” relationship with Piers Gaveston stands as a refutation of “emerging sexual regimes” that “installed man and woman as the opposite sexes” and pro-
vides an example of the complex negotiation of sexual identities in early modern England, a negotiation that inaugurates modern sexualities. Despite certain theoretical and historical difficulties—with, for instance, Boswell’s unproblematized use of the term *homosexual* to describe Edward and Goldberg’s implicit view of medieval subjectivities as unconflicted (implied by his location of “emerging sexual regimes” in the sixteenth century)—Boswell and Goldberg usefully direct attention to the importance of Edward II for the history of the construction of sexualities and for queer theory. Froissart’s account, with its invasion of the king’s privacy, its pitting of wife against male friend and lover, and its construction of Despenser as polluting body requiring the most dramatic of public disciplines, widens our aperture onto the sexual politics of fourteenth-century England, making evident how at this specific historical juncture sexuality could be used for highly politicized ends. Froissart’s chronicling of the affair of Edward and Despenser offers access to the lived experience of actual people and provides an unusually rich and detailed example of the construction of subjectivities and sexualities in the fourteenth century.

**Act I**

Froissart’s dramatization of the events of 1326 begins as follows. After landing in England with her army, Isabella made her way in triumph to the town of Bristol, where she laid siege to the city, in which Hugh Despenser’s elderly father, then about ninety years of age, had taken refuge. The king and the younger Despenser, according to Froissart, were hiding in a castle just outside the town walls. Won over to the queen’s side, the citizens of Bristol soon opened their gates and handed over the elder Despenser and another of the king’s counselor’s, the Earl of Arundel, to be dealt with in whatever way the queen chose (“pour faire d’yaus se pure volenté,” 29). With Thomas Wage acting as master of ceremonies, the two men were indicted before the queen, her son, and an assembly of barons and sentenced to be drawn, beheaded, and their bodies hanged (“traynés, et puis decolés, apriès pendus à un gibet,” 31). The execution, Froissart tells us, took place outside the castle and in full view of the king and Despenser’s son, who were hiding inside. Perhaps not surprisingly, a few days after witnessing these grisly and monitory deaths the king
and Despenser tried to escape in a small boat, but winds and tides—not to mention the weight of their sins, Froissart adds—kept them afloat in the same place for eleven days. Eventually they were captured and taken as prisoners to Isabella. Thus, Froissart tells us, the queen reconquered the realm of England for her son ("Ensi reconquist la ditte royné tout le royaume d'Engleterre pour son ainsné fil," 32).

Gripping though this story is, it is inaccurate on a number of counts. Although the elder Despenser was indeed executed at Bristol on 27 October, as Froissart claims, Arundel was not caught until later. More important, the king and the younger Despenser had left Bristol before it surrendered to the queen and had continued westward. After attempting to sail from Chepstow to the safety of Lundy Island, they were blown back to Cardiff and finally captured on 16 November by Henry of Lancaster at Neath Abbey. Thus, crucially, they were not around to witness the show Froissart has the queen prepare for them, not in Bristol to see two other men—father and friend—punished in the most atrocious fashion for crimes for which they themselves, arguably, were even more fit to be convicted.

Froissart's staging of these events, a staging found in no other source, except for Jean le Bel's Chronique, which Froissart follows closely here, achieves several important effects. First, in its insistent isolating and pairing of male protagonists (two men tried and executed while two other men watch) against the massed forces of the queen, her son, and the barons, the account calls attention to the role of homosocial relations in bringing the king and Despenser to this dire point. This is the first part of Froissart's story. The crimes of Arundel and the elder Despenser, as Froissart's narrative stresses, were crimes of association. Moreover, the men were punished not just for keeping the wrong company and for choosing the wrong allies, but also for forming alliances that were too close and too exclusive. They were disciplined, in short, for the crime of excessive male friendship, which Froissart depicts as a threat to good government and right rule. Second, by having Isabella orchestrate this show for her husband's viewing pleasure, Froissart's account sets up a stark opposition between female and male desire, an opposition that was introduced earlier in the Chroniques when Despenser the younger was described as turning the king against his wife and stirring up discord in their marriage. Finally, by presenting these executions as public spectacles, Froissart underscores the potency of theatricality—and the bodily
symbolism on which such theatricality depended—as an agent of political and discursive control. When, in Froissart's hands, Isabella makes a public display of Despenser and Arundel, she dramatically consolidates her claims and justifies her complaints against the king and the younger Despenser, forcing their tacit assent to her version of events by turning them into either silent spectators of, or unwilling participants in, this sexual drama.

In focusing on the crime of excessive male friendship, Froissart is not unique; but he gives this crime an unexpected slant. Problems of male association figure in other fourteenth-century accounts of Edward's downfall as well, many of which foreground factionalism as the explanation for the king's loss of power. Modern historians have tended to agree, viewing the revolution of 1326 as baronial, that is, as motivated by a power struggle between the barons and the king and his intimates. Although it follows these general contours, Froissart's narrative reformulates the theme of the dangers of association by grounding Edward's troubles within his household, within, that is to say, the coterie of male friends and advisers who on a day-to-day basis personally influenced royal opinion. As historians have shown, the household existed alongside, but also separate from, other forms of official government—such as the council or parliament—which also claimed the right to shape policy and with which the household sometimes clashed. By the early fourteenth century, the royal household had become an exclusively male preserve—the queen had her own separate household, with her own servants, friends, and bureaucrats to manage her affairs and estates. As royal chamberlain, the young Hugh Despenser was the decisive figure in that male preserve, the key person—Edward's favorite—who not only had privileged access to the king but was able to limit the ability of others to speak to and see the king, a particular point of contention in baronial complaints against Despenser. Indeed, earlier in his account, in a passage apparently originating with him, Froissart describes Hugh Despenser the younger as indispensable to Edward, calling Despenser the person "without whom nothing is done and through whom everything is done, and the person whom the king trusts more than anyone else" ("sans lui n'estoit riens fait, et par lui estoit tout fait, et le creoit li rois plus que tout le monde," 12).

During the fourteenth century, the household system, which allowed personal access to and influence on the king, was often under attack,
especially toward the end of Edward II's reign as the administration began to separate from it. Historians interpret such struggles variously: some see them as battles among the magnates, the great landowning peers, and the king, that is, as an issue of constitutionalism; others view them as conflicts over patronage, that is, over the access of the magnates to the wealth the king has the power to distribute. Either of these interpretations would fit the situation of Despenser as well as Piers Gaveston, the unpopular favorite of Edward II earlier in his reign (Gaveston was also accused of having a sexual relationship with the king). Like Despenser, Gaveston was said to have given the king evil counsel and to have caused discord between king and nobles, particularly by forbidding the nobles to see the king unless he, too, were present. Contemporary records suggest that the other magnates saw Despenser, like Gaveston, as both an impediment to their own advance and a rival, one particularly greedy for property, which he often seized with the help of royal officials or the king himself. What separates Gaveston from Despenser is that Despenser's scope of mischief, at least as described by Froissart, spills out of the bounds of male-to-male rivalry and into the territory of male-to-female relations.

In recounting the events of 1326, Froissart concocts a drama of marital as well as masculine relations, turning Isabella into a scorned wife who seeks justice for herself and for her offspring. Male desire is explicitly opposed to female desire as Despenser is constructed as the agent of marital discord, the man who by virtue of his closeness to the ruler and through his manipulation of rumor and bad advice turns king against queen, engineering the removal of Isabella from her position near Edward. One of the things Froissart's account thus reveals is that the interests of the male coterie and of the wife and heirs can be at odds. And Froissart's sympathies are visibly tilted toward the latter.

The extent to which Froissart writes an account of female empowerment featuring Isabella as the triumphant savior of her son and the entire nation is in fact striking. Froissart manipulates sexual symbolism to explain why Isabella was able to seize power and, more important, why she was justified in doing so. As Isabella takes action, normative gender roles are reversed: the queen is shown in aggressive pursuit of Edward and Despenser, who flee until they are trapped. She breaks down the city's walls; they cower helplessly inside the castle. She metes out violent justice; they try to slip stealthily away. In short, she dominates; they are
dominated. Her triumph, in the end, is in the name of marriage and progeny and she manages to triumph, Froissart suggests, because she so vigorously defends her son’s inheritance, promising to preserve the family line now secured for another generation by her son’s betrothal to Philippa. Here heterosexual desire is co-opted to the cause of dynastic struggle and Edward III’s betrothal is implicitly contrasted with Edward II’s distinctly unproductive, ungenerative relationship with Despenser—this despite the fact that Edward had already fathered five children, a fact that Froissart conveniently overlooks.

In Froissart’s hands, Isabella plays a role almost unprecedented in the annals of late-medieval queenship. Increasingly denied access to real power from the twelfth century on, her household separated from the king’s and her presence not required at affairs of state, the late-medieval queen had become largely a ceremonial figure, confined to passive and symbolic roles. Up to 1326, Isabella’s behavior appears consistent with this trend. Her most public acts involved brokering peace between Edward and his subjects: for example, after Gaveston’s murder, Isabella supported the bishops in their attempts to make peace between Edward and Thomas of Lancaster; she helped procure the settlement at Leake in 1318, once again temporarily reconciling Edward and Lancaster; and in 1321, she joined Pembroke and Richmond in begging Edward to have mercy on his people. In all of these supplicatory moments, she fits the pattern of queenship historians have described. Clearly, when it comes to the events of 1326, Froissart casts Isabella in an atypically active part.

Froissart’s decision to side with Isabella and to construct her as a powerful, active regent might be attributable to the fact that Froissart first traveled to England in the 1360s in the retinue of that same Philippa—like Froissart, from Hainault—chosen by Isabella to marry her son. Perhaps we ought to imagine the chronicler being motivated by the protocols of patronage and the appeals of nationalist sentiment. Like Froissart, Jean le Bel, whose account Froissart follows, also had Hainault connections and hence a possible interest in praising Isabella. But Froissart’s representation of Isabella, and le Bel’s as well, might also stem from a heavy investment in a particular image of good kingship—one that both le Bel and Froissart associate with Edward III, a king Froissart calls jones, sages, vaillans (young, wise, and valiant), and who, not incidentally, produced twelve offspring. Historians have described how successfully Edward III deployed family sexual relations to further his political and
dynastic ambitions, using strategic marriage alliances to strengthen his colonialist enterprises on the Continent and consolidate power within England. It is perhaps relevant that Froissart was personally involved in at least one of these alliances since he was a member of the retinue accompanying Edward's son Lionel to Italy in 1368 to negotiate Lionel's marriage to Violante Visconti. For Edward III, as for other members of the fourteenth-century nobility, sexual practices were understood to be directly tied to political concerns, and a goal of good kingship was the establishment of a "family firm" that could further royal interests.  

If for Froissart Isabella in 1326 seems to represent the family firm's best hope, it is in part because he is writing from the vantage point of the end of the century, during the final years of the troubled reign of Richard II, Edward II's great-grandson and a king with seduction problems of his own. The textual history of Froissart's chronicles is complex but sheds light on Froissart's depiction of Isabella's battles against Despenser. Book 1, which contains the episode dealing with Edward's deposition, exists in three separate redactions, all based on le Bel's *Chronique*, which Froissart followed closely for the events of Edward II's reign. Although Froissart had begun to write his chronicles during the 1360s, none of the surviving manuscripts, as Peter Ainsworth has demonstrated, can have been completed before 1377 at the very earliest (the year Richard II was crowned) and the 1390s—that is, the end of Richard's reign—are a much more probable date for their completion. In addition, it is likely that the redaction known as the Rome manuscript, which exists in only one copy and varies in a number of ways from the other versions, was written between 1399 and 1405, just after Froissart had completed the second half of book 4, which deals with the final moments of Richard II's career. Like Edward II, whom he attempted to have canonized, Richard attracted criticism because of his excessive reliance on favorite male associates—"the prevailing vice of Ricardian rule," as one historian says—and charges of favoritism loomed large in events surrounding the end of his reign as well. The opening of the Rome manuscript takes us back to the 1320s, to the final years of Richard's great-grandfather's reign, which itself forms the backdrop to Froissart's portrait of the great king Edward III, whose reign is seen as the golden age from which Richard's kingship has so drastically and with such sorry results diverged. For Froissart, then, looking back at the 1320s, Edward II foreshadows Richard; part of Froissart's project seems
to be to explain the source of their deviance from the ideal of kingship as represented by Edward III.  

ACT II

Froissart does not hesitate to label the source of this deviance, which brings us to the second act of this piece of political drama. Once captured, and led as prisoners ("comme prisonnieres," 32) before the queen and her son, who are delighted at having obtained their desire, the king and Despenser were separated, and the king was taken to Berkeley Castle, where he was imprisoned. Under the direction of Thomas Wage, Despenser was brought back to Bristol just as the queen readied her departure for London. Despenser was bound tightly to the smallest, thinnest, and weakest horse that could be found ("le plus petit magre et chetif cheval qu’il pot trouver," 33) and was dressed in a tunic emblazoned with his arms, so that he might be instantly recognized by all who saw him. Bound and dressed in this way, Despenser was led in derision to the sound of horns and trumpets through all the towns through which the queen passed until they reached Hereford, where the queen was reverently received.  

What Froissart describes is basically a charivari, or rough riding or skimmington, that is, a ritual of public humiliation usually reserved for those accused of sexual transgressions in some way threatening to the social order—unruly wives, henpecked or cuckolded husbands. The charivari, which came to have a quasi-legal status as a means of punishing domestic crimes, was a noisy procession in which the victim, or sometimes an effigy, was paraded through the streets and ridiculed by spectators. One point of the charivari Froissart describes would seem to be to hold Despenser up to public mockery by demonstrating the extent of his reversal of fortune: the king’s closest companion now pathetically alone, the wealthiest baron now ensconced on a pauper’s steed, the private whisperer of advice now assaulted by blaring horns of public opinion, the usurper of marital intimacy now powerless before the woman he displaced. In this way, the punishment arranged for Despenser uses inversionary symbolism as a tactic of humiliation. The shaming ritual functions by juxtaposing past with present, reminding everyone, including Despenser himself, how far he has fallen.
Another point of the charivari would seem to be to underscore the fact that Despenser's crime is not just political but also domestic and sexual. By having Isabella subject Despenser to a ritual commonly used against those charged with domestic disorder and sexual nonconformity, Froissart is able to suggest that Despenser's crimes include sexual transgression and involve domestic difficulties. The charivari transforms Despenser from enemy of the state to household nuisance, with the result that social and sexual concerns are given precedence over politics. Since the king is being held in captivity, unseen, unheard, and unable to protest or offer a different version of events, the stage is set for Isabella to blame Despenser, which she does by making him the highly visible target of the spectacle designed to legitimize her usurpation of power.

Act III

Perhaps not surprisingly, the charivari Isabella arranged for Despenser lacked the usual ending: for him there was to be no ritual reincorporation into the community at the end of his riding, no chance to forget his shame and take up his life once again.\(^\text{33}\) Instead, the third act of the drama is staged, after the Feast of All Saints, an appropriately morbid seasonal backdrop for what follows, and a feast that Queen Isabella celebrated with great splendor for the sake of her son and the foreign nobles who were with him, Froissart tells us (34).\(^\text{34}\) After the feast, Despenser was brought before the queen and the assembled nobles, his misdeeds were read out (once again, a pointed reproach to his whispered seductions and rumormongering), and he was condemned to death. Next he was dragged on a hurdle, to the accompaniment of trumpets, through the streets of Hereford—"de rue en rue" (34)—to the main square, where the people were assembled and where a bonfire had been lit. There he was tied high on a ladder so that everyone—both high- and lowborn ("petis et grans," 34)—could see him. When he was mounted on this ladder, his genitals were cut off ("on li copa tout premiers le vit et les coulles," 34) and thrown into the fire to burn, because, Froissart states, he was a heretic and a sodomite, even, it was said, with the king ("par tant qu'il estoit herites et sodomites, ensi que on disoit meisement del roy," 34), which was why the king had driven the queen away at Despenser's suggestion. Next his heart was torn out and put into the fire because he was a false-
hearted traitor ("par tant qu'il estoit faulz de coer et traittes," 34), who had led the king to bring shame and misfortune on the country and to behead the barons. Moreover, Froissart adds, Despenser had so turned the king's head that he refused to see the queen his wife and his eldest son, and had them expelled from the kingdom, at the risk of their lives. Heretic, sodomite, traitor: the public punishment of Despenser inscribes these crimes on his person, making his body bear public witness to his deeds.

No other chronicle describes Despenser's execution as happening in this way. The chronicle of Galfridus le Baker, for instance, says only that the younger Despenser was taken to Hereford, where he was hanged, beheaded, and quartered ("suspensus, decollatus, et in quarterias divissus," 83), the four parts of his body being sent to four different parts of England and his head being mounted on London Bridge. Henry Knighton's Chronicon recounts the arraignment speech delivered by William Trussell against Despenser on 24 November, which charges Despenser with bad counsel, treason, and putting the lives of Isabella and her son in danger, but passes over the details of Despenser's punishment, saying only that he was executed and his head fixed on London Bridge. The Annales Paulini give a succinct, unsensationalized account of the execution, and also show some sympathy for Despenser's patient endurance of his torment: "he was drawn, then hanged, then beheaded, all of which he sustained humbly and patiently" ("fuit distractus, postea suspensus, deinde decollatus, qui humiliter et patienter sustinuit omnia," 1:319–20). To the best of my knowledge, Froissart's account stands alone in the length and detail of its description of Despenser's punishment and in its theatricalization of Despenser's sufferings.

An illustration from a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript of the Chroniques produced in Flanders, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, effectively captures the inherent theatricality of Froissart's treatment of Despenser's demise. Visually echoing Froissart's account, the picture shows two ladders propped against a building in what appears to be the main square of a town. On one ladder a nearly nude Despenser is tied, while a man standing on the other ladder cuts out Despenser's heart; a splash of red paint suggests that Despenser has already been castrated, his genitals cast into the fire blazing at the foot of the ladders. On the ground below, a crowd of well-dressed men animatedly watch, commenting on and gesturing toward the execution taking place above them.
Although this illumination accurately portrays the spectacularity of Froissart's version of Despenser's death, its gender dynamic is rather different from what is described in the text, in that it erases Isabella from the scene. As rendered by the artist, this is an exclusively masculine theater of punishment, featuring a male executioner cutting apart a bound and vulnerably naked male body before the eyes of male spectators. In this representation, Isabella is kept outside the action, with the result that the central conflict between her and Despenser, so crucial in Froissart's narrative, remains unexpressed in the painting. Recast as an affair of concern only to men, Despenser's execution in this illumination does not enact the triumph of heterosexuality that is at the center of Froissart's account of Edward's downfall.

At the same time, however, the feminine has not so much been banished as displaced in the manuscript painting, in a way that is consistent with Froissart's account. Although Isabella, the powerful and as a consequence arguably masculinized pursuer, is absent from the painting, Despenser's body when subjected to this punishment and to the gaze of the surrounding male spectators is feminized, his masculinity unsettled by the punishment devised for him. Vulnerably naked and fettered, his body, like that of Jesus in many late-medieval representations, is demasculinized as it is pierced, probed, and violated by the executioner's weapons. Helpless, speechless, and exposed, Despenser is cast into a subject position more often occupied by women than men in the fourteenth century and in this subject position he becomes a ready focus of blame for Edward's failures as a ruler.

Michel Foucault has added considerably to our understanding of how spectacular punishments like this one served premodern disciplinary regimes, offering a public theater of transgression, atonement, and then violent removal of the offending agent from the body politic via the purifying and cathartic display of torture and protracted suffering. Certainly a purging of the offender is part of what is going on in these representations, especially in Froissart's account. Despenser's crimes are first exposed—visually, on his body, for all to see, and audibly as they are read out for all to hear—and then banished as his body is torn apart and dismembered. According to Froissart and a number of other contemporary accounts, when Despenser's heart and genitals had been burned, his head was struck off and sent to London and his body was divided into four parts, which were sent to the four other principal cities of England.
This act of bodily dispersal was presumably a mark of further degradation of his person, but also functioned as a way of disseminating the visible signs of his offense to the widest possible audience. Thus the private events of Edward’s household were broadcast to the general public through the spectacle of Despenser’s execution and dismemberment, as well as through Froissart’s own, equally public, recounting of them.

Although nothing in Froissart’s account would preclude a Foucauldian reading of this sort, his chronicle nonetheless employs a detailed symbolics of the body in its description of Despenser’s death that goes well beyond what Foucault describes. This body symbolism turns on identifying and excising wayward body parts—specifically genitals and heart—which are charged with having undue influence over the rest of the body. There is a microcosm effect at work here, as individual parts of the human body are linked to larger parts of the social body, and one heretical and treasonous member stands for others. Froissart was not altogether an innovator at these tactics, of course. To cite just one example, body-parts symbolism in Despenser’s punishment had been prefigured in the trial of Andrew de Harclay, earl of Carlisle, just a few years earlier, in March of 1323, a trial Froissart might have known about. Harclay had been discovered negotiating with the Scottish enemy and charged with supporting Robert Bruce; for his treasons he was drawn, hanged, and beheaded, and his heart and bowels, from which his traitorous thoughts proceeded, were burned; the body was quartered as a warning to others.\textsuperscript{41}

However much it might have been inspired by the example of Harclay and apt though its symbolic logic might seem, the punishment Froissart arranges for Despenser was not inevitable or even likely under existing laws. Part of the problem involved in understanding Despenser’s punishment is deciding just what Despenser is guilty of—treason, heresy, or sodomy, all of which Froissart conflates when reckoning up Despenser’s crimes. If he is being punished for treason—the crime with which he is charged in Trussell’s arraignment speech—he would likely have been drawn and quartered, or, given his high status, beheaded, as Gaveston was. Burning was reserved for female traitors, perhaps in order to avoid, as one historian suggests, the “indecent exposure of their bodies in public.”\textsuperscript{42} Significantly, Barbara Hanawalt notes that only in the case of treason were male and female punishments differentiated; for other crimes they were the same.\textsuperscript{43} If Despenser is being punished for treason, then his punishment straddles the boundaries between
male and female. Burned and quartered, he is punished in a sexually ambiguous way as neither entirely woman nor entirely man.

If he is being punished as a heretic and a sodomite, as Froissart states, then Despenser's punishment, while once again not inevitable, is at least consistent with the increasingly harsh penalties being meted out for sodomy, penalties that included castration and death by burning. In their separate discussions of the increasing intolerance toward homosexual activities in all of the European societies of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, John Boswell and Michael Goodich note the tendency to link sodomy with heresy as well as the willingness to use both as charges against political foes. Goodich cites the examples of the Templars and of Boniface VIII, who in his political struggles with Philip the Fair was charged with heresy and sodomy. It is worth noting that in a number of chronicles, Edward's relations with Gaveston and Despenser come immediately after accounts of the trials of the Templars, who were also accused of heresy and sodomy. Tellingly, although Froissart's is the only chronicle to employ sexual symbolism in depicting Despenser's punishment, a number of other chronicles imagine a similarly sexualized end for Edward II, claiming that he was murdered with a red-hot poker inserted up his rectum, although his death takes place not in public, but in the privacy of his prison chamber. Whether in full view of the public or not (and, once again, the narration of Edward's private death in the chronicles has the effect of making it public), the bodies of Despenser and Edward are forced to identify and atone for their transgressions, with punishment simultaneously drawing attention to and excising the offending body part.

Despenser's sexual dissidence and destabilizing presence, which in Froissart's account seems designed chiefly to enable Isabella's seizure of power, can obviously provoke the kind of social and discursive dislocation Jonathan Dollimore calls "discoherence," that is, "an incongruity verging on a meaningful contradiction." "In the process of being made to discohere," Dollimore says, "meanings are returned to circulation, thereby becoming the more vulnerable to appropriation, transformation, and reincorporation in new configurations." What discoheres in this instance is masculinity (and power and authority), once resident in Despenser's arrogantly powerful, and hence hypermasculine, person, but now drained from him by the queen who has rendered him weak, helpless, effeminate, and a victim of his own desires. But in presenting
Despenser's body as this sort of spectacle—neither completely feminized and passive nor totally masculine and active—what Froissart holds up as dangerous about Despenser, what perhaps provokes the queen's violent attack on him, is precisely the way he is not other, most obviously the way that the crimes she attempts to fix in him alone actually fuel the economy of courtly culture.

This is particularly true in the case of treason, one of the crimes with which Despenser is charged, a crime that had special resonance in the context of a government based largely on affectional alliances among men intimate with the king. Although the Great Treason Statute of 1352 would attempt to set limits to the definition and scope of treason, earlier in the century treason was an elastic criminal category understood generally as any act that violated the bond of fealty owed to a lord or the bond of allegiance owed to the king. More broadly, treason could encompass any violation of trust between two friends, whatever the hierarchical relation between them. Treason was thus at heart a crime of friendship and pointed to the violation of codes of sociability and affinity crucial to courtly culture. Significantly for the difficulties Edward found himself in, treason was a crime with sexual overtones as well. These overtones derived not just from treason's connection to sociability, but also from its linguistic association with seduction: among the Latin terms used to describe treason in many chronicle accounts are the words *seditio* and *seduccio*, that is, sedition and seduction, terms apparently interchangeable at the time, as Michael Hanrahan has noted. To act seditiously was thus akin to acting seductively, suggesting that treason could find its origins in a friendship that became too close, too privy, too exclusive—all of which characterized Edward's relations with Despenser and figured in baronial antipathy toward the king's favorite.

For both *seditio* and *seduccio* the offending body part was typically the tongue, a corporeal instrument capable of corrupt counsel. The fourteenth-century emphasis on the connections between advice and prohibitions on speech makes clear that speech could be deployed as part of power struggles between rulers and subjects. Tropes of advice were frequently used to limit the king, as were complaints against flatterers and corrupt counselors. A consistent charge against Edward II was, in fact, that he employed evil counselors, as the document justifying his deposition makes clear when it foregrounds Edward's propensity for listening to bad advice as cause for his removal from power. Like other
contemporaries, Froissart ascribes part of Edward's problem to his susceptibility to the advice of false counselors, whose treasonous whisperings are presented as sexual dangers since they threaten to seduce as well as betray the king. When Froissart gives Despenser a nonspeaking role in his public punishments, he is calling attention to Despenser's crimes of seductive speech while underscoring the reversal of fortune that has now silenced him.

Given that sedition and seduction, friendship and treason, were intertwined in this way, determining the limits of friendship was an issue of concern for fourteenth-century courtly culture. Although it was understood to be the most serious crime, treason was a crime the crown could not entirely hate, despite its dangers, not only because of its nearly inextricable connection with the most basic structures of fourteenth-century government, but also because of its lucrative potential. Treason was a crime that directly benefited the royal treasury, because conviction for treason resulted in forfeiture of property to the crown. In the case of Despenser, a conviction of treason would serve to transfer his vast holdings to royal coffers about to be under the control of Isabella should her coup be a success.

Friendship and sodomy were also closely related, and once again, sodomy was a crime not entirely easy for the crown to hate, given its close alliance with the male sociability so essential to medieval governmental structures. Intense bonds of affect and obligation linked males in late-medieval aristocratic societies, and homoerotic bonds were not—and could not be—isolated, but rather were woven into a web of masculine sodalities and affinities. Goldberg observes that in Marlowe's Edward II "friendship and sodomy are always in danger of (mis)recognition" (119), one for the other, and that transgression of social hierarchies is often what triggers charges of sodomy between friends. Echoing Foucault's claim that sodomy refers to everything illicit lying outside the system guaranteeing marriage and inheritance, the prerogatives of blood as the guiding principle of social order and maintenance of class distinctions, Goldberg argues that "A 'sodomite' need not be a man who sleeps with other men; the scandal of sexual acts that violate socially sanctioned forms of sexual behavior is produced only when the structures of the social hierarchy are seen to be violated" (120). Alan Bray's analysis of Edward II similarly makes the point that, when male intimacy transgressed social hierarchies, it could be termed sodomy rather than friendship; hence, when in Marlowe's play Gaveston usurps privi-
leges that the barons believe belong only to them, he becomes a sodomite with Edward.55 Extrapolating from the play to its historical context, Goldberg asserts that sodomy became visible in Elizabethan England only when its “supposed practitioners were charged with violations, usually religious or political, of the social order” (120). Certainly this seems true in the case of Edward and Despenser as Froissart represents it. Despenser is accused only when he usurps privileges the barons or the queen believe belong to them, when he becomes a closer friend to Edward than they are.56

**Act IV**

This merging of the sexual and the political is solidified by Froissart in the last act of the political drama he shows Isabella mounting against Edward and Despenser. Immediately after Despenser’s execution, the queen and her son proceeded to London, where they were met by rejoicing crowds. (Froissart fails to tell us that the Londoners also seized the opportunity to riot and murder.)57 At Christmas that year the queen held a great court, Froissart relates, and during the festivities it was decided to put down in writing all the king’s misdeeds, which he had committed under the influence of his evil counselors, and to read them before all the people (37). When this was done, the barons, knights, and council all agreed that Edward II was not fit to be king (“dirent que telz hors n’estoit mies dignes de jamais porter couronne, ne d’avoir nom de roy,” 38), and that his eldest son should immediately take his place. And so, Froissart concludes, Edward III was crowned King of England on Christmas day of 1326.58 By proclaiming the king’s misdeeds in this fashion, Isabella effectively replaces improper (secret, seductive, treasonous, and sodomitical) speech with proper, open speech; she stops rumors and puts an end to whispered advice through the use of a public and apparently consensual declaration. Edward is kept offstage, perhaps out of fear that his presence might rally support for him or perhaps because it is much more effective for Isabella to keep blame focused on Despenser. The final act of this political theater, then, is a combined ceremony and proclamation that together attempted, like the public display of Despenser’s body, to bring the seducer into the unwavering light of civic regard, and hence to halt his influence while also affirming Isabella’s version of events within the space of openly shared political discourse.
I want to conclude my discussion of Froissart’s account of the downfall of Edward II by looking at it in a slightly different light, not just as the political theater Froissart represents it to be, but as a narrative act having its own functions within his historiography. In a compelling discussion of an adultery story embedded in the Westminster Chronicle’s account of the treason trials of 1388, during Richard II’s reign, Paul Strohm has suggested that one reason for the inclusion of gossipy or scandalous episodes in late-medieval chronicles is that scandal serves an important socializing function, participating in “the imaginary processes by which disturbing subject matter . . . was opened to restatement in exaggerated forms that invited revulsion and justified repressive control.” Following the pattern Patricia Spacks has outlined for gossip, scandal, in Strohm’s words, mediates “between the particular and the general, the individual and the social . . . unifying an already intimate circle of hearers or readers in shared belief about appropriate and inappropriate behavior.”

Froissart’s account of political intrigue and dynastic struggle at the medieval English court, of the scandal of Edward and Despenser with their dangerous and unruly sexuality, their too-close friendship, titillates and entertains while also serving to ratify the virtues—and political and economic advantages—associated with Queen Isabella’s allegiance to heterosexual marriage and its underpinning of the ideological and material organization of the nobility. The scandal of the king’s affair with Despenser might thus have become for Froissart and his audience a way of moving private behavior into the light of public scrutiny, where shared norms could be tested and then rejected or affirmed.

It seems plausible to assume that the affirmation of shared norms was part of Froissart’s purpose in his handling of the Despenser episode, given the aims and audience of his chronicles. Froissart saw his chronicle as a moral treatise that would recount the great marvels and feats of arms (“les grans merveilles et li biau fait d’armes,” 1) of the Anglo-French wars for his imagined audience of young gentlemen or bachelor knights (“jones bacelers,” 3) eager for social and economic advance (“tout jone gentil homme, qui se voellent avancier,” 2). Froissart’s intent, in his own words, was to pack his book full of examples that would be of help and encouragement to these readers in their endeavors (“matère et exemples de yaus encoragier en bien faisant,” 3). For this audience of aspiring young elites, the story of Despenser might have served as a cautionary tale about the dangers of too-close affection between men.
Although the policing of sexuality portrayed in the *Chroniques* might seem to point in part to pervasive anxieties about homoerotic relations in fourteenth-century courtly culture, as has been argued for other instances of same-sex desire within institutional settings in premodern Europe, that does not seem to me to be the only—or even the chief—lesson to be learned from Froissart’s account of what happened to Hugh Despenser. Rather than pointing to anxiety, Froissart’s narrative attests to at least partial acceptance of homosocial and homoerotic behavior among men at court, implicitly recognizing that male affectional and associational structures did not just lurk hidden within the government but in fact constituted it and were necessary for the operation of courtly culture. Certainly a degree of anxiety about how far tolerance should go is evident in Froissart’s story. But at the same time, Froissart’s recounting of the Despenser affair also demonstrates the availability of a powerful rhetoric of heterosexual preference that could be deployed with great success for political ends. By having Isabella engineer Despenser’s theatrical and highly public punishment while Edward is kept for the most part offstage, Froissart shows not just how effectively scapegoating could work as a form of public spectacle, but also how vilification of same-sex desire and homosocial relations could be enlisted in the cause of political power struggles. Froissart’s account of Isabella’s spectacular punishment of Despenser can therefore be seen as a reinscription of heteronormative standards: not only is Despenser denied his desires, but he is viciously punished for them. In this way, Despenser is co-opted for the production of a universal heterosexuality. The scandal of Despenser seems to mark, then, not so much a site of struggle where we can see marginalized groups resisting silencing or can glimpse, as Steven Kruger says, “in however muted and distorted a fashion, the queer presences against which homophobia was anxiously erected,” but the sadder and grimmer opposite—a site of the demonizing of sexual difference. For genuinely resistant voices, we have to search elsewhere.

**Notes**

1. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce, G. Raynaud, and L. Minot and A. Minot (Paris: Société de L’Histoire de France, 1869–99), 1:12–35. All subsequent references are to this edition, which is based on the first redaction of the *Chroniques*; citations will be given parenthetically in the text. The redaction known as the Rome MS, from which I oc-
casionally quote when it differs in significant ways from the first redaction, is printed in
the appendix of vol. 1.

2. For an overview of the events of the latter part of Edward II's reign, see May

3. The assembly of 1327 did in fact move to depose the king; see Natalie Fryde, *The

4. There is a distinct irony in Froissart's depiction of Isabella's so successfully man-
aged theatricalization of these events, given that Edward II was known and sometimes crit-
icized for his love of theater and entertainments; see Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed.
J. R. Lumby (London: Longman, 1882), 8:298. As Higden reveals, Edward's affinity for the-
ater could be seen in sexualized terms: "he forsook þe companye of lorde, and drowh hym
to harlottes, to syngers and to gestoures" (8:299).

York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 80, notes that changed attitudes toward Edward's rela-
tions with his favorites reflect "a change in modern attitudes rather than discovery of fresh
evidence."

6. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western
Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: Univer-
sity of Chicago Press, 1980), 298. Boswell argues that although there "is no doubt that both
Hugh and his father were politically useful to Edward," such usefulness "does not reduce
the likelihood of a romantic relationship between the two younger men" (300n.90).

Stanford University Press, 1992), 141.

8. Froissart's account of the elder Despenser's death is restrained compared to that
in Galfridus le Baker's chronicle, which describes how the elder Despenser was drawn,
eviscerated, and forced to see his own intestines burned: "Alligatur confestim strenuus iste
miles, brachiis et tibiis in longum protensis, et in ipsius viventis conspectu, viscera pro-
pria de ventre inciso crudeliter extracta, ignibus traduntur" (That vigorous soldier was im-
mediately bound, his arms and legs stretched out lengthwise, and in his own sight, while
he was still alive, his own viscera were cruelly extracted from his cut-open stomach and
thrown into the flames). See *Galfridi le Baker de Swinbroke Chronicon*, ed. J. A. Giles (Lon-

9. In the Rome MS version of book 1 of the *Chroniques*, Froissart adds a lengthy pas-
 sage at this point, describing how everyone watches this marvel of the becalmed boat and
how, when Henry Beaumont has rowed out in a barge to capture the king and the younger
Despenser, everyone remarks at how God is on the side of the queen and her son ("Dieus
est pour madame la roine et son fil") in not allowing the king to escape and that it is now
time for them to be punished for their misdeeds ("que il est temps que ils soient pugni et
corrigiet de lors mesfais les quels ils ont fais," 245).


Renouard, 1904). For the relationship between the account by le Bel, a canon of Saint-Lam-
bert in Liège, and Froissart, see Pierre Philippeau, "Froissart et Jean le Bel." *Revue du Nord*
22 (1936): 81–111.

12. The by now commonly used phrase *homosodal relations* comes from Eve Kosofsky
Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), where it is used to describe same-sex relations that, while not themselves explicitly sexual in nature, exist on a continuum with sexual activities.

13. Froissart claims that Despenser caused such great discord between the king and queen ("mist si grant descort entre le roy et le royne") that the king did not want to come into any place where she was ("li roi ne voloit point venir en lieu où elle fust," 14), and comments that Charles comforts his sister upon hearing that she had been ill-treated as a result of Despenser’s actions ("estoit demenee par le fait dou Despenser," 17).


17. This passage is not found in le Bel’s Chronique.


21. See *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (London, 1832), 1:283. At the trials of the elder and younger Despensers, charges of usurping royal power were mingled with charges of treason. For the trial of father, see *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, 1:317; for the son, see G. A. Holmes, “Judgement on the Younger Despenser, 1326,” *English Historical Review* 70 (1955): 261–67. It is worth noting that Hugh Despenser the elder was the only
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baron to stand firmly by Gaveston during the movement against him in 1308; see McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, 58.


23. Other chronicles also stress the rivalry between Isabella and Despenser. *Adami Murimuthensis Chronica*, 46, says that Isabella refused to return from France because of her relationship with Mortimer but especially because of her hatred of the Despensers ("et maxime in odio illorum Dispensariorum, quo anno praecedenti procuraverunt familiariam regnae ab ipsa removeri"); Higden’s *Polychronicon* notes that because of Gaveston, Edward “neglexit” Isabella (8:300) and that as the power of the Despensers increased, Isabella’s decreased (8:314). There were also rumors that the younger Despenser was trying to engineer an annulment of Edward II’s marriage; see McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, 81. Froissart gives some credence to these rumors in the Rome manuscript version of book 1 (Chroniques, 1:222–23).


25. These incidents are cited by McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, 79.


28. The quotation is from Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, 187. Although Richard was never officially charged with sodomy, the Lancastrian chronicles mention it as a cause of his deposition; see, for example, *Chronicon Adae de Usk, A.D. 1377–1421*, 2d ed., ed. and trans. Edward M. Thompson (London: H. Frowde, 1904), 29.

29. Ainsworth, *Jean Froissart*, 254–57, comments that the Rome manuscript begins where two tyrannical reigns overlap (those of Edward II and Richard II), while the portrait of Edward III in the Rome manuscript of book 1 “offers the reader a compelling admixture of historical narrative, nostalgia, and (implied) homiletics” (257–58).

30. In the Rome manuscript, Froissart mentions that he was at Berkeley Castle in September of 1366 in the company of Edward Despenser, the grandson of the young Hugh Despenser. They spent three days in the castle or in amusements in the neighborhood.

31. The entire passage reads: “Li dis messires Thumas Wage fist bien en fort loiier monsigneur Huon le Despensier sour le plus petit magre et chetif cheval qu’il pot trouver, et li fist faire a vestir un tabar et afubler par dessus son abit le dit tabar, semet de telz armeures qu’il soloit porter, et le faisoit ensi mener par derision apries le route et le conroi le royne, par toutes les villes ou il devoient passer, a trompes, a trompetes et flahutes,
pour lui faire plus grant despit, tant qu’il vinrent à Harfort, une bonne cité” (33–34). The Rome manuscript account differs slightly from this, particularly in stressing the derision that greets Despenser and by adding that “in every village they entered, public rolls proclaimed the misdeeds of the said Sir Hugh” (“en toutes les villes où il venaient, on lissoit publiquement par un rolet les fais dou dit messire Hue,” 247). As in the judging of Hugh Despenser the elder, Thomas Wage acted as the queen’s agent. Knighton’s Chronicon, 1:436–37, gives a similar account, adding that Despenser was crowned with thistles and had scripture verses denouncing malice written on his coat.


33. According to at least one chronicle, a similar ritual humiliation was meted out to Gaveston; Vita Edwardi Secundi, 2:275, describes how Warwick seized Gaveston at Deddington in Oxford and led him away not as an earl but as a thief, forcing him to go on foot rather than horseback, as usual for a man of his position.

34. Fryde, Tyranny, 192, states that Isabella apparently wanted to take Despenser to London, but he was too feeble, having refused food and drink since his capture.

35. The sentence in the original reads: “Et avoech ce il avoit si enhortet le roy qu’il ne pooit ou ne voloit veoir la royne sa femme, ne son ainsnet fils, qui devoit estre leurs sires; ains les avoit decacié, par doubtance de leurs corps, hors dou royame” (35).

36. Essentially the same account can be found in Adami Murimuthensis Chronica, 51; Chronica Monasterii de Melia, 2:353; Higden’s Polychronicon, 8:322; Vita Edwardi Secundi, 2:289; and Vita et Mors Edwardi Secundi, 2:312. The most detailed report of the younger Despenser’s death is in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. R.S.41, ff. 122v–124v; see Fryde, Tyranny and Fall, 192.

37. Knighton’s Chronicon, 1:437–41: Knighton calls both Despensers “traytoures et ennys del realme” (437). The Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvon similarly describes Despenser’s sentencing by Trussell but gives no description whatsoever of his death (2:87). For a discussion of Trussell’s speech, see Holmes, “Judgement on the Younger Despenser.”

38. Once again, Froissart follows le Bel almost word for word.


45. Boswell, Christianity, 269–332, and Michael Goodich, The Unmentionable Vice:

46. Adami Murimuthensis Chronica, for example, immediately after mentioning Gaveston's return from exile in Ireland, turns to the London council held in May of 1310 against the Templars "concerning heresy and other foul and abominable accusations" ("super haeresi et aliis articulis turpibus et nefandis," 13); also see the Annales Londoniensis, 1:190, 192.

47. Galfridi le Baker Chronicon, 85; Chronica Monasterii de Melsa similarly says that the deposed king was taken to Berkeley Castle and there killed by Sir Thomas Gurney, "with a glowing iron spit stabbed abominably through his hidden parts" ("cum veru ferreo candente inter celanda confossus nefarie," 2:355). Also see the long account in the Vita et Mors Edwarci Secundi, 2:313–19: Edward, grief-stricken at his separation from Isabella, is taken from Kenilworth to Berkeley Castle; he is cruelly treated and imprisoned in a foul room over a charnel house ("reclusum in camera tutissima per exhalationem cadaverum") for many days to the point of suffocation ("usque ad suffocationem," 2:318). Shortly afterwards, he is killed with a red-hot poker and many hear his cries: "ipsum oppressum et suffocatum cum ferro plumbarii intense ignito trans tubam ductilem ad egestionis partes secretas applicatum membra spiritalia post intestinias combusserunt, caventes ne vulnera in regio corpore, ubi solent vulnera requiri, per aliquem justitiae amicum reperto, sui tormenta de laesione manifesta respondere, et poenam subire coacti" (he himself, oppressed and suffocated, when a rod of lead intensely heated had been applied to his secret parts of excretion through the rectum, his living members were burnt following his intestines, his torturers taking care lest a wound in the body of the king, where wounds are accustomed to be sought, be found by some friend of justice, and his torturers have to answer for any manifest injury, and be compelled to undergo punishment) (2:318). Higden's Polychronicon, 8:324, offers a similar account, as does Knighton's Chronicle, 1:443.


49. See Bellamy, Law of Treason, 1.


51. Bellamy, Law of Treason, 7, claims that in the English plea rolls the preferred terms are traditio, seditio, or seductio. See Michael Hanrahan, "Seduction and Betrayal: Treason in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women," Chaucer Review 30 (1996): 229–40, for a relevant discussion of these overlapping discourses in Ricardian court culture.

52. See Ferster, Fictions of Advice, esp. 67–68. Complaints against flatterers make sense given that, although the fourteenth century saw the development both of the council as an administrative body helping to govern the country and of parliament, private counselors in the household continued to play a powerful role. For these developments, see James F. Baldwin, The King's Council in England during the Middle Ages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913); A. L. Brown, The Governance of Late Medieval England, 1272–1461 (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), chapter 2; and Given-Wilson, Royal Household, esp. 183–84.

53. For the frequency of the theme of "evil counsel" in baronial complaints against Edward, see Davies, Baronial Opposition, 27–29.

54. The punishment for treason included loss of all goods and perpetual disinherit- ing of heirs (later in the century, some heirs petitioned parliament to have their lands reinstated on the grounds of false judgments); see Bellamy, Law of Treason, 84–85.

56. It seems to have been recognized that Despenser had a special position, one that superseded that of Gaveston in the king's affections and that made him a quasi regent, hence causing discontent among the other magnates. Galfridus le Baker's chronicle, for instance, notes that there were those among the barons who called Hugh a second king ("Fuerunt inter illos [i.e., the barons] qui dixerant Hugonem alterum regem," Galfridi le Baker Chronicom, 60).


58. This, too, Froissart changes to make a better story; Edward III was not crowned until 1 February 1327. The Rome manuscript version of book 1 expands the elaboration of the ceremonies surrounding Edward III's coronation, as if to create an even stronger demonstration of his fitness to rule; see Chroniques, 248–53.


60. See, for example, V. A. Kolve's discussion in "Ganymede/Son of Getron: Medieval Monasticism and the Drama of Same-Sex Desire," Speculum 73 (1998): 1014–67, of the twelfth-century play Filius Getronis, which he reads in the context of anxieties within medieval monasteries about same-sex desire between men and boys.

I would like to begin with one of Judith Butler’s most incisive essays, “Gender Is Burning.” It provides a useful, and challenging, frame to the response I am attempting to make to the preceding three essays, one that successfully delineates how the subjectivated can disobey normative performative discourse—can, in fact, disembody it. I say “attempt,” for these three essays cover a great deal of ground and raise challenging possibilities for the project of devising a queer theory operating in medieval contexts. All three propose such useful contours for charting road maps across the unexplored territories of medieval queerdom that one hesitates to encapsulate them in any formula. And, albeit very different in their individual contours, all three bring several major questions to the fore. The first concerns the legitimacy of queer theory as an instrument of historical explication, as will be discussed further on. The second foregrounds the imbrication of nonnormative gender expressions with queer sensibilities; that is, nonnormative gender expressions have a certain primacy even over explicit sexual transgressions, and nonnormative representations of sexuality reflect the ways bodily deviations also question hegemonic masculinities. Furthermore, such “deviances” (a word that I find effective in connection with “queering” endeavors in spite of its negative history) retrace a queer cartography of gender implosions in which women remain the great unspoken, and thus, that
bothersome rub that can no longer be ignored. Third, all three essays, through very different routes and to varying degrees, bring into focus the ways the (male) body is reconfigured to overlap with that complex category "woman," once it sheds much of its abjected biological content. In this process, agency is predicated on the ability to break down that category so that the reinterpretation separates the social being "woman" (inferior and despised, or, as in the case of a queen, feared and constricted) from its bodily living as a subject knowing pleasure in societies where women's pleasure is assumed to conform to a subject/ed position. An academic/national history project of bolstering masculinities within the monarchy threatened by its queer underside (explored by Hutcheson), the ambiguous status of another king as his own courtier's minion (as in Sponsler), the castration fantasies surrounding a famous knight (discussed by McCracken) are, in my view, tightly connected to the reconfiguration of gendered and sexed bodies that took place historically in the case of Arnaud de Verniolle, a socially powerful male who played (dangerously) with the female subject/ed position.

Queering History

Gregory Hutcheson's queering of the history of the Spanish court and of the place of the Moor in medieval Iberian historiography brings us squarely into the realm of a queer historiography empowered to do more than merely reveal the sexual secrets—or even the "dirty bits" dear to Andrew Taylor—in the biographies of historical figures. Such an approach proposes a complete fusion of the political, the social, and the sexual. Hutcheson's is thus a rich exploration of the Foucauldian critique of official, narrative history, whose omissions and exclusions are the very hallmark of often unspoken but nonetheless effective centers of power. Furthermore, we can see at work in this discovery of a queer history within the interstices and slippages of official history clear examples of the Butlerian intersection of an interpellation sustained by and hinging on the law with a disobedience to interpellation—where non-conformity to the performative status of discourse ushers in parody, hyperbole, and other rearticulations that hinder the effect of the law. ("The performative, the call by which the law seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what
appears to be the disciplining intent in motivating the law.” Hutcheson's essay felicitously probes the relationship between suppressed queer desires and the academy's desire for a linear history whose pleasure resides in the duplicitous transparence of its readability. Similarly positioning queer studies in relation to history, Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero note the following in their introduction to Premodern Sexualities:

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the concept of historicity to queer theory and other critical enterprises devoted to dismantling the universals, essences, and natures that have for centuries been used to define and persecute "others," including those others understood by dominant ideologies to be excessively fond of the pleasures of sameness. . . . Especially in question are those historicist practices that repudiate the roles of fantasy and pleasure in the production of historiography.

Queer historiography of the type presented by Hutcheson, Fradenburg, and Freccero is less a reintroduction of "queers" into the subject of history than an interrogation of the historical project itself, whereby the linearity of those master narratives producing the ominously intelligible discourse of power is replaced by the historical performance of the unstable, the approximate, the discontinuous, and the fractured.

WOMEN AND NORMATIVITY

A noticeable lack in medievalist queer studies, possibly in queer studies as a whole, remains the relative dismissal of same-sex/queer potential among women, and the latter's unproblematic enrollment in the project of discovering queer male desires and displacements. Male bodies thus become the sites of gender and sexual anxieties, while women remain defenders of the heteronormative. The lack of obvious configurations of female-female desire cannot remain a valid excuse for assuming their nonexistence, and the various tensions within female incorporations into heteronormativity are an often unrecognized terrain for rich explorations of similar displacements to those found in male sites. Even in their most glaringly normative incarnations, women's behaviors toward and
within sexuality can be complicated in view of that anxiety within heterosexuality which, Butler proposes, is evident in the "pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences [it sets up] in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety." 7

The role of women in queer readings of medieval texts, then, is best understood in relation to that bracketed "I" Butler identifies as "crucial to the thinking through of the constitutive ambivalence of being socially constituted." That "I" draws its "'agency' in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose," so that "[t]o be implicated in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that the 'I' opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms." 8 In brief, this means, for instance, that texts in which women appear either not to contest heteronormativity or actively to sustain it, may also have to be read in the context of these same women's struggle to wrest power from institutions and individuals, or to defend themselves against a power exercised against them.

Claire Sponsler's compelling analysis of Despenser's fate and of its representation by Froissart brings out this crucial ambivalence in the heteronormalizing of medieval women. In this narrative, the queen acts to reestablish a form of justice that is both heteronormative and concerned with the maintenance of "proper" royal power, punishing Despenser but also King Edward for his complicity in the unsettling of male-female relations in the household. Queen Isabella thus appears in the first instance as a daunting guardian of heteronormativity and heterosexuality. But the very fact that Isabella, having been rejected by Edward, subsequently destroys him and replaces him with her son also divests her of any stable sexuality of her own and puts her in a no-man's-land of sexual definition. Although the task of containing homosexual excess falls to her, she reaps no immediately visible affirmation of her own sexual self in the process. Coherence and discoherence of gender projects thus remain central to both political and sexual battles. 9

Froissart's text can be fruitfully compared with other texts similarly combining the historical and the fictional to produce massive gender discoherence. A parallel could be drawn, for instance, with the fourteenth-century French chanson de geste Baudouin de Sebourc, which presents the heteronormativization of women as the bulwark of heterosexuality and at the same time manifests a great deal of discomfort concerning homosexual practices. I have discussed elsewhere how the (re)writings
of history in *Baudouin de Sebourc* are by no means indifferent to issues of gender deviation and sexual transgression. Here I would like briefly to allude to some of the ways that such a text implodes gender norms and thus heteronormativity itself.

In *Baudouin de Sebourc*'s candid representation of ugly cultural biases, women as a group—and gender as a category—act to confirm various forms of otherings that are fraught with violence and hatred. The division of gender is clearly articulated through the misogynous rhetoric rampant in the poem, expressed in particular by the hero Baudouin himself.

Throughout the text, repeated ambiguities about gendered roles and gendered physical appearance, accompanied by the acknowledgment of homosexuality and homoeroticism, lead to puns, jokes, gossip, allusions, in short, to an entire set of sexual discontinuities that explode at the very end in a violent erasure of sexual deviance expressed through the *Bougre* lord Thierry's plans to have his wife burned. Along the way, however, heterosexuality has revealed its flaws, disturbed by numerous allusions to nonnormative sex. In one series of incidents, Blanche of Flanders in male disguise is called Baudouin's "André," a slang term apparently designating the bottom boyish lover of a man. The episode is symmetrical to one in which Robert of Flanders dresses up in his sister's clothes to try out Baudouin's loyalty; the fact that he is later vanquished in combat by Baudouin emphasizes the homoerotic content of this scene, in which a full-grown and strong man, neither a youth nor a fop, can pass so easily for a young girl. In another passage, love between men is expressed through the very special friendship of two knights, one of whom, to his great sorrow, ends up killing the other by mistake in battle: it is said of Corborant and Richard of Chaumont that "they loved each other more than a lover his dear beloved" ("plus amoient l'un l'autre qu'amans s'amie chiere"). The narrative is thus invaded by a type of "homosexual panic," as if, after repeated rents in the fabric of a presumably all-powerful heterosexuality, the poet(s) had scrambled to return the text to reassuring order through violence.

Violence explodes around Thierry's "unnatural desire" with his nearly successful attempt to put his wife to death, a wife whom he detests apparently simply for being a woman. In turn, the Bastard and the burgers punish and execute Thierry, even as his wife takes swift revenge against his minions. The wrath that his lord, the prince, then ex-
presses against Thierry's enemies exposes a male homosexuality embedded within complex relations of power and surrounded by ambiguous messages of acceptability, as the prince apparently considers the attack on his vassal Thierry more egregious than Thierry's unorthodox sexual mores. The text contrasts this complacency toward Thierry's deviations with the alliance made among the Bastard, a professional redresser of wrongdoing, the urban community of the burgers, and the scorned wife, who is the one to exercise the highest degree of punitive violence against the "bougres." Since Baudouin de Sebourc is a highly political text, in which conflicts between higher powers—regal or ducal—and alliances of lower nobility and plebeians are rife, the text's performance of homosexual panic and its norm-bolstering punitive effectiveness remind us again that the political and sexual orders are connected and dependent on each other, as in the Despenser incident discussed by Sponsler.

The Baudouin de Sebourc narrative strictly enforces a heterosexual vocation for its women, women who constantly violate the boundaries of gender-role prescription while diligently obeying the dictates of orthodox sex—to the point, in fact, of violating other social and sexual rules regulating promiscuity and enforcing the sanctity of marriage. A sexually aggressive Saracen secretly in love with a Christian dresses as a man in order to cross the sea and find him, and she successfully fights off and beats up her traveling companions, who have challenged her sexual imposture by assaulting her. Finally, however, having born a son, she ends up silent and imprisoned with him for years. Similarly Queen Rose, Baudouin's mother, raises an army, and wages war against her second husband, Gaufroi, when she realizes that he has murdered her first spouse; she succeeds in putting his lands to waste. She is not, however, lauded but chastised by the pope's envoy for being a "heretic" who refuses her body and loyalty to her "lawful" husband. So too, Marie de Sebourc, the unwed mother of the Bastard by Baudouin, takes another lover after he abandons her, but is roundly condemned by Baudouin for such a departure from female subjection. These moments of female resistance are only the most obvious and explicit disruptions of gender roles in the text and should be read against the full implosion of normative agendas for sexuality and gender brought about by a series of fragmented events focused on male homosexuality. This mutual implication of gender and sexuality thus confirms the tight relationship
between the various categories of sexual excess recognized in queer readings of sexual dissonance.\textsuperscript{20}

**DISEMBODYING GENDER**

Peggy McCracken's discussion of castration narratives in Arthurian texts provides further evidence for the importance of gender-inappropriate behaviors in challenging the normative sexual order. The analysis she proposes is equally applicable to the vast ensemble of texts and fragments that comprise the Tristan and Isolde legend. Although these texts are usually assumed to convey an indisputable, flagrant adoption of heterosexual eroticism, the motif of castration allows us to perceive a profound ambiguity in them. Indeed, Tristan repeatedly receives a wound in the thigh that will not heal and that, in fact, becomes putrid, blackish, and decomposed. The symbolic underpinnings of this motif have been most clearly deciphered in the work of folklorists.\textsuperscript{21} This wound is not solely the effect of Morholt's poisoned sword, but also of contact with the dragon's severed tongue—an ambiguous sexual symbol indeed—and of the wound inflicted by the boar's tusk in the hunt, a beast that is an appropriate emblem for Tristan as a melancholic. The medical results of these wounds are akin to the symptoms of leprosy—a malady of melancholics,\textsuperscript{22} and, indeed, one of Tristan's disguises is as a leper. Lepers were reputed to be sexually double, hot and out of control, but thus forced into abstinence by the law and public health codes.\textsuperscript{23} Tristan is similarly double: a "great lover" whose sexual ardor discounts his wounds, but symbolically—and effectively—castrated and thwarted in his performance, both by the law and by illness. The conglomerate of Tristan legends thus allows us to observe the workings, over a vast medieval textual ensemble, of what Kaja Silverman has dubbed the "dominant fiction," a necessary condition for the smooth functioning of the ideologies of gender because it allows the construction of a male subjectivity aligned with a fiction central to society and dependent on a "collective make-believe." Silverman defines the "ideal female subject" as one who "refuses to recognize male lack, and that disavowal and fetishism provide important mechanisms for effecting this refusal. Indeed, traditional masculinity emerges there as a fetish for covering over the castration upon which male subjectivity is grounded."\textsuperscript{24} Thus, this dominant fiction—the con-
gruence of phallus and penis—comes to a bad end within the distinctly medieval cultural substrata formed by the Tristan legends and the Arthurian texts reread by McCracken.

**Queering History and the Female Subject/ed Position**

The story of the cleric Arnaud de Verniolle, who was condemned during the inquisitorial proceedings in Montaillou, provides us with a glimpse of what happens when a problematic textual matrix is interrogated to bring forward complex interweavings of sexuality and gender, and thus to make a “rich stew”—using one of Eve Sedgwick’s expressions—of historical and sexual discursive tensions where femaleness and maleness reoccupy a variety of destabilizing positions. Such a textual matrix provides an interesting counterpoint to the problems raised in the essays by Hutcheson, Sponsler, and McCracken, because it relates question of truth and authority to fiction, interrupts linear historiography with the inescapable expression of queer desire, and does so by foregrounding fractures in gender-normative performances of the body in sexuality. In a more general way, the textual matrix formed around Arnaud raises another crucial question of queer historiography, namely, the various interjections or intrusions of naming in the self-construction of queer subjects, that form of “interpellation” discussed by Judith Butler.

On 23 June 1323, the cleric Arnaud de Verniolle, arrested on charges of heresy and sodomy, was brought for interrogation before Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers. The proceedings were part of an inquiry led by Fournier in the Sabarthès—a subregion of the Albigeois in the Comté of Foix at the foot of the Pyrenees—to eradicate the remains of Albigensian belief and mores among the population. Jacques Fournier’s Inquisition record is contained in MS Vatican Library 4030, a parchment manuscript of 325 folios with a Renaissance binding. The manuscript was transcribed by four separate hands. The fourth hand—the one recording Arnaud de Verniolle’s case—is written in a very regular gothic script, the work of a professional scribe more attentive to his calligraphy than to his spelling.” The text of Arnaud’s trial poses a number of difficult problems of linguistic analysis. It is couched in the somewhat dry Latin of Inquisition procedure, and thus raises the question of how
many of the witnesses would have actually deposed in such a bureaucratic, scholarly Latin rather than in their native Foix dialect, a form of Occitan. The inability of at least some of the protagonists to handle Latin successfully is underscored when a witness testifies that Arnaud once showed him a copy of the “Decretals”; unable to read the Latin text, the witness had to rely on Arnaud’s own translation. The terms used to describe homosexuality are also problematic since they are undoubtedly particular to specific scholarly, Latinate discursive registers. Thus, while we may nonetheless perceive within Arnaud’s account a rich subtext of distinctions—at once linguistic, doctrinal, and cultural—among sexuality as “sex acts,” sexual orientation as life practice, and gender dynamics, the full cultural content of these distinctions necessarily remains unrepresentable by the inquisitorial Latin terms used.

Fournier’s procedures took place in the difficult period between 1312 and 1321, a period marred by scarcity and marked by the king’s attacks on the Templars and lepers, as well as increased local attacks on Jews and Pope John XXII’s hostile pursuit of witches and of Waldensian heretics. Between 1309 and 1311, the last Cathar prefect of Albigeois was burned at the stake and about 650 Cathar followers were subjected to intensive inquisitorial proceedings that resulted in almost all cases in total loss of property. Yet underground resistance persisted: informers were murdered, people became fully familiarized with inquisitorial procedure and used it to denounce their enemies falsely, and parts of the tithe were not paid to ecclesiastical authorities. Fournier reacted fiercely, dragging all nonpayers into court, and eventually, after more than ten years of trials and investigations, the Sabarthès region capitulated.

The final deliberations in Arnaud’s trial took place between 9 and 11 August 1324. Arnaud was dealt with harshly: he was unanimously sentenced to degradation and life imprisonment in irons on a regime of bread and water. All four Franciscans present, and one Carmelite, urged that the sentence be mitigated because Arnaud came from a good family—to no avail. However, Arnaud was not, in fact, condemned solely for “sodomy,” but rather on the basis of a complicated case that linked sodomy with “heresy” and that was rooted in the particularly tense political context of the trial. Although only a subdeacon, Arnaud had posed as a priest, celebrated Mass, invited and heard confessions, and granted absolution—all actionable offenses. He also contrived with a friar, Bernard Raynie, to set up a “confession racket,” using the formula “May God ab-
solve you of your sins” (“Deus te absolvat de peccatis tuis”) instead of the correct “I absolve you” (“ego te absolve”) when he was hearing confessions; he delegated those who knew Latin to the friar. Moreover, as a subdeacon, Arnaud was subject to the new rules enacted after the First Lateran Council of 1123, which stated that the subdiaconate was a clerical order obliged to “punctuality, vigilance, sobriety, and chastity,” one for which marriage was prohibited and for which chastity was demanded on pain of sacrilege. Yet Arnaud showed no tendency to sexual abstinence of any kind. In jail, he made at least one truly heretical pronouncement when he consoled his cell mate, who bemoaned the length of his incarceration and not being able to go to church, by affirming that the Gospel stated, “Behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves” (“Ecce ego mitto vos sicut agnos inter lupos”) and that not going to church should be the least of his worries, because “where the souls of good people were gathered there was the true church” (“bona Ecclesia erat ubi erant animae bonarum gencium,” 34, 230a). Arnaud also admitted to having befriended a Waldensian living in Pamiers, whom he described as a man of great letters and science (230a). Worse yet, Arnaud’s own brother, a fugitive heretic, was still in contact with him—for example, sending secretly from a nearby village for Arnaud to get him a clean shirt. The brother then returned to Catalunia with three other men whose names Arnaud did not divulge to friar Pierre Record, his cell mate. Arnaud did not confess himself for nearly a year, had not taken Easter communion for twelve years, and had performed Mass in a ludic context out of foolishness and for fun (“cugulesca vel fatuitate”), consistently showing his lack of respect for fundamental tenets of Catholic dogma and ritual. Thus, throughout his trial, the inquisitors focused about equally on his violation of the sacred nature of confession and on his alleged sodomy.

Arnaud was in his early thirties at the time of these events, and the young men he cavorted with were between sixteen and eighteen. Usually he met them in church during religious holidays, discussed with them the matter of confession, offered these needy students a lead to a job, or invited them home to look at his books. He would interrogate his prospects, trying to ascertain their degree of interest in women and exposure to previous homosexual acts. For instance, in encounters with a potential partner, his “sexual orientation” was tested by asking questions such as “If we had a woman here, what would you do?” When the answer was
“nothing special,” he would grab the boy and kiss his cheeks. He would also ask, “Do you know what some men do with each other?” or “What women would you like to have?”

The first partner to turn evidence against Arnaud was Guillaume Ros, a sixteen-year-old student who had been lured by the promise of a job with the unconventional canon. Guillaume had been asked to swear on a missal to keep secret the canon’s oddities, such as occasionally getting drunk and beating people up, or expecting his underlings to provide him with women and to lie with him in one bed and submit to whatever Arnaud might want to do to them. Guillaume objected that bringing in women was a sin, but did not mention sin in connection with lying with the canon and doing his will. Once, in Arnaud’s house, Arnaud read him a passage of what Arnaud said were the “Decretals.” Since Guillaume could not read the text himself, Arnaud obligingly translated it for him into the vernacular (“in vulgari”), stating that if a man lay with another and emitted semen from the heat of his body, it was not as grave a sin as if he knew a woman (16–18). According to Guillaume, Arnaud then attacked and subdued him, undressed him, and ordered him to remove his undergarment unless he wanted harm (“malum”) to come to him. Guillaume complied, and Arnaud undressed completely, took him in his arms, and, kissing him, placed his virile organ between his thighs (“posuit membrum virile suum inter coxas ipsius loquentis”), moving as if he had to do with a woman (“ac si haberet rem cum muliere”), and then discharged his semen between Guillaume’s legs (“crura”). Guillaume reciprocated, albeit reluctantly, according to him, while Arnaud continued to perform the same movements.

Guillaume’s only reward for this encounter was apparently a small book, and it does not seem that he got anything else later on, although he entertained hopes for small gifts. Arnaud did offer to pay for his studies if he wanted to stay with him in his house and lie with him every night until the feast of Saint John the Baptist, but Guillaume refused. Their encounter took place during the early days of Lent. Such calendar notations are important because they show disregard for Lenten prohibitions and because they anchor social life in Arnaud’s town in the popular feasts celebrated around Saint John the Baptist.

Eight days later, Arnaud invited Guillaume to accompany him to a secondary residence of his, a sort of river beach house where Arnaud organized parties with his boyfriends—apparently more homosocial than
sexual—where they drank, ate, read poetry, and wrestled. Guillaume willingly followed, but when he found that they were alone and that Arnaud wanted sex, a scene ensued between them. Still, Guillaume clearly cooperated this time, since Arnaud was apparently not strong enough to perform in full butch manner when he tried to pick Guillaume up and plop him down for lovemaking: “and thereupon he took the said man, the witness, between his upper arms, with the witness’s arms folded before his breast, wishing to lift him from the ground and to carry him to the aforementioned place, but when he could not accomplish that, pulling and growing red, he instead dragged him to the aforementioned place” (“et deinde accepit dictum loquentem inter humeros, plicatis brachiis ipsius loquentis ante pectus, volens levare ipsum a terra et portare ad dicta loca, quod cum facere non posset, trahendo et rossegando traxit ipsum ad dictum locum”). During all of this, Arnaud again declared that their behavior was actually a lesser sin than to fornicate with a woman.

Eight days later, the allegedly victimized Guillaume followed Arnaud to his house through hidden back streets, where again, “under duress,” he let Arnaud commit “sodomy” with him. Two days later, astoundingly, Guillaume returned of his own volition to testify in front of the tribunal, only to tell the judges something much more incriminating against himself. This time, he admitted that, lured by the promise of a small gift, he returned to Arnaud’s house, found the gift useless but nevertheless stayed and joined Arnaud on the bed at his request. Again, Guillaume let Arnaud commit the “crimen sodomie” with him and complied with Arnaud’s request to do it to him in turn.

Arnaud’s relationships with men present a rich homoerotic and homosocial texture. But there is as much to be learned from the relations he and his group of male friends held to women as a social category, to femininity and effeminacy as expressions of sexual identity, and to the subjected female position as an enforced gender script. These are complex questions that reach far beyond any simple rejection by these men of women as sexual partners; heterosex continues to shade these men’s experience even when engaging in “homosexual” practices. For instance, Arnaud’s jail mate, friar Pierre Record, claimed that Arnaud told him that after sex with a prostitute his face became swollen like “a leper’s”; struck with fear, Arnaud decided to forswear the company of women and have sex only with men. Certainly leprosy was thought by many at this time to be sexually transmitted, but not by prostitutes alone, or even
only by women; anyone infected with the disease and engaging in sex was thought to be able to propagate it. Thus, although thirteenth- and fourteenth-century municipal rulings in southern France subjecting marketplaces to restrictions did link together prostitutes, lepers, and Jews, these rulings were not particularly concerned about sex. In fact, when southwestern French beliefs did link the transmission of leprosy with specific professions, it was not prostitution but instead trades such as carpentry and rope making that were implicated.

Arnaud, however, never told the leper story to his young men, though it might have been a good way of swaying them toward committed homosexuality. In fact, far from turning his male friends away from women, he often tried to mollify them with promises of getting women for them, as men sometimes did for him, and he made his access to women and knowledge of them an additional selling point. He also very frankly admitted that in his search for sexual release for his immense libido, women would do if necessary.

Arnaud’s relationships with women reflect the patriarchal order of his culture, filled with silent, efficacious women such as his mother, the nurse seen by the young men in his fine home, the unnamed mother of his bastard son, the servants whom he offered to his boyfriends, his bastard son’s fiancée to whom he brings a ring, and those “virgins” whose defloweration he considered a graver sin than sex between consenting men. In depositions given by Arnaud as well as his former partners, there is ample detail about sexual practices, and the phrase “as if with a woman” reappears throughout the texts, raising interesting questions about the top-bottom gender dynamics engaged in by Arnaud and his lovers. Indeed, most of the time, both men seemed to perform in each position in turn, although, throughout, one gets the distinct impression that Arnaud is the most aggressive and in control. In Arnaud’s band, then, anal sex was possibly practiced but then denied forcefully out of fear of worse treatment at the Inquisition’s hand; or it was practiced but denied because passivity was shameful in this Mediterranean culture where the image of “virility” had to be maintained; or it was, in fact, simply denied because it was indeed not practiced. The matter remains uncertain. But other sexual practices that amounted to “behaving like a woman,” although reviled, were repeatedly engaged in and even admitted to. These practices open a door to understanding more fully the sexual sensibilities of these men and their own discursive constructions of sexuality—in particular the overlap of an absent “sodomy” (anal sex) and
a very present sexual deviance (sex with men) that carried with it connotations of the feminine (especially since the sodomite was increasingly shamed for being effeminate, regardless of his sexual position in intercourse).  

Arnaud clearly established that, although he might be called a sodomite, he had not performed the most heinous crime, anal sex, which confession manuals named “sodomia perfecta,” but a lesser variant, “in femoribus” and “inter femora” (“between the thighs”). He also delineated the spatial economy of intercourse: no sex acts had been performed with one man on his back and the other on top of him. Phobic reaction to this particular position was evident both in penitentials and confessional manuals and in antihomosexual stanzas, such as this twelfth-thirteenth-century graffito found in a ninth-century manuscript: “When you lie on your back, when you recline in the house of death” (“dum te supinas, dum mortis in ede reclinas”), doubled with the fearsome topos of havoc wrought by the world upside down—“You make cocks into hens, and boys into girls” (“gallos gallinam facis, et pueros puernas”).

Thus, Arnaud insisted that nothing resembling the accepted, officially sanctioned version of heterosexual sex (man on top, woman on bottom and penetrated) had occurred. While the male body, as site of anatomical and social perfection, extending as far as the sacred body of Christ, remained thus suitably veiled, impenetrable, and protected, the presumably eminently penetrable female body had been evacuated from the proceedings, leaving an undeterminedly gendered body to function sexually and affectively in an intermediate, suspended, position. This was a queer position indeed, between a masculine order these men no longer fully belonged to, and a feminine one to be eschewed because subject to dreaded taboos, and one in which the men performed doubly perverse acts—moving against the male body as if it were a woman’s and spilling seed in men’s thighs (“[he] gives to a young man’s thighs what he owes to the mouth of the womb”). Most surprising, though, this allegedly passive feminine position was not simply ascribed by a more aggressive, in-control Arnaud to his young lovers, but also demanded by him from them, so that he too could feel their body man-handling his, as if they were “doing it to him as to a woman.” Practically, once the heteronormative performance of sex had been discarded, the meanings of “rem habere cum muliere” became polyvalent, as was the positioning of the elusive, and highly questionable, feminine with respect to pleasure.
Where, then—and how—do we locate the female, and the feminine, in the sexually heterodox world of Arnaud’s fourteenth-century Sabarthès? In Arnaud’s deposition, as well as in those of his sex partners, there is a clear separation between the female position as social subjection and the feminine as sexual otherness, marked both by inferiority and danger—hence, attraction.

The female position, thus, in the culture of early fourteenth-century Montaillou, was inseparable from the disenfranchising of women’s bodies. For Beatrice de Planissoles, this meant that, while she could remarry three times, she remained under the tight personal control of her lover, Pierre Clergue, the sexually profligate rector of Montaillou, who exercised powerful control over her reproductive abilities. It was to Clergue that Beatrice resorted to obtain a special herb that would prevent conception, as it prevented the coagulation of cheese, a bit of knowledge appropriated by Clergue from the shepherd subculture and retained by him, against all received usage in the traditional French countryside, where such matters were the province of women.37

For Grazide Rives, the female disempowered position meant being casually carnally known by Pierre Clergue, who then gave her as a wife to Pierre Lizier but retained the exclusive right of extramarital sexual intercourse with Grazide, without the community objecting. Grazide was thus exchanged as barter for favors and network building among men, to sustain the homosocial bond between them. This process has been connected by Jean-Charles Huchet—in relation to this very incident—to a poem by Guillaume IX of Aquitaine, in which he brags about having two women at his disposal (“dos cavalhs ai a ma selha ben e gen”) and proposes to give one to a male companion as a friendship-sealing gift. Huchet characterizes this exchange of women as a component of homosexual desires that could not be publicly articulated, and that only in this way could be subsumed into more conventional and acceptable homosocial bonds.38 This is a process easily recognized in Arnaud’s story; for on several occasions Arnaud offered women to his prospective male lovers as an enticement or reward, a gift made possible because these women were of inferior rank or were servants in his wealthy paternal household.

The female position in Arnaud’s culture entailed much more than the pronouncements of theologians about a woman’s fate as a supine, receptive sexual partner. That position in sex cannot be separated from the social loss it implies—a loss of manliness, of control, of face—or
from the daunting prospect it offers of being indelibly marked with the
taint of female shame. Yet the amazing thing about Arnaud’s sexual
world is not the care he took to reassure unimpressed inquisitors that
the top–bottom position was not assumed, nor is it even that Arnaud,
acting out his aggressive, controlling tendencies, seemed to be lying in
insisting on this fact—since he did assume that position on several oc-
casions, for instance, in his first encounter with Guillaume Ros. What
is striking is that there was so much slippage into experimentation with
subject/ed positions and their ensuing powerful sexual tensions. A
telling anecdote occurs when Arnaud, deviating from his usual diet of
book- and job-starved students, encounters an eighteen-year-old cob-
bler’s apprentice. In this case, the young man was the initiator of the
interaction, and, in a manner consonant with the noneffeminate posi-
tion, attempted to lure Arnaud with the offer of women. He sponta-
necessarily offered to show Arnaud how to satisfy his lust when no women
were available, grabbed him, and placed him under his own body. Arnaud
responded that he knew this method well, and placed the cobbler under
himself. But, he added, neither went any further in this position and they
resorted to the usual side-by-side position *inter femora*. The whole episode
reveals how deeply the top–bottom, subjected position was charged with
erotic promise, and how much it told of pleasure too deep—and too dan-
gerous—to engage in.

Peter Damian’s eleventh-century treatise against clerical homosex-
ual practices, *The Book of Gomorrah*, had already attempted to clear up
some of the ambiguities of doctrine exploited by clerics such as Arnaud.
According to Damian, those who sin against nature included those who
sin with themselves, those who commit mutual masturbation, those
who commit femoral fornication, and finally, those who commit the
complete act against nature (i.e., anal sex). Thus, femoral fornication was
included in actionable offenses by clerical moral legislators. The Irish
Synod of the Grove of Victory (ca. 550), often quoted in penitential liter-
ature, gave four years of penance to “[w]hoever commits the male crime
as the Sodomites,” but three years of penance to those committing
femoral acts, and two years to those engaging in acts by the hand of an-
other or his own.” A major aspect of Arnaud’s deviance was his custom
of performing such acts and then assuaging the conscience of his more
timid partners by promising access to easy and sympathetic confession
and penance. Here, again, Damian had railed against such practices: “I do
not accept that this hidden thing should go on, namely, that certain ones who are filled with the poison of this crime, as if taking heart, should confess to one another to keep the knowledge of their guilt from becoming known to others.” More specific yet is Damian’s attack on those purported canons which diminish the fault of those who fornicate with boys or men rather than women, canons which he labels as false and completely apocryphal. One of the targeted texts seems to be Burchard’s Decretum, which had been read as suggesting leniency in that direction and which was most likely the text Arnaud referred to as the “Decretals.”

Thus, with anal penetration excluded from the discussion, the homosexual practices in this early fourteenth-century case perform complex and overlapping agendas of desire, fear, and shame: they underscore how to play and experiment with the subjected position, and to retreat from it to the compromise side-by-side one, albeit with movements defined by all involved “as if one had to do with a woman” (“ac si haberet rem cum muliere”). This rem is hard to translate adequately in English, but is fully understandable in Romance languages as the euphemistic chose/cosa, the “sexual thing,” the sexual act, that “thing,” which, when performed with women, was in itself fraught with unsuspected dangers. For the medical profession, intent on curbing the population’s libido, a carefully articulated dogma of how bad the “normal” sexual spatial economy was for the health of males countered the male’s position of agency and power. Sex, the doctors remonstrated, even in the heteronormative position, meant putting one’s head upside down, inverting the sacred order of body and space, and flooding the precious brain. It was particularly hazardous at certain times of the year (the Dog Days or Canicula) when dry heat was incandescent and ready to flare up in women, robbing men of what humidity they had left. Arnaud and his community seemed little inclined to heed such injunctions concerning the perils of Canicula (many passages in the depositions involve undressing because of the heat, which leads to sex). But in a mixed context such as Arnaud’s, within both a communal lay culture and a scholastic/clerical one, multiple questions might arise as to what the female position meant—not least of all, for disempowered Grazide herself, quick to point out that Clergue’s rough handling of her in the barn was not a rape. Thus, even while the social conditions of women underscored their subjected position, and their bodily otherness remained a figure of abjection, the realm of sex, though controlled and patrolled by dour theologians, remained traversed by contradictions, a place where men
also were fragile and needed to be carefully guarded against the perils of penetration, or even its mere suggestion.

Arnaud was the product of a time when an ideological and legal war was being waged against heresy, and, as a member of a community that had embraced heresy, he paid dearly for it. He was a southwesterner, an Ariègeois, a Fuxère, the son of a land abraded by decades of fighting—with weapons, with competing articles of faith, and in the courts—against a northern rule, alien on both the religious and the feudal planes, upheld by the Toulouse Inquisition, legitimated by papal authority. Arnaud was all these things and, at once, a man who loved men, the nudity of their bodies, kissing their faces, their emissions between his legs, their compliant resilience to his own body, and, not least, their company. Labeled sodomites by a court system that had worked the restrictions of vocabulary into an intricate punitive system based on discursive exclusions, Arnaud and his consorts were good candidates to become subjects who could not speak, or not speak and be heard. Indeed, Arnaud tried to speak, and tried to deny the primacy of sin in defining the sexual sensibilities of an individual, while coexisting with the awareness that some acts—other acts—were simply wrong. He had no name available to him other than the one ascribed by canons and penitentials, whose meaning he tossed up for dissection, in disbelief, but also in despairing acknowledgment that, since the naming process had been initiated by others, he had to acquiesce on behalf of something that had been with him, he confessed, since he was ten to twelve years old, something that called for a recognizable and negotiated place in his life, even in the face of torture, reclusion, and death, and even if it meant living that sexual something in the subjected female position.

We may never know if or how much these depositions were truthful, whether Arnaud really desisted from the “sodomia perfecta” (inseparable in this discourse from the forbidden position), whether he simply amended his version for the inquisitors, or whether, for that matter, his inquisitors really believed him. Yet, even in its resurfacings, in its traces of a dissident sexual/social practice, Arnaud’s story is a page torn out of the book of erased memory that bodies given over to same-sex love continue to write, from that portion of history, as Joan Nestle has said, which is most violently denied.

The body thus carries its own brazen message that wills affirmation and transgression, but is at once the focus of society’s scrutiny and regulation, as well as of its anger and destructive force. Reinscribing the
desiring, transgressive body into a medieval history of sexual dissidence and dissonance, in which gender instabilities are given their full play, allows us a deeper, richer understanding of cultural history. The essays by Hutcheson, Sponsler, and McCracken admirably perform that task, focusing on the ways (queer) bodies, read through the complex interweavings of outright fiction (romance) and fictionalized texts (historical chronicles), manage to reinsert themselves, even if as a mere wedge, into the dominant record of the distant past. In different ways, all three address the uneasy questions posed by the distance/displacement of women in queer embodiments that play against—and with—the experience of subjected sexual positions (the king’s favorite in the Spanish court, King Edward, the chaste males of Arthurian tradition) that the binary logic of the day would brand as female. But by focusing on how bodies—in their fully “fleshed-out” articulations as sites of social conflict—become themselves the center of discursive practices set up to exclude them, these essays deftly avoid the pitfalls of hermeneutic practices that, embracing the subject as wholly unstable and seeing women as mere ciphers in discourse, would elide the female subject completely and deny historical women agency.46 Recentering these queer sensibilities, and the very queerness of history in the notable case of Arnaud de Verniolle, further allows us to reflect on the female subjected position in relation to the category of the feminine in an apparently all-male world. Read against and across each other, and generating a heat at once erotic and discursive, all these textual matrices put the gender order to the torch and leave it, indeed, burning.

Notes


8. Ibid., 123.


11. *Baudouin de Sebourg*, 2 vols., ed. Louis-Napoléon Boca (Valenciennes: B. Henry, 1848), 1:viii. This is still the only edition in print; a new edition by Larry S. Crist has been in the making for many years and has been announced for imminent publication.


13. Ibid., 2:xxii. The homoerotics of such combat has been pointed out by E. Jane Burns (*Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993]), and has since been explored by others.


16. Ibid., 2:xxv.

17. Ibid., 1:iii, iii, vi.

18. Ibid., 2:xxvii. xix, xxiii. Rose's resistance against the imposter and murderer Gaufron, now her husband, is characterized thus as heresy by the pope's legate: "Bougre estes et Juise, et digne d'embraser / Qui le commant du pape ne volés acorder" ("You are a bugger and Jew, and worthy of the stake / since you will not comply with the pope's command"), vv. 57–58.
19. Ibid., 2:xvi.

20. This is a relationship brought out, for example, in Robert Shephard’s essay on the English court, “Sexual Rumours in English Politics.”


24. Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 15–52; the citation is at 47.


26. Jacques Fournier was born in Saverdan, Ariège; he became master at the abbey of Boulbonne of the Cistercian order, master of theology at the University of Paris, then abbot of Fontfroide, and was raised to the episcopal see of Pamiers on 19 March 1317. Beginning in 1319, his inquisitorial skills were honed in the delicate trial of the Franciscan Bernard Délicieux, in collaboration with the archbishop of Toulouse, as well as in several other arrests and investigations.

27. The first hand, thought to be that of Guillaume Pierre Barthe, principal notary to Jacques Fournier, covers four initial nonnumbered folios as well as folios 1–128d and produces a carefully written text with accurate spelling. The second hand is found only in a corrective formula placed at the end of each trial: “et ego Rainaudus labbaudi clericus de Tholosa, cum originali fideliter correcxi.” The third hand, covering folios 129–134d, is in a more archaic Gothic than the first. Duvernoy, Le Registre d’Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, 8–12.


30. Repeatedly asked by judges why he heard confession if he indeed believed that a nonordained priest did not have the authority to do so and grant absolution, Arnaud finally responded: “quod idcirco ipse volebat audire confessiones diversorum, ut sciret que pec- cata comiserant et qualiter, et si comitebant illa peccata que ipse comitebat, et si illo modo peccabant sicut et ipse” (“on this account, that he himself wanted to hear the confessions of diverse people, so that he might know which sins they had committed and how, and if they committed those sins that he himself committed, and if they sinned in the same way as he himself did”) (46, 232c–d).


40. Ibid., 43.

41. Ibid., 49–56.


44. The initial questions, "Who speaks?" "Who can speak?" were framed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.


46. See in particular the incisive critique of such risks in Elizabeth Pittenger's "Explicit Ink," in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Fradenburg and Freccero, 223–42.
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Part III
This essay does not attempt to be either a chronological study or a social history of eunuchs, although John Boswell wrote in 1991 that such a history was "badly needed." Rather, I come to focus on how eunuchs often appear as a kind of "period piece" at sites of conflict between conventional historiographic periodization (the straight and narrow of "that was then and this is now") and queer temporalities emergent in the interstices of periodization. Histories of sexuality, in spite of a seemingly growing impulse to categorize, have mostly avoided a consideration of eunuchs. Foucault's rhetorical disdain of the eunuch (via Nietzsche) has certainly helped to place eunuchs under the sign of abjection. He uses the eunuch as a trope to mark the "traditional historian" in his famous essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." He also imagines the eunuch when he discusses the bourgeoisie and the periodization of a history of sexuality. The eunuch thus uneasily marks the fantasy of clean cuts in historical practice and periodization for Foucault. It is as if the eunuch is a kind of fetish image for Foucault, the last image of traditional history that genealogy sees before its methodological cut. In fetishizing the eunuch, Foucault forecloses a study of interstices, the gaps between the testicle and the penis, the gaps between that was then, this was now.

This essay seeks to open up a gap in the fetish of periodization. It does so by revisiting Freud's essay on fetishism and using the Freudian
gaps of that essay as a way of reading Amitav Ghosh's influential historico-ethnographic study *In an Antique Land*, which has been taken, for instance, by James Clifford in the opening of his book *Routes* as the exemplification of the transcultural predicaments of the late twentieth century, in particular, as they bear on the struggles and arts of cultural encounter. The essay concludes by imagining queer alternatives to the fetishized corporeal organization of archivist, fieldworker, and medieval historian who are forced into the straight and narrow by the rigid routinization of "that was then, this is now."

**The Fetish of Periodization**

In 1927, Freud published his famous essay on fetishism. It opens with a Freudian slip, an important loophole into the construction of historical Jewish difference. I want to show first how Freud's slip does the important work of translating the fetish from psychology to politics. Then I want to persuade you that Freud's Freudian slip made more than a half century ago opens an important loophole into another world, the Mediterranean trading diaspora of the twelfth century. At stake in my return to Freud's fetishism is an effort to understand the belated workings of historical trauma in medieval studies today. It is in such belatedness that medievalists can construct a much-needed ethical relation to the political project of rethinking the humanities.

Freud opens his essay on fetishism with an exercise in translation. He begins by discussing the renowned fetish of his famous analysand the Wolf Man, who had a particular concern with a "shine on the nose": in Freud's words "he exalted a certain sort of 'shine on the nose' into a fetishistic precondition." In German the Wolf Man describes his fetish as "Glanz auf der Nase." Because Freud knew that the Wolf Man's childhood nurse was an English nanny and that English was spoken in the nursery, he translates the German homonymically into the childhood English. The German "Glanz auf der Nase" thus becomes the English "glance at the nose." Freud breaks off this story here and does not return to it in the essay.

This break warrants a pause. The obvious nearly homonymic medical term, *glans*, the anatomical name for the head of the penis or the clitoris, is overlooked, goes untranslated, by Freud, the medical man. This untranslated *glans* marks, I argue, the site of Freud's own trauma in his
essay on fetishism. The opening anecdote thus works rhetorically precisely in the way that Freud imagined the fetish operating: encoded (in his words) as the “last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one” (201), the fetish (in this case, the anecdote with its crucial untranslated term) covers over, dissimulates, the corporeal trauma of the glans.

Let us agree for a moment to take the word Glanz—gesturing toward but never arriving at the site of trauma (the homonymic glans)—as a “fetish” for Freud. It is a “word-thing,” meaning that it works analogously to such stereotypical fetishes as the high heel or the cashmere sweater. The question of such a reading then becomes: what to make of the foreskin as it marks the “last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one” (201)? How does glans signal a historical trauma for Freud? A persuasive answer can be found in Sander Gilman’s brilliant study of the racialization of Jews in nineteenth-century medical and eugenics literature. In his book Freud, Race, and Gender, Gilman has shown how Aryan racial discourse of the later nineteenth century regarded Jews as a degenerate mixed race, so much so that Jews were even thought to be Negroes, a categorization of utter abjection. Sexology also marked circumcision as feminizing; indeed, Gilman notes that Viennese slang called the clitoris a “Jew” and female masturbation was called “play[ing] with the Jew.” This racialized epistemology mapped onto gender thus fetishistically produced the male Jew as an abject nonsubject. The male Jew and the black clitoris were thus closely intertwined.

Freud knew this literature and he wrote his essay on fetishism as the negative of eugenics discourse. The unspeakable discursive limit of the circumcised foreskin is the clitoral glans. Thus, for Freud, the last discursive impression before the “uncanny traumatic one” of the clitoral glans is the foreskin. The glans, dissimulated by Freud as Glanz/glance, appears just before the recognition of the hegemonic violence of racialized and sexualized discourse regarding Jews, which circulated in Freud’s Vienna. Put another way, Freud’s circumcised foreskin belatedly returns as an institutional trauma, one that has to do with anti-Semitic discursive formations in medicine and eugenics. For Freud, a circumcised Jewish scientist who was deeply concerned precisely to institutionalize psychoanalysis as a science, and therefore needed to do so in the dominant phantasmatic form of the “intact” Christian bourgeois male body, the characteristically Jewish/racialized/feminized glans, the circumcised foreskin, could only be spoken of through untranslatability.

So far I have traced an intersection between Freud’s circumcised
foreskin and the trauma of institutionalized, "scientific" anti-Semitism. I would now like to consider how this intersection bears on the question of queering the Middle Ages and historicizing modernity. I want to argue that, just as institutional trauma precluded Freud from translating across and between his own historical embodiment and his scientific work, so does institutional trauma in medieval studies preclude rethinking the interstices of conventional periodization. It is at such interstices that sexualities emerge in their particularities. Just as Freud's essay on the fetish fetishistically marks the spacing in which glans and foreskin were sutured in racialist discourse, so too has historical study of the fetish worked both to periodize and to institutionalize a particular vision of the Middle Ages. These studies of the fetish fetishize periodization; they reinforce Western epistemological categories of the classical, medieval, and modern.

Two important discussions of the fetish by Anne McClintock and William Pietz can serve to illustrate my point. In their view, the *feitíco* of the Middle Ages is simply not the same object as the true fetish, which emerges in the early modern period.\(^{10}\) Pietz thinks of the fetish as "an idea and a problem, as a novel object not proper to any prior discrete society, originated in the cross-cultural spaces on the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth century" (I:5). He expends much energy separating the medieval notion of "fetish"—which, according to him, first appears in Iberian law in 1176 in a municipal code for Tervel in Aragon, where a section on the crimes of women (*De muliere facticiosa*) legislates against those making magical objects (II:33)—from the usage of fetish by Portuguese traders among the West African tribes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pietz carefully delineates the incommensurability of the medieval and the early modern fetish as one of economic epistemology: "The notion of the *feitíco*, as conceived within [medieval] church doctrine on witchcraft, did not raise the essential problem of the fetish: the problem of the social and personal value of material objects" (II:35). Thus there is a medieval prehistory to the fetish that Pietz must exclude from his economic epistemology. Pietz uses the fetish, his "novel object," to sort out historical time (periodization) and cultural space (Europe and Africa). Uncannily, Pietz never mentions in this second section of his three-part essay that the incommensurabilities of Portuguese/West African trade involved from the start the exchange of people as objects and trinkets as things: African slaves and Portuguese trinkets. His narrow economist definition of the fetish as a
material object enables him to ward off the traumatic economics of slavery. His fetish can be read as the last impression before the enslaved African body.

McClintock thinks about the fetish more capacious than Pietz. According to her, the fetish "stands at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory" (184). By opening up the fetish to a psychoanalytic register, McClintock acknowledges that the fetish can occupy several positions—magical, material, and sexual—simultaneously. Yet, surprisingly, the complexity she allows the fetish has no effect on the way she uses periodization. She begins her genealogy of imperialism conventionally with Columbus in 1492 (21) and illustrates her point with that well-known and ubiquitously reproduced engraving of Vespucci encountering America embodied as a naked female "native." Why rethink the fetish from the fetishized event of 1492?

The periodization of Imperial Leather, with its implicit "pre" of the Middle Ages, paradoxically repeats the imperial time inherent in the anthropological discourse on the fetish circulating in the nineteenth century. Take, for example, the key texts of Edward Tylor’s Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom (1871) and F. Max Müller’s Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (1878). For Tylor, fetishism served as the sign of the originary "primitive," the racialized, the West African, the "pre-"; for Müller, fetishisms were the sign of a "post-," that which comes after the Aryan, the Aryan being in Müller’s model the very condition of possibility for a past, a past racialized in the form of white religious supremacy. Black and white, pre- and post-, the fetishes of periodization and the periodizations of the fetish do read fetishistically: "I know it, but even so"—I know the problem of imperial time, but even so I want its periodizations. The Middle Ages as conventionally periodized works as the "the last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one."

In what follows, I want to suggest the importance of defetishizing medieval periodization and rethinking the fetish queerly. In order to do so, I want to think of the spacing of the fetish, that is, the space in between the "last impression" and the "uncanny, traumatic" impression. As a way of thinking of that spacing I shall engage in a reading of the verbal fetishes in Amitav Ghosh’s ethnography and medieval archival study In an Antique Land. His book points medievalists back to the catastrophe of the slave trade of the Mediterranean trading diaspora (before
the Black Atlantic), and also forward to the trauma of Ghosh's own materialization as an archivist and ethnographer.

*In an Antique Land* writes the Mediterranean trading diaspora of the ninth to twelfth centuries as a medieval golden age. For Ghosh, this Mediterranean world is the site of history with a small "h," that is, "indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian, Egyptian, Hindu and Muslim" (33). By the fifteenth century, Europeans, according to Ghosh, would bring to this diaspora history with a capital "H," a metahistory of violence and force that permanently shattered this medieval utopia. He painstakingly constructs his golden age out of documentary fragments from the Cairo Geniza archive. The Hebrew word *geniza* means storage, hiding, or burial place, and it has become familiar to medievalists as the name given to the cache of several thousand documents, mostly composed in medieval Arabic and written in the Hebrew alphabet, that accumulated for centuries in a silo-like room, called the *geniza*, in the important synagogue located in Fustat, Cairo. Ghosh pieces together the history of a medieval Hindu slave—discovered in MS H.6 of the Cairo Geniza—who served a Jewish merchant on the Malibar coast in the trading diaspora of the twelfth century. He intertwines the archival story of the slave with an ethnography of his fieldwork in peasant villages in Egypt in the 1980s. Thus two narratives, one archival, one ethnographic, run on parallel tracks in *In an Antique Land*. As in recent histories of the fetish, Ghosh treats as impassable his division between medieval history with a small "h" and modern history with a capital "H." I plan to transgress the binary of his periodization through my reading of the body parts, namely, foreskin, clitoris, and testicles, that litter his text. Ghosh's desire for a plenitudinous medieval golden age gets written back on him, we shall see, as severed genitalia. As in my reading of Freud's essay on fetishism, I am curious to mark which translations Ghosh avoids in a work that is all about translation. His refusals to translate become for me the clues to sites of historiographic trauma that remain unthought, these sites that can help us to understand the institutional dispossession that are too traumatic for Ghosh to avow.

**Words Are the Thing**

From the outset words are trouble in *In an Antique Land*; they are not what they seem. At crucial moments of ethnographic encounter, Ghosh
cannot find the words for things. The very first word to fail Ghosh in his ethnography is the word for "sex." Soon after his arrival in the Egyptian village of Lataifa, he describes himself in the fascinated act of watching a pair of ducks mating. He writes: "I had no conception that ducks had penises and vaginas" (60). A young villager, named Jabir, has been watching Ghosh’s fascination with the mating scene and proceeds to ask Ghosh: "What do you know on the subject of . . ." (61). Ghosh does not recognize Jabir’s colloquial word for “sex” and has to look it up afterwards in the dictionary. His ignorance is the cause of adolescent hilarity to Jabir, who quickly turns the conversation to the question of circumcision. For the first time Ghosh reveals to a villager that he is not circumcised. Where there had been a failure of translation around sex, Ghosh now suddenly supplies an abundance of knowledge, an etymology for the word circumcision: “In Arabic the word ‘circumcise’ derives from the root that means ‘to purify’: to say of someone that they are ‘uncircumcised’ is more or less to call them impure” (62).

Foreskins hover around the ethnography and return again in its second section where Ghosh describes the most probing discussion of circumcision to occur between him and the villagers. Here is the exchange:

“So what about circumcision?” a voice demanded, and was followed immediately by another, even louder one, which wanted to know whether women in my country were “purified” as they were in Egypt. The word to “purify” makes a verbal equation between male circumcision and clitoridectomy, being the same in both cases, but the latter is an infinitely more dangerous operation, since it requires the complete excision of the clitoris. (203)

So insistent are the villagers that an anguished Ghosh abruptly leaves the conversation. How can he reconcile his corporeal “wholeness” (his intact foreskin that seemingly guarantees immunity from castration) with its “impurity” (the foreskin being the analogue to the clitoris among the villagers)? By virtue of his intact foreskin, Ghosh becomes paradoxically a dirty woman, an uncircumcised woman with a clitoris, a castrated, but not castrated enough, figure. Ghosh is faced with the fantastic dilemma of having it (the white phallus) and being it (the clitoris). Rather than explore the queer possibilities of rethinking the embodiment of the ethnographer, rather than explore crisscrossings of identification and desire inherent in his dilemma, rather than explore the gap
in between the foreskin and the clitoris, Ghosh instead disavows the paradoxes of his fieldwork through his use of history. He anxiously insists on the temporal binary of history with a small “h” (his golden age) and a capital “H” (the violence of Europe) as operating fetishistically to keep these lines of desire/identification on the straight and narrow. In so doing, as I shall now show, he misses the violence within his golden history with a small “h.”

THE SCENE OF THE ACCIDENT

There is another body part, the testicle, that produces gaps in Ghosh’s efforts to keep temporality and corporeality on the straight and narrow in In an Antique Land. I take up his ethnography again as Ghosh travels to the Malibar coast to conduct the philological research necessary to decipher the paleography of the slave’s name that appears in MS H.6: “For me a great deal depended on this meeting, for my unraveling of the slave’s history had been blocked by an intractable etymological puzzle, the mystery of his name” (246). At his moment of archival naming, the slave of MS H.6, according to Ghosh, becomes a historical subject: “It was thus that Bomma [the name of the slave] finally came of age and was ready at last to become a protagonist of his own story” (254).

The agency of the slave as a historical subject could be constrained, however, by his condition of enslavement. In the tension between agency and subjection lies the trauma of Ghosh’s own materialization as ethnographer and archivist. At this juncture in his story, Ghosh addresses the issue of slavery in the Geniza golden age. He compares medieval slavery to the yardstick of early modern plantation systems. Suggesting that, by comparison, medieval slavery “lacks” the modern notion of servitude and freedom, Ghosh prohibits a reading of the Enlightenment master–slave relationship back onto the Geniza trade diaspora. He claims that slavery in the lifetime of Ben Yiju, the master, and Bomma, the slave, could frequently serve as a career opening to the highest level of government and a fictive way of creating kinship. Sufi poetry written during the twelfth century imagines slavery as the “practical embodiment of perfect freedom” (261). Thus, for Ghosh, slavery during the golden age did not demean, but produced links “that were in some small way ennobling—human connections, pledges of commitment, in
relationships that could just as well have been a matter of mere exchange of coinage" (263).

Uneasiness about the nature of slavery during this golden age vexes not only Ghosh but also an exemplary early revisionist work on the Geniza golden age written by Shlomo Goitein.13 Goitein's study Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages also stumbles on the question of medieval slavery. Goitein, a Zionist who left Germany in 1923 for Palestine, wrote Jews and Arabs for an American audience, during the period of the formation of the Israeli state after World War II. Goitein wished to trace a history of tolerant contact between Jews and Arabs that could serve as a model for future relations in the Middle East. He rejects essentialist, racist explanations for a Semitic affinity between Jews and Arabs and instead bases their commonality on their shared history of "primitive democracy" (27).

This common democratic bond might, of course, provide a past for mapping the future of the "modern" state in the Middle East, but the historical presence of slavery jars the multicultural benignity of Goitein's wished-for golden age. To prevent such trouble from disrupting the proleptic Enlightenment past constructed in this golden age by both Goitein and Ghosh, slavery has to become a family affair:

Now, slavery in the ancient East is a very complicated subject. But, when we confine ourselves to the status of slaves in Israel and in Arabia, a comparatively consistent and univocal institution emerges. There, slaves were not the wretched, sweating beasts of the American plantations, or the Roman latifundia, or the potteries of Athens; they were members of the household with more independent status at times than sons or younger brothers. (Goitein 28)

Slavery is thus a family affair and a masculine matter. Both Ghosh and Goitein elide slavery with male, domestic slavery. The desire for a golden age traps them into dismissing the pervasive evidence for a large-scale, not so easily domesticated, institutionalized slavery in the military-bureaucratic sectors of the Geniza world, and they write off a large number of slaves as constituting a "barbarian slave corps" (Goitein 104), neither Arab nor Jewish, that therefore does not count in discussions of the golden age. The essentialist, racist lines that Goitein eschews when
he wishes to draw affinities between Jews and Arabs become the very grounds for excluding barbarian slaves.

Many histories of medieval world economies likewise are silent about slavery in this golden age. Janet Abu-Lughod, in her study Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350, simply does not acknowledge the scale of economic exchange during the ninth through twelfth centuries and the importance of the slave trade to that exchange. Likewise, Philip Curtin, in his otherwise comprehensive Cross-Cultural Trade in World History, is silent about the kind of commerce that fueled the acknowledged dominance of Mediterranean culture during this golden age, treating Islam as "civilization" and transmitter of "culture," but not as involved in economic exchange:

In the broadest perspective of Afro-Eurasian history, in the period from 750 A.D. to at least 1500, Islam was the central civilization for the whole of the Old World. Not only was it the most dynamic and creative of Rome's and Persia's successors; it was also the principal agency for contact between the discrete cultures of this period, serving as the carrier that transmitted innovations from one society to another.

Revisionist archaeology too is silent about the slave trade. Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, in their reinterpretation of the Pirenne thesis, acknowledge a dynamic Mediterranean world economy at the moment Pirenne would argue for its blockade and collapse, but, nevertheless, these archaeologists never discuss the specificity of the exchange that their compelling numismatic evidence and their knowledge of the lavish scale of Abbasid urban development in the Fertile Crescent and Indian Ocean materialize.

This strange silence and uneasiness about slavery in the Mediterranean golden age of the ninth through twelfth centuries is troubling. Few revisionist histories seem eager to explore the claim by Maurice Lombard that long-distance slave exchange was the very edifice that sustained the golden age: "slave-traffic was, then, of the utmost commercial importance." To exemplify Lombard's thesis on the centrality of slave exchange, let me turn to the schematic maps he uses to illustrate the medieval pan-European-Mediterranean-Indian slave trade. I wish to focus especially on the symbol of the little scissors that occurs on these
maps. Those places marked by the scissors—in Córdoba, Nubia, Ethiopia, Armenia, Turkestan, Eastern Europe, Verdun—served as castration centers for the slave trade in adult males during the “golden age.”

Here I wish to join the symbol of the scissors and the name of the Hindu slave Bomma produced by Ghosh’s archival research. The word that cannot be said in the cryptonomy of Ghosh’s book, the translation that cannot be made, is not the painstakingly reconstructed name, “Bomma,” but rather the word slave, a word with a traveling history. The very name of slavery has a material, embodied genealogy in the long-distance exchange conducted by and across “pagan,” Christian, Islamic, and Jewish trading partners during the golden age. Just as Freud could not say glans, Ghosh cannot say slave. The Arabic word for slave—saqlabi (singular) or saqaliba (plural)—continues in a new status designation the once ethnic designator Slav. During the golden age saqaliba referred to those slaves originating in the Bilad as-Saqaliba, or slave country. Saqlabi also serves as a synonym in Arabic for the word eunuch.20 As early as the ninth century, reference is found to Slavic eunuchs serving as interpreters for Viking merchants in Baghdad. Adult males exchanged from Slavic regions into al-Andalus and the eastern Mediterranean were commonly castrated at ports of entry—hence, the scissors that mark these sites on Lombard’s maps. The slippage from ethnic designator to status designator is a border phenomenon occurring over the ninth to tenth centuries in the border zones of the peoples of the book, ranging from the Balkans to al-Andalus.

Not all male slaves were castrated, but the slide between saqlabi/slave and saqlabi/eunuch marks a traveling sexual trauma. This slippage brings the cryptonomy of Ghosh’s book to a sexual turn. When he writes about the Sufi tradition that drew upon slavery as a spiritual metaphor, Ghosh tells an exemplary story of the Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, who built an empire in central Asia. At a crucial moment of conquest, so the story goes, when the sultan seemed abandoned by his troops, his slave, Ayaz, stepped into his shadow. Among Sufis this perfect act of love works a miraculous spiritual transformation and the world-conquering Mahmud becomes “the slave of his slave” (262). Other versions of this story celebrate Ayaz as a “catamite.”21 In Ghosh’s retelling, he elides the homoerotic content of the famous story. Not only is the violence of slave trade occluded, its homoeroticism is spiritualized. Goitein, too, is uneasy about homoeroticism. In his Jews and Arabs, he remarks that one of
the traditions that creates a "deep gulf" (15) between Jews and Arabs is the Arab regard for friendship, "and more than friendship," between members of the male sex as the "acme of civilization" (ibid.). Goitein thinks that this tradition contributes to a "nervous, unbalanced state of mind in the urban population of the Arab East" (ibid.).

The so-called bourgeois revolution bonding the Geniza merchant society at its cosmopolitan center relies, I argue, on dismemberment at the borders (castration was forbidden under Islamic law). Dismemberment involves not only the removal of the testicles of adolescent and adult males, but the excision of women from their communities to join "fictive families" in Córdoba, Cairo, Aden, and Mangalore. If slavery proved banal at the center—domestic and bureaucratic, a matter of family and statecraft—it was because the violence that fueled the lucrative exchange lay faraway at the borders. Slaves were already DOA, "dismembered on arrival."

The slave of MS H.6 reminds us that the history of this world economy and slave system remains to be written. What the peoples of the book accomplished with castration, the Enlightenment would achieve with the "universal" law of property rights—which extended to slaves as objects. The breaks that Ghosh and Goitein would mark between medieval slavery and the plantation systems of the early-modern period and the Enlightenment are, I think, a misrecognition based on, and maintaining, a deeply abiding Western periodization that chooses not to look at the shifting border histories of the ninth to the twelfth centuries from Europe to the Indian Ocean.

**Fundamental Trauma**

My practice of sounding out the words of trauma in Ghosh's book aims contestably at the production of a different kind of history. I have shown how this medievalism of a golden age works belatedly. The medievalisms of *In an Antique Land* are not, however, restricted to the belated. They work proleptically as well when they stand in for a critique of contemporary fundamentalisms at the same time that they deny histories to these fundamentalisms.

To tell this story of proleptic medievalism, let us travel with Ghosh when, in the summer of 1990 on his way to track down the name of Bomma, he paid a visit to a fishing village located on the sandspit di-
rectly across the lagoon from Mangalore's old port. The fishing caste of
the village, the Magavira, played an important historical role in Geniza
Indian Ocean trade. Ghosh notices that this prosperous village has
drifted away from its Tulanid tradition of Bhuta worship, in which the
name "Bomma" was given to a leading god of the pantheon. Instead, the
village has embraced Hinduism and built a modern temple, on which
are plastered the posters of an anti-Muslim, fundamentalist Hindu po-
litical organization. Ghosh conjectures that the village is in the process
of appropriating Hinduism, especially its fundamentalist modalities, to
build for itself a new future.

Yet, Ghosh's condemnation of contemporary fundamentalisms in
In an Antique Land cannot be separated from his affective project of pro-
ducing a medieval golden age. To support this assertion, it is necessary
to situate Ghosh as subject to and included in a tradition of Indian historiography. The desire to use the Middle Ages as an origin might be expected to have less affective resonance in the construction of postcolonial nationalisms in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East than it does in Europe. Not so. In a collection of brilliant essays on Indian historiography, Partha Chatterjee has shown how Indian history writing in the nineteenth century reproduced the dominant Western model of periodization—classical, medieval, renaissance. Chatterjee alerts medievalists to the remapping of medievalisms beyond conventional European borders:

For Indian nationalists in the late nineteenth century, the pattern
of glory, medieval decline, and modern renaissance appeared as
one that was not only proclaimed by the modern historiography
of Europe but also approved for India by at least some sections
of European scholarship. What was needed was to claim for the
Indian nation the historical agency for completing the project
of modernity. To make that claim, ancient India had to become
the classical source of Indian modernity, while "the Muslim pe-
riod," would become the night of medieval darkness. (102)

To produce the period of a medieval "dark ages" in conformity with
European periodizations, Indian historiography constructed Muslim
rule in India as the Dark Age, so that Islam became the excluded term
of Indian historiography. Chatterjee draws important links between
this historiographic tradition and the politics of contemporary funda-
mentalisms:
What, we may ask, is the place of those inhabitants of India who are excluded from this nation? There are several answers suggested in this historiography. One, which assumes the centrality of the modern state in the life of the nation is frankly majoritarian. The majority "community" is Hindu; the others are minorities. State policy must therefore reflect this preponderance, and the minorities must accept the leadership and protection of the majority. This view, which today is being propagated with such vehemence in postcolonial India by Hindu-extremist politics, actually originated more than a hundred years ago, at the same time Indian nationalism was born.

The fundamentalisms, Islamic and Hindu, that Ghosh bemoans are not an aberration of the late twentieth century, but rather the effect of an "entirely modern, rationalist and historicist idea" (Chatterjee 110) emplotted into Indian historiography a century ago. By denying a specific history to Hindu fundamentalism, or what Ghosh would term history with a small "h," he contributes, via his construction of a golden age, to an abiding neo-imperialist project that would classicize the Islamic tradition that had been excluded from Indian historiography. By classicizing this excluded Islam through a model of freedom and tolerance, the characteristics of the medieval Geniza world, Ghosh makes Islam assimilable into contemporary historiography in such a way that no one has to account for its exclusion to a "dark ages" in the first place.

**Queer Dispossession**

So far I have attempted to open up some gaps in the fetishization of periodization. In the moment in between "the last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one" queer histories emerge. These queer histories have told us about the intertwining of the male Jew and the black clitoris in Freud's Vienna, about the excising of body parts of the medieval Mediterranean slave trade, and about emplotting Muslim rule in India as a Dark Age. The question remains how these queer histories help us to historicize postmodernities, that is, the fetishized corporeal organizations of archivist, fieldworker, medieval historian, analyst. How can we imagine queer alternatives to the straight and narrow of authoritative embodiments that we have fabricated for intellectual workers?
My reimaginings follow several byways, one being Teresa de Lauretis’s rereading of castration and the fetish.26 De Lauretis reconsiders the temporal gap of the Freudian fetish, that moment “between the last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one.” She exposes how that gap has been imaged temporally through the heterosexual normativity of Freud’s account of desire. Freud tells the time of the fetish in terms of the developmental model of the Oedipal stage. The fetish marks for Freud the “before” of Oedipal development. The fetishist remains in the before of the story. Freud’s fetish is thus intrinsically linked with the narrative fetish of temporal origin—“before” and “after.” Scholars have repeated this narrative fetish in their efforts to historicize the fetish, whether it is material (Pietz) or psychoanalytical (McClintock).

In a brilliant move, de Lauretis reads the temporal gap of the fetish instead through Freud’s negative theory, through perversion. Perversion opens up temporalities not organized by “before” and “after.” She proposes that we rethink the fetish not as Freud would have it, as detachment from the penile representation of the phallus, but rather as detachment from the phallus itself. The phallus then is no longer the only measure of loss and the only moment of its timing. De Lauretis thus opens up possibilities for considering other kinds of losses that set in motion other kinds of desires.

Her specific discussion of lesbian desire argues for the loss of the female body as original loss (231). She does not, however, essentialize the female body in ways that conventional castration theory has essentialized the phallus as the penis. She insists that the loss of the female body is the loss of an “entirely fantasmatic object” (ibid.) of which there is no perceptual memory. The loss is a sign that marks itself on the body as a fetishistic trace. At this step in her argument de Lauretis raises crucial issues relevant to our project of queering temporality. Her perverse reading of the fetish in lesbian sexuality refuses the notion of an originary moment when an object was lost. She rethinks the temporality of the fetish as temporality set in motion in the contact of fetishes, in the encounter of traces, where there are two in contiguity, creating new surfaces, new temporalities. Thus temporality is relational in the desire of desire. To phrase this in another way, de Lauretis disrupts fetishistic theories of temporality in which temporality has a founding object in the “before” and “after.”

The difference between Freud’s fetish and de Lauretis’s perverse fetish can be shown if we return to Ghosh’s ethnography. As I suggested
earlier, Ghosh is not castrated enough in In an Antique Land. He re-
mains attached to the privileged object of the phallus and he thus misses
a queer history for his slave Bomma. Toni Morrison in Beloved has writ-
ten such a queer history of slavery. Readers of Ghosh can learn from it.27
The body parts of female slaves are the fetish for the white master; they
serve as the “last impression” before the traumatic vision to which he
must be blind, the effacement of sentience intrinsic to chattel slavery.
The fetish here is the “before” and “after” of property law. Morrison
traces how these body parts that are a fetish to white masters are expe-
rienced queerly by slaves. For example, take this monologue of Baby
Suggs, who relates the traces of such institutionalized, corporeal dis-
possession as she rides to her purchased freedom with her owner Mr.
Garner: “But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as
simple as it was dazzling. ‘These hands belong to me. These my hands.’
Then she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else
new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along?” (141).

The contiguity of dispossessed body parts of female slaves sets the
spectral temporality of Beloved in motion in a brilliant emplotment of
the perverse theory of temporality proposed by de Lauretis. Beloved is a
ghost whose only possession seems to be her own spectral haunting.
She sets her scar, her severed throat, phantasmatically against the body
of her mother. Sethe her mother theorizes this perverse temporality: “I
was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things
go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think that it was my re-
memory. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s
not” (35–36). Sethe refuses here the “before” and “after” temporality of
the white man’s fetish.

To queer Freud’s essay on the fetish is to retranslate the corporeal
materialization of the observer, be it Freud, Ghosh, the reader, or the
writer of this essay. The gap of the fetish, that temporal moment in be-
tween the “last impression” and the “trauma,” need not be read as “be-
fore” and “after.” That moment can be experienced instead as new
temporal folds of contiguity in which traces and scars touch. Queer
retemporalizing of historiography can usefully start in such folds. This
is a work, a labor, for medieval studies.
Notes

My thanks to Anston Bosman (comparative literature, Stanford University) for his elegant and enthusiastic collaboration for our presentation “Cutting Up History: Eunuchs as Queer Period Piece,” given at the Stanford Gay and Lesbian Mellon Seminar, 9 March 1999. The generous sabbatical support of the Stanford Humanities Center made our collaboration and this essay possible. We are indebted to the intellectual exuberance of this seminar, chaired by Paul Robinson (history) and facilitated by Chris Bourg (sociology). Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger served as editors to this essay in the most generous and capacious sense of that term. I am indebted to them as friends and colleagues.


11. Ghosh’s failure to recognize the word for sex and his impurity reduce him to the one “who does not know” in the eyes of the young male villagers. In another bout of teasing, the village boys say: “Shouldn’t we tell him? . . . How’s he going to grow up if he doesn’t ‘beat the ten’?” A village boy responds: “It’s no use. He won’t understand—he doesn’t know a thing. Look I’ll show you” (64). The village boys then go on to test Ghosh’s very command of the visible world by asking him to identify the source of a reflection on a field canal. I am grateful to my colleague Patrick Gaffney for help in going over the words darab (to strike, to beat) and assar (to copulate); see Socrates Spiro, *Arabic-English Dictionary of the Colloquial Arabic of Egypt* (London: B. Quaritch, 1895).

12. The slippage of circumcision and clitoridectomy, which is implicit in Ghosh, recalls the arguments made by Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*. See also Kaja Silverman, “Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity,” in her *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 52–121. Her study provides an argument for seeing clitoridectomy as an embodied form of traumatic memory doing the work of binding for the phallic fiction: “The verb ‘to bind’ has a very specific sense in Freud’s writings. It refers not only to the circumscription of a homeostatic body of energy within the limits of the ego, but the processes whereby memories characterized by a high degree of affective and sensory intensity are brought within linguistic control—the process whereby they are anchored to signifiers, and consequently to meaning. The memories in question are totally transformed by this binding operation; indeed, it might be more accurate to say that something else is put in the place of the original, hallucinatory mnemonic traces” (65).

13. S. D. Goitein’s work on the Cairo Geniza archive, as Ghosh suggests, deeply inspired him (Ghosh just missed meeting Goitein before his death in 1985). Goitein is the editor of a five-volume study based on documents from the Cairo Geniza, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–88). I will concentrate here primarily on his earlier work, *Jews and Arabs: Their Con-


17. Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe: Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983). For the scale of exchange, see especially the sections on Baghdad, Samarra, and the major Indian Ocean sites of Siraf, Kilwa, and Zanzibar that flourished during this period (123–57). The traditional argument that medieval slavery was on a “different scale” from the early modern is in need of careful reevaluation.


19. These maps are in *ibid.*, 197, 199, and 202.

20. For the etymology of this word in Arabic and European sources where it appears as a borrowed word by the thirteenth century, see Charles Verlinden, “L'origine de sclavus=esclave,” *Bulletin du Cange* 17 (1943): 7–128; also Charles Verlinden, “Encore sur les origines de sclavus=esclave,” in *L’Esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale*, vol. 2 (Ghent: Rijksuniversiteit te


Shameful Pleasures
Up Close and Dirty with Chaucer, Flesh, and the Word

Glenn Burger

Queer Desire and Canonicity

Throughout their many disciplinary manifestations, Chaucer and Chaucerian fictions have played a preeminent role in defining, grounding, and maintaining "English literature" and the discourses of heterosexuality and modernity that depend on it. As Elaine Tuttle Hansen succinctly puts it: "Chaucer has been known and valued differently in different ages, but he has always been read, talked about, and more often than not singled out for praise as the precursor to be emulated, the forebear to be revered, the Father of English poetry. . . . Present or absent, Chaucer matters." What has been at stake here is the ability of the relationship between great author and reader to function as a faithful medium for proper social reproduction; for in articulating a stable Chaucerian identity, such a hermeneutic also (re)enforces a proper subject position for its readers—whether that is attained by giving up an individual "modern" self in order to understand medieval otherness or by becoming "like" Chaucer the universal man and hence a full liberal subject.

This is a reading history whose effects have been, and remain, punitive and dangerously reductive for queer subjectivities. Perhaps, then, we would be better off without Chaucer altogether, better looking for other forefathers or foremothers, or better focusing on an immediate past that
more clearly can be ours. If we were simply to revolt against such a readerly relationship with a past tradition, however, to indulge in the fantasy that we can purge ourselves of all the effects of canonicity, wouldn't we risk naturalizing a relationship with history as ascetic and renunciative as that demanded by a hegemonic "tradition"? If we were to accept instead the need for historicization in order to resist the normativizing influences of a hegemonic past, how might we go about engaging queer desire with the workings of history and canonicity? Why might contemporary queer readers desire to read Chaucerian fictions at this moment in history and how might they go about creating a space to do so? And how might such a discussion both arise out of, and contribute to, how we historicize and materialize queer desire in the present moment?

Carolyn Dinshaw has begun to explore the ways in which a "queer touch," for example, might disturb the hermeneutics of supersession and the heteronormativity it works to inscribe by bringing out into the open the role such a traditional "Chaucerian" (and hence "literary") hermeneutics has played in naturalizing heterosexuality's long and varied history. Commenting on the Pardoner's queerness, Dinshaw remarks, "It's typical of Chaucer, in some ways a classic liberal humanist (this is why he is so continuously popular, I think), that this queer gets to speak and begins to open a perspective on heteronormativity only to have that norm reinscribed in even greater force—greater, that is, for its continual reinscription." Thus the "force of the queer touch" in the Tales—whether the monstrous abnormality of the Pardoner or the Wife's staging of feminine gender and desire as discursive production—is "carefully controlled and managed . . . and it's only our latter-day bodies that can feel the shock and appropriate that power for queer use." The contemporary queer critic, "looking back at this medieval poem, finds those queer touches that its culture has tried to disavow, opens up their denaturalizing perspective on heterosexual identity and can thus contribute to the mapping of heterosexual identity's long and varied history." Mapping heterosexuality's long and varied history in this way can help us see not only the queer torsions within a premodern past, but also those within present narratives of liberation and resistance. A queer Chaucer may thus be helpful in engaging with, and furthering, the growing desire of postmodern queer subjects to historicize their present locations in the fullest possible way; for traditional categories of "the literary" and "the author," as well as the modernity they inscribe, can haunt
attempts to build a resistant hermeneutics for contemporary gay/lesbian/queer studies as much as for current queer medieval studies. In his introduction to *The Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories*, one of the first attempts to collect and define an emergent “gay literature,” David Leavitt notes:

Unlike our heterosexual counterparts, for whom history, rituals of courtship, models for behavior, and codes of decorum are handed out daily in the classroom, we must seek out, furtively, some sense of our connection to official history, not to mention some sense of our own history, which by definition is discontinuous, a series of stop and starts that begins again each time a young gay man or lesbian sneaks his or her way to the gay section at a bookstore—if indeed there is a gay section; if indeed there is a bookstore.5

Leavitt begins in a familiar place, with the problems that gay and lesbian subjects face in extending their “history” beyond the confines of the personal and contemporary because of their perverse location on the private/public divide. But the effect of Leavitt’s introduction (and indeed the structure of the anthology itself) is to efface any such discontinuity by articulating a liberatory relationship between proper reading and the development of a whole self, able at last fully to inhabit history. He outlines his own reading history as a “coming out” from isolation to integration: beginning with the unsatisfactory representations of gay experience he found in his first forays into the gay section of the bookstore (*The Lord Won’t Mind* and *Dancer from the Dance*), followed by the discovery of gay novels such as *The Family of Max Desir* (“that rarity” among gay literature of the period, “a novel in which a gay man plays an integral role in the unfolding drama of family life”), and leading to the successes of more recent gay literature “that, rather than fawning over angels made flesh, transformed homosexual experience into human drama; a gay literature that was literature first and gay second.”6

Two trajectories emerge in this narrative push to a “new level of liberation . . . that would allow gay men and lesbians to celebrate their identities without having to move into a gulag.”7 The first is backward. Having emptied the gay past by emphasizing its lack of a proper sense of “the literary,” Leavitt can then fill it with “proper history” by inserting a gay
canon always already there but invisible in the subcultural ethos of the gay lit section of his Palo Alto bookstore in the 1970s. And what should have been in that bookstore and available to the young gay subject?

For starters, *The Folded Leaf*, William Maxwell’s seminal tale of love between teenage boys, published in the late forties. J. R. Ackerley’s agonisingly honest autobiography, *My Father and Myself*; Sanford Friedman’s *Totempole*; perhaps some of Forster’s posthumously published gay stories. I knew about none of these books back then. . . . It took years more to dig out the other books I could have read when I was sixteen, instead of *The Lord Won't Mind* and *Dancer from the Dance*. Not that these books prettified or idealized gay experience—we are talking about nothing so simple as “positive role models”; but they told the truth. The men who inhabited them were recognizably human.

The other trajectory of Leavitt’s narrative is forward, with “gay” functioning as the fulfillment of a modernist narrative of progress. Leavitt concludes his introduction with the story of a performance at a benefit to fight attempts by the American right to use the National Endowment for the Arts as a weapon against sexual self-expression. A young man and woman, identifying themselves as “a fag” and “a dyke,” ask everyone who is gay to stand up. A quarter of the audience does so. Then they remind the audience that the king of Denmark wore a yellow star when he heard that his Jewish subjects would be required by the Nazis to wear one. Once again, all gay members of the audience are asked to stand up. Now three-quarters stands up; the rest remain in their seats, “eyes grim and steadfast, clutching their armrests as if for their dear life.” In Leavitt’s account, the “present” already signifies its own “pastness,” as current identity politics—in which “gay” is a resistant minoritizing term in opposition to “straight” heterosexuality—is represented in the process of being superseded by the inevitable progress of history. Thus, however privileged a place he claims for gay writing and reading practices, they remain bound up in hegemonic reproductory formulations of “the literary,” a “great tradition,” and the progress of history. And for Leavitt, the most positive achievements of his collection’s stories are their establishment of a gay “tradition,” their exploration of “the dilemma of living as part of a minority,” their presentation of “the
problem of sexual identity in all its individualistic complexity," and most especially, their success in having nongay writers agree to be included in a gay anthology. The effect of his historicizing is, then, the fantasy of the end of sexuality itself. But in contradistinction to Foucault's call for an "end" to identitarian politics in order to stress "becoming" rather than "being," in order to "invent with the body ... a nondisciplinary eroticism: that of the body plunged into a volatile and diffused state through chance encounters and incalculable pleasures," Leavitt's formulation enacts a stabilizing fulfillment (and hence perpetuation in the present) of modern gender and sexuality identity categories; for while Leavitt may be trying to resist the minoritizing and stultifying effects of a rigid identity politics, his reconfiguration of "gay" as a universalizing category works to reinscribe many of the foundational assumptions of modernism and the universal liberal subject.

At the core of what is most problematic in Leavitt's historicization of gay reading and subjectivity is his fear of the traditional linkages made by hegemonic ideologies between identity, gay reading, and "fawning over angels made flesh." As a result, it is hard to find a place for desire and pleasure in his account of a gay literature, other than that occluded in the various kinds of renunciation of self necessary to become "recognizably human." But it is precisely this necessity to queer the role that pleasure plays in the work of historicization that Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero have so usefully emphasized in their reflections on the processes and paradoxes of queer historicization:

Scholars and activists have reminded us not only that sex has a history, but also that history has its pleasures. Queer theory, the history of sexuality, and gay and lesbian studies pursue a fraught but ebullient rethinking of the ethics of pleasure. While recent studies in sexuality make clear that we ought to know the past, they also affirm that we want to. It is true, of course, that after Freud—and Foucault—"wanting" will never be the same. But one of the most productive paradoxes of contemporary work on sexuality is that, while it does not take pleasure at face value, it also does not take it for granted. Pleasure can be doubted, scrutinized, politicized, historicized, debated—and enjoyed.

We do not, then, pursue the history of sexuality just because we think we must; we study it because we know that what
we must or ought to do is intimately related to what we want to do. . . . History—and not just family history—is an erogenous zone.\textsuperscript{11}

If a queer historicization of the gay/lesbian/queer reader and Chaucerian fictions is to disturb the established relationships between past and present, encourage us to experience history as an “erogenous zone,” then it will need to bring the premorden and postmodern into a different alignment than that accomplished by historicizing \textit{grands récits} or simplistic models of recuperation or revolt. It will need to theorize new models of subjectivity and readerly practice, in the process resisting previously installed relationships between “the literary” and modern identities, and between such identities and hegemonic social reproduction. And finally, it will need to bring the discursive into a more direct relationship to the material factors in its production.

Such a queer theory and praxis would manifest that kind of politically engaged postmodernism called for by Homi Bhabha when he suggests that the “meaning” of

postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism . . . does not lie in the popular use of the ‘post’ to indicate sequentiality—\textit{after}-feminism; or polarity—\textit{anti}-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment.\textsuperscript{12}

But such a queer theory would also energize our investigation of the past by resisting the ways that the \textit{pre} of premorden or the \textit{middle} of medieval is so often employed to indicate a stabilizing sequentiality (\textit{before} modernity) or polarity (\textit{anti} everything that is modern). It would articulate a historical process where medievalism can function as a “middle . . . where things pick up speed,” a coming and going rather than the start or finish to some organized narrative of origins.\textsuperscript{13}

As an example of such a realignment of premorden and postmodern, I would like to bring together two textual moments—the first, John Preston’s introduction to his anthology of gay porn, \textit{Flesh and the Word}; the second, the narrator’s address to the reader in the prologue to the \textit{Miller’s Tale}—in an attempt at what Deleuze and Guattari would call a
rhizomatic connection between the post- and premodern, in order to expose the queer performativity that constructs both these meditations on the relationships among desire, literary production, and identity.

**Flesh and the Word**

The first volume of *Flesh and the Word*, published two years before Leavitt’s *Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories*, also arises out of and responds to the successes of gay identity politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Like Leavitt’s, Preston’s introduction to his collection attempts to historicize the relationships between reading and identity, fictional/textual production and agency, desire and history. And he does so by means of a personal narrative that begins in the primal scene of many gay narratives—before coming out, before Stonewall, before true adult identity has been achieved:

> When I was a teenager in the sixties I used to find every excuse possible to travel, alone, through Harvard Square. There for sale at a kiosk that specialized in foreign and exotic publications were small, digest-sized, black-and-white photo magazines, many of them from Britain, that featured pages of nearly naked men. The magazines were almost hidden in a corner of the booth with their titles—names like *Physique Pictorial*—hardly visible. Their existence took my breath away. Getting from the stand to the cash register with an obliquely titled, pocket-sized magazine took all my adolescent courage, and then I could never look the clerk in the eye. I most often wouldn’t dare take the books home after I bought them—something might be discovered there—but I’d find some private place to sit (usually a library) and study the images, a young boy’s erection painful in my pants. I would memorize the faces and the bodies and keep them in my mind, my private reserve of sensual delight.

Read through the lens of Leavitt’s definition of gay literature (or, for that matter, of much of mainstream society’s definition of culture generally), Preston’s narrative constitutes a debilitating lack of identity, an empty past that inscribes the writing present as its progressive fulfillment. Unlike
"then," now "we" can have a gay identity, gay authors, a gay literature; now we can begin to move toward being fully in charge of our own representation.

Yet I am drawn to the "young boy's erection painful in my pants," and the memorialization of faces and bodies kept "in my mind, my private reserve of sensual delight." What is so interesting about this moment is the clarity with which Preston reproduces the lack of a "proper place" for such deviant desire, its absence of identity, even as he outlines—de Certeau-like—an alternative walking through the city, and the various spaces and identifications in and through which subjectivities find expressivity. And it is precisely the absence of a "proper" reading position and authorship—in all their bourgeois, mystified naturalizations—that makes this moment an enabling one for Preston. In this way it provides a resistance to the "forgetting" that de Certeau describes as the basis for authorship and the fiction of a proper place: "In 'forgetting' the collective inquiry in which he is inscribed, in isolating the object of his discourse from its historical genesis, an 'author' in effect denies his real situation. He creates the fiction of a place of his own (une place propre)."15

For Preston, absence of authorship and the fiction of a place of his own does not necessarily signify "lack," and he distinguishes these early encounters with pornography from a resistant sexualization of "innocent" heterosexual representations of masculinity and the male body:

It wasn't that there weren't other images that I could make sexual. . . . I had those same experiences with such seemingly innocent media as the Sears Roebuck mail-order catalog, with its pages and pages of underwear models. What made Physique Pictorial and its peers so devastatingly powerful was their sexual purpose. . . . These were nearly naked men whose photographers obviously knew they were creating erotic images as they emphasized the lines of barely draped genitals with lighting and pose. . . . It was both safer and more pleasurable to look at images of men who were straightforwardly posing for me. . . . It also felt more realistic, whether or not it was true, to think of myself in a relationship with one of the models. Whatever else that model was doing, I could believe he was posing for me. I didn't find him in undress by mistake, the way I felt I did with my Sears models.16
Moreover, such pornographic encounters differ in intensity, not in kind, from the excited but painful reading against the grain that is necessary in a queer encounter with the classically "literary." As a queer reader, Preston finds himself forced to read out of the absence of a place of one’s own an author without a place of his own: “No matter how much my high school English teacher insisted that Walt Whitman was only talking about friendship—and she did insist on that—I knew better as soon as I read Leaves of Grass.” Even in the case of a contemporary writer representing homosexuality, a similar situation occurred, since he could only pass as an “author” to the extent that he would not create the fiction of a place of his own. Thus, “[r]ead anything that was homosexually oriented was exciting in the sixties. A simple passage of a Nelson Algren novel that acknowledged a gay character’s sexuality, no matter how sordid the context, was important to me.”

What Preston describes in all these cases is the opposite of an economy of the proper place. Instead, it is in the privacy of the public library that he finds a space to “study the images” of Physique Pictorial; the powerful effects of that study reorient and empower his different reading of the literary. Distinguishing differences of private versus public, popular versus literary, consumption versus appreciation, proper versus improper, are crossed and recrossed in enabling ways for the queer reader. As Preston remembers it: “I wasn’t simply consuming those images. I was beginning to conceive of myself as one of them.”

Integral to the process Preston describes is a recognition of its queer performativity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, responding to the “weird centrality of the marriage example” for J. L. Austin’s articulation of performativity in speech act theory, has begun instead to speculate about a performative elaboration that might begin with the example, not “I do,” but, let us say, “Shame on you.” . . . [T]he very grammatical truncation of “Shame on you” marks it as the product of a history out of which an I, now withdrawn, is projecting shame—toward another I, an I deferred, that has yet and with difficulty to come into being, if at all, in the place of the shamed second person. The verblessness of this particular performative, then, implies a first person whose singular/plural status, whose past/present/future status, and indeed whose agency/passivity can only be questioned rather than presumed.
Clearly, the young Preston conforms to such a place of the shamed second person in a performative moment of "Shame on you": "I could never look the clerk in the eye," "I most often wouldn't dare take the books home after I bought them—something might be discovered there—but I'd find some private place to sit (usually a library) and study the images, a young boy's erection painful in my pants." What's interesting, though, is that such conformity manifests the in-betweenness of what Sedgwick has called "shame's threshold between sociability and introversion. . . . Shame, as opposed to guilt, is a bad feeling that does not attach to what one does, but to what one is. . . . [O]ne therefore *is something*, in experiencing shame." 20

The young Preston's choice of the *Physique* pictorials over the catalog pictures can thus become a recognition of that *being something* in experiencing shame: "Whatever else that model was doing, I could believe he was posing for me. I didn't find him in undress by mistake, the way I felt with my Sears models." The young Preston also chooses such a shameful identity when he chooses the queer readings of the classics in spite of the "Shame on you" directives of his teachers and the tradition of reading they invoke and represent. So, too, does the adult Preston when he returns to his younger self and is drawn to that young boy's erection or when he anthologizes and writes gay porn (instead of pursuing the more "adult" literary interests a Leavitt would wish for a contemporary gay man). In desiring the questionable identities and identifications of shame, Preston is moved to choose the verblessness of a particular performative that implies an "I" "whose singular/plural status, whose past/present/future status, and indeed whose agency/passivity can only be questioned rather than presumed." 21 It is not that the adult Preston, as a gay man, has somehow found a place to leave that earlier shame behind, to excise it as a toxic presence. The intimate relationships of porn, shame, interest, and identity that he outlines in his preface make it clear that that is exactly what he does not want. 22 Preston thus invites his reader into an experience of the queer performativity of "Shame on you" and the transformative identifications it makes possible. 21 For it is not porn per se, but the particular location in which porn places the queer subject, in relation to identity, shame, interest in the world, that fascinates Preston, and that makes its queer performativity so necessary. 24

Rather than the mastery of "the gaze," or the subjection of mass consumption, the move to the apparent margins, the choice of "superficial" pleasures (as opposed to the depths of bourgeois selfhood), and the ex-
citement of “a young boy’s erection” provoke identifications that lead to the excesses of postponed identity, a subject-in-process neither strictly cultural nor countercultural: “One of the excitements—and confusions—of being gay was understanding that I could be, in so many different ways, both the active and the passive partner. Sexologists might use those terms only in relation to who performs what physiological acts, but I was quickly aware that there was a whole range of possibilities, emotional as well as sexual.”25 Rather than some utopian free space that pornography inhabits, Preston inscribes the possibility that pornography’s non-“literariness” might work to constitute that impure space in which the imposition of hegemonic identities can be deferred and in which alternative communications and identifications become possible.26

In turn, Preston’s anthologies of gay porn function in the present in a similar fashion to resist the canonization of gay writing, its success in carving out a “proper place” within the literary for its production, its creation of the fiction of a place of its own. In part this occurs by resisting the illusion of authorship and the proprietary rights it makes possible:

I make no claim that the writing here is anything but pornography. . . . People would try to say that my sexual writing—or Samuel Steward’s or someone else’s—was “too good” to be discarded as pornography. I disown that distinction completely. Pornography and erotica are the same thing. The only difference is that erotica is the stuff bought by rich people; pornography is what the rest of us buy.27

Thus Preston insists on remembering the collective inquiry in which he is inscribed, on connecting the object of his discourse with its historical genesis, on foregrounding the material conditions producing his desire: “I suppose that some people will say that what I’m doing is taking a lot of work that would be labeled pornographic and making it into erotica by presenting it in this volume, brought to you by a division of one of the largest publishers in the world. It’s an amusing thought.”28

Translating gay porn into a high-end format—the published hardcover anthology—cannot erase its “proper place” in the low-end marketplace. Preston’s recognition of the rhizomatic connections between “literature” and nonliterary “ephemera” disrupts the usual hierarchies established by the literary/nonliterary binary, suggesting instead the complex imbrication of both as commodities in a common marketplace.
By mobilizing the circulation of identities original to the porn magazine setting against the inevitable attempt by the ideology of the literary to rearrange and shape the waywardness of porn into erotica, Preston resists assuming the stilled affiliative identities of a literary tradition as the “proper” gay identity. In re-presenting gay porn in the way he does, Preston puts the tracings made by traditional handlings of desire back onto the multiplicity of the map (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s terms). 29

Several features of his anthologies are noteworthy in this regard. Preston includes “history,” but not in any straightforward teleological or identity-affirming way. Pre-Stonewall examples, along with post-AIDS material, suggest not some inevitable march to freedom, but the difficult and liberatory process of creation in the middle of adversity, ideology, chance, and unstable desire. In a similar fashion, Preston’s choice of material challenges distinctions of genre and gender. Writing about pornography and descriptions of “real” gay cruising grounds mix with pornography proper. The relationship between pornography as trainer of desire and desire as shaper of the pornographic medium is constantly blurred as readers are encouraged to wander at will through the anthology and in turn are seduced by desire into fantasizing the unthinkable. Some of the hottest stories are written by women about gay male sex (frequently S/M) for a supposedly gay male reading audience. Throughout, his inclusion of woman-authored gay male porn, of nonfiction, of mainstream “literary” writing such as Edmund White’s or Alan Hollinghurst’s, and most notably of “hardcore,” “violent” S/M porn, such as Aaron Travis’s “Slave” or Pat Califia’s “Belonging,” insists on the power of fantasy and resists any notion that porn (and writing/imagining generally) constitutes the mimicry of a binary logic. Preston’s anthologies resist the pull of the sexologist’s manual (whether cultural or countercultural); they never seek to tell us who “we” are. Instead, like Deleuze and Guattari’s middle, the space they inhabit is that of the and . . . and . . . and, a place of the subject in process, of a multiplicity of rhizomatic identifications that imitate nothing, reproduce nothing, are their “becoming world.” 30

A SHAMEFUL ESTATE

The Canterbury Tales, on the other hand, seem preoccupied with telling us who we are. Or so a succession of authorized readings (beginning with the Ellesmere scribe) would maintain. And, as Carolyn Dinshaw
has suggested, if the opening lines of the Tales have come to signify “literature” to the anglophone West,

it is perhaps because they may be the first in English to articulate with such clarity what we may call a sexuality—heterosexuality, taken to be one of the founding markers and guardians of the Western world. . . . An act of generative penetration inaugurates this work, an act which links humankind to the generative cycle of nature. . . . It’s no surprise, then, that these are the best known of Chaucer’s lines—Chaucer, who is himself revered for his generative powers, critically constructed as the father of English poesy. They establish a tradition of English literature consonant with larger heterosexualized literary structures. . . . It’s no surprise, either, that critics have rather routinely interpreted the Canterbury Tales as being structured in a major way by marriage. . . . Since Chaucer himself has established such a norm in the opening lines, those heterosexual arrangements become a means of interpreting, a hermeneutic according to which events and characters are rendered intelligible or unintelligible. Kittredge is looking through the lens Chaucer has polished.31

But if we were to view this “weird [Kittredgian] centrality of the marriage example” for Chaucer studies through the lens of Preston’s queer performativity, might we not see with new eyes that other “beginning” to the Canterbury Tales, that is, the “low” interruption of the drunken Miller and his tale? And in doing so, could we not speculate instead—to use Sedgwick’s words again—“about versions of performativity (okay, go ahead and call them ‘perversions’—or ‘deformatives’) that might begin by placing some different kinds of utterance in the position of the exemplary”?32

As Lee Patterson has noted, “In an important sense, the Canterbury Tales really begin with the Miller’s Tale—although even this is something of a false start.”33 Patterson is, of course, situating his remarks within the context of an argument that in the Tales Chaucer is intent on stepping out from under the oppressive weight of a courtly tradition of “making” and developing new modes of expression and representation. And the Miller’s Tale will indeed seem a “false start” if we remain locked within traditional models of domination/revolt and of progress and modernity as the defining terms for the Tales. But if we instead situate this “false
start” in the context of Sedgwick’s “deformative,” the emergence of the (problematized) first person at this moment in the Tales becomes a richly productive question rather than a stabilizing presumption.

For, like Preston’s backward glance, the narrator’s interjection at the beginning of the Miller’s Tale foregrounds a performativity quite different from the normativizing power of the marriage example that characterizes the work of the narrator and the Knight in their sanctioned opening to the Tales. The dramatic moment the narrator draws our attention to stages both the drunken, churlish resistance of the Miller to the silencing power of shame and the projection of shame that establishes identity for the withdrawn subject uttering the deformative “Shame on you”—that is, the moral and social suasion of the Miller’s betters (represented in this instance by the Knight and Reeve):

What sholde I moore seyn, but this Millere
He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
M’athynketh that I shal reherce it heere.
And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
Or elles falsen som of my mateere.
And therfore, whoso list it nat yheere,
Turne over the leef and chese another tale;
For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,
And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.
Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.34

The narrator’s comments on the one hand place him within the stable identity position of one who knows better than the Miller and thus avoids his shame. On the other hand, the narrator, in performing the Miller’s shame, performs his own identification with it and by it. Similarly, the narrator’s private/public address to the textualized reader offers the latter the choice of being placed with the Miller even as he explicitly projects shame onto such an identification. In doing so, narrator and reader can choose to identify as subjects in process, performing at times contradictory public and private functions. The narrator’s interjection echoes the
queer performativity of the Miller and his tale by inserting the modernizing effects of textuality, thereby resisting the universalizing “now” of traditional medieval representations even as the moral tenor of his comments would appear to assert it.

We can get a distance on this material but only by disavowing our own mobility and involvement within its pluralistic universe. This is, then, a profoundly “deformative” moment of identification for the reader of the Tales, placing “Shame on you” in the position of the exemplary. For the queering of the stability of the very estate identities being inscribed by the generic and social organization of the first fragment disturbs the pattern of domination and revolt that Fragment I assures us is normative. The narrator raises in its extremity the ability of the performative “Shame on you” to shut down interest and communication. But he does so only to stress the unlikelihood of such an event taking place in the way intended; indeed, the performance of “Shame on you” works as much to excite desire, to maintain interest in the Miller and his tale, to explore an “I” identifiable in and emerging from the shadows of that performative. And this “I” is also a reader in the process of being constructed, arising out of a secondary position vis-à-vis the traditional medieval clerical “right reader” (born out of allegorizing, transcendent patterns of reading). The work of Lee Patterson, Paul Strohm, and David Wallace in different ways provides a context for this new reader in the newness of Chaucer’s social condition. The “turn to the social world of contemporary England” that Patterson finds in the Tales accentuates for him the newness of this collection as textual artifact:

The presence of the Tales is for the modern reader so unavoidable, their achievements so undeniable, that we approach them with a sense of inevitability that assumes their permanent existence. But there was a time when they had not been written, and their coming into existence was not preordained. If something rather than nothing, then why this thing rather than another?

The queer performativity of the Miller’s Tale, then, constitutes a fraught moment where this set of newnesses coalesces and comes to consciousness: the fabliau as a new Chaucerian genre and the body of the tale-teller as foundational for the tale (and the pilgrimage body for the Canterbury Tales). But in both cases their instantiation as the Miller’s tale in a performative relationship with a set of received assumptions
about how such a tale and tale-teller signify (to which the narrator’s interjection draws our attention) inscribes the deformative as speaking voice. As such, it foregrounds the dangerous centrality of an authorial voice in relation to the shift taking place in the constitution and transmission of cultural capital. The medieval monastic and university clerical culture had little need for the category of literature outside of allegory, and, as John Guillory suggests, “the medieval pedagogic canon was selected according to the criterion of truth, and even the late medieval parodic texts celebrated by Bakhtin interrupt this regime not as fictions but as the linguistic complement of the truth, namely the lie.” Yet at the same time, from the late twelfth century on, there is, in the development of a vernacular literature, the development of a category of fiction with truth-value, neither sacred scripture nor strictly allegorical veil surrounding transcendent truth.

Fabliau, pilgrimage storytelling as carnivalesque release, drunken interruptions from social inferiors can be seen, then, as constituting the pedagogical lie that proves the truth of hegemonic authority. But which hegemonic authority? The successful use of the Canterbury Tales by its early readers to canonize the category of the literary and to constitute a new bourgeois subject and idiolect suggests that the “newness” that the Tales represent is a potent social force. Yet, as Guillory has noted, the stability of high (Latin) and low (vernacular) culture in the earlier Middle Ages maintains the stability of the “estates” and the division of power between clerical and noble (not itself a pure separation because the former was often drawn from the latter). But from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, knights and noble landowners were trying to set themselves off from the clergy and forge an independent cultural identity:

This project . . . involved the appropriation of literacy as a form of cultural capital, but not of the Hochsprache or pedagogic canon of the scribal class. The appropriation of literacy was rather undertaken in conjunction with another appropriation—of that popular, folk culture from which the nobility had never distinguished itself. This moment of extremely polyglot culture not only weakened the major clerical form of domination; it laid the groundwork for the cultural alienation of the nobility from the lower classes by instituting linguistic differentiation where none had existed before. . . . The acquisition of literacy by noble (and eventually also, bourgeois) culture is the condition for the
appearance of diglossia within the vernaculars, as opposed to the bilingualism of medieval “international culture.”

It seems overly simplifying and stabilizing, then, to see the moment of the Tales simply as the formation of a new soon-to-be hegemonic identity (which, for lack of a better term, we might call “gentry”) displacing the old high medieval ones of the noble/clerical compact. Instead, the narrator’s interjection at the opening of the Miller’s Tale, precisely at that moment where a “new” order interposes itself, explores the processes of identification that produce and reproduce power in the world. In doing so, this deformative moment explores the desire for “newness” itself (and with it, that which will come to be called modernity), even as the forces already installed call that a deforming experience. It is this dynamic that makes this as exciting a moment for the postmodern, queer reader as it clearly was for the late medieval reader; for the narrator’s comments here reveal the opening of the Tales as a moment of libidinal excitement, a fever pitch of intensity in a process of organization not yet climaxed.

Like Preston’s moment at the kiosk in Harvard Square that inscribes a set of identifications as yet polymorphously desiring but on the verge of “becoming” identifiable (i.e., homosexual/gay, a public forum being constructed, a counterdiscourse that linked private/public in new ways), so too Chaucer’s narrator inscribes in the scene of the Miller’s interruption a similarly pre-originary moment where we see a new reader being born out of the valorization of individuality and a proper space for the author yet desiring so much more. Such an interest in the world, such a push to associational identifications rather than communitarian identities and ideologies is, of course, at the heart of the desire to represent new bourgeois ways of being in the world, those new identities and ideologies that we have come to call modern. What makes the Canterbury Tales so appropriate for the new class of late medieval readers (and so serviceable to successive generations in their attempts to define and reproduce hegemonic identities) is its ability to fantasize as “the real” that new symbolic order of modernity that is coming into being—one organized around individualized and nationalized identities.

The narrator’s interjection frames the frame, as it were, and highlights its perverse use in the Canterbury Tales. The frame here does not act as the stabilizing commentary that highlights the core, as it would in the glossed Bibles; nor does it simply act as a carnivalesque, regulated space for the personal, such as one might find in the margins of illuminated
manuscripts, or in the “upsadoun” world of medieval festival or pilgrimage. Rather, what we have here is the fictional frame as erogenous zone, functioning as the space where desire is valorized to the extent that it can be represented, but represented under the sign of shame. Thus, we witness the construction of a mechanism to allow a sense of modern history, but because it is done under the sign of shame, this mechanism cannot achieve the status of exemplary utterance. It is instead experienced as a deformatory that continues to incite desire even after its alleged “work” of inscribing “bourgeois” desire for representation is done. Our attention is, one might say, directed back to a young boy’s erection painful in his pants.

In this way the Tales incorporate the anxious misidentifications necessitated by such a departure from the past as it works both within and against the naturalized categories of the high medieval clerical/aristocratic imaginary. This performative moment has a relationship to history neither medieval (in the sense of a contemporaneous now oblivious to anachronism) nor modern (in the sense of a fully formed Renaissance “self-fashioning”). And the Tales’ lack of foundations (their inability to refer unambiguously forward to a transcendent truth in the future or directly back to the stuff of day-to-day experience) is their defining feature and determinant of value. This pilgrimage’s “middle” ground—between London and Canterbury, between a high medieval clerical/aristocratic compact and a new, bourgeois reality—thus fantasizes a place for a new, “English” nation, one that later will be re-formed by Lancastrian propaganda into a hegemonic ideology of nation, but that in the context of the shameful deformativity of the Canterbury Tales remains more protean in its openness to imagine and reimagine community as a series of associations and identifications.

In his discussion of the complex history of the relationships between canonicity, identity, and cultural unity, Guillory has argued that “while liberal pluralism continually employs an implicitly sociological concept of Gemeinschaft (community), it has no concept of Gesellschaft (association) at its disposal at all. Hence it is unable to describe the political effect of any form of association which does not entail the assumption of cultural unity, or ‘community.’” On the other hand, recent critiques of the canon can perpetuate the very linkages of identity and cultural unity they seek to contest by constituting “new cultural unities at the level of gender, race, or more recently ethnic subcultures, or gay
and lesbian subcultures.” The postmodern queer reader, then, might very well embrace that blush of shame with which the narrator “opens” the Miller’s Tale as a productive middle, an afterimage resonant with possibilities too often forgotten by communitarian and identitarian visions of the pilgrimage body.

Notes

3. Ibid., 79.
4. Ibid., 91.
6. Ibid., xix.
7. Ibid., xxi.
8. Ibid., xx–xxi.
9. Ibid., xxviii.
15. Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 44. De Certeau continues: “In spite of the contradictory ideologies that may accompany it, the setting aside of the subject-object relation or of the discourse-object relation is the abstraction that generates an illusion of ‘authorship.’ It removes the traces of belonging to a network—traces that always compromise the author’s rights. It camouflages the conditions of the production of discourse and its object. For this negated genealogy is substituted a drama combining the simulacrum of an object with the simulacrum of an author” (44).
17. Ibid., 5.
18. Ibid., 4.

20. Ibid., 12.


22. According to Sedgwick, for the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins, shame and interest are related affects: "[Tomkins] places shame, in fact, at one end of the affect polarity shame-interest, suggesting that the pulsations of cathexis around shame, of all things, are what either enable or disable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world. / 'Like disgust, [shame] operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest . . . will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure. . . . Such a barrier might be because one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or because one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger." Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 7, here cites Silvan Tomkins, *The Negative Affects*, vol. 2 of *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 4 vols. (1962–91) (New York: Springer, 1963), 123.

23. "Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimizes the place of identity—the question of identity—at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity-space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted, which is also to say, as already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition. Shame—living, as it does, on and in the capillaries and muscles of the face—seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another. Indeed, one of the strangest features of shame (but also, I would argue, the most theoretically significant) is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment by someone else, someone else's embarrassment, stigma, debility, blame or pain, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me—assuming that I'm a shame-prone person—with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable. And the contagiousness of shame is only facilitated by its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars" (Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 14).

24. As Sedgwick puts it, "'Shame on you' is performatively efficacious because its grammar—admittedly somewhat enigmatic—is a transformational grammar: both at the level of pronoun positioning, as I've sketched, and at the level of the relational grammar of the affect shame itself. . . . [S]hame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side outside; shame and pride, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove: shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is performance. I mean theatrical performance" (ibid., 4–5).


26. Obviously the workings of ideology are not absent from this process. On the one hand, hegemonic ideologies determine where and how such pornographic material is produced and distributed, attempt to contain in various ways how individuals can encounter
the material, how it is seen to fit into "representation." On the other hand, the identifications of pornography in turn shape subjectivities as they come into consciousness; these can in turn become hegemonic ideologies within countercultures established from such readings, and therefore determine what is "properly gay" sexuality and practice. Space is always threatening to be overtaken by place, the improper to become an economy of the proper place. Nonetheless, "For myself and for many other gay men, pornographic writings were how we learned the parameters of our sexual life. We could have more than a simple ejaculation with a nameless partner. Pornography was how we developed our fantasies, both sexual and emotional. The eponymous Phil Andros was a hustler and a porn star who was not only showing us how to come with some literary flair, he was pointing out how life worked, where the decent folk were, and who should be avoided." Preston also points out that Gay Whore, a porno book from 1967 containing a climax scene in which the two men end satisfied and happy, provided a representation unavailable either in mainstream writing or in early "homosexual literature" (ibid., 9).

27. Ibid., 11.
28. Ibid., 12.
29. "What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. . . . The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. . . . A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back to 'the same.' The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence.' . . . Have we not, however, reverted to a simple dualism by contrasting maps to tracings, as good and bad sides? . . . It is a question of method. The tracing should always be put back on the map. . . . For it is inaccurate to say that a tracing reproduces the map. . . . The tracing has already translated the map into an image; it has already transformed the rhizome into roots and radicles. It has organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities according to the axes of signification and subjectification belonging to it. It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself. That is why the tracing is so dangerous. It injects redundancies and propagates them. What the tracing reproduces of the map or rhizome are only the impasses, blockages, incipient taproots, or points of structuration" (Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 12–13).

30. See Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the book as rhizome rather than image of the world (11), and their later delineation of the rhizome as "middle": "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . . '. This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be.' . . . Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic . . . ). But [there is] another way of traveling and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing. . . . The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is
where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (ibid., 25).


34. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, cited from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), I:3167–81. In addition to the linking of humankind to the generative cycle of nature that Dinshaw notes in the *General Prologue*, the marriage example begins and ends the first, commissioned tale of the collection. For the *Knight's Tale* inscribes at its opening and close the marriages of Hippolyta and Theseus, Palamon and Emily, as performatives that make vividly intelligible the relationships between heterosexuality and social reproduction.

35. For the ambiguities of Chaucer's position as an *esquire de servise*, deriving status and privileges from contractual service to the king rather than through aristocratic bloodlines and inheritance, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. 1–23. For the importance of guilds and other associational polities as forces of social change and models for Chaucer's "mixed" location in the power politics of his age and the mobile identifications of the *Canterbury* project, see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), esp. 65–103.


38. Ibid., 513.

39. As such it sounds uncannily like that "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" that Homi Bhabha sees in today's postcolonial, postfeminist, postmodern moment, one that "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy": "'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going beyond—are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. . . . Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogenous course of history, 'establishing a conception of the present as the "time of the now"'" (*Location of Culture* 4). Of course, for Chaucer it would not be sequential time that is here interrupted but rather the universalizing repetition of transcendent truth on the lines of the Parson's metaphoric substitutions at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*.

40. See, for example, Michael Camille's speculation about the kinds of dialogic reading provoked by bawdy or personal reference included in manuscript frames, a "feminine" frame, as it were, for "masculine" authority in the actual "text" (*Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* [London: Reaktion Books, 1992]).
41. See, for example, Carl Lindahl's reading of the *Canterbury Tales* in the light of its antecedents in medieval festivals and through the lens of Bakhtinian carnival in *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

42. For a consideration of how the *Miller's Tale* brings us into contact with the feminine and the body in ways that disorganize the stable heteronormativity of the *Knight's Tale* and encourage the desiring instead of a "desexualized" body operating within, yet not completely controlled by, the ideological structures of desire, see my article "Erotic Discipline... Or 'Tee Hee, I Like My Boys to Be Girls': Inventing with the Body in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale,*" in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages,* ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1997), 245–60.

To be really medieval one should have no body. To be really modern one should have no soul. To be really Greek one should have no clothes.

Oscar Wilde

Sirs, beholde vpon hight and ecce homoo . . .

Pilate, The York Plays

And sithen miracls pleyyinge is of the lustis of the fleyssh and mirthe of the body, no man may effectuely heeren hem and the voice of Crist at onys . . .

A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge

The anonymous Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge (ca. 1400) is hardly unusual in its condemnation of theater as conducive to lechery. A brief glance through Jonas Barish’s book The Antitheatrical Prejudice reveals that much, even if the book’s index makes no mention of the subject. On the other hand, Barish barely mentions lechery in his chapter on the Tretise, stating only that the author “devises a fantastic analogy between the playing of miracles and the worship of the golden calf to show that miracle plays, by encouraging glutony, lechery, and covetise, constitute a dreadful ‘maumetrie’.” Clifford Davidson, in the Introduction to his fine edition of the Tretise, mentions “the lustis of the fleyssh and mirthe
of the body” in relation to associations made elsewhere between theater and prostitution, but otherwise discusses lechery only as part of what he sees as an analogical argument in this work:

Its objection consists of seeing “miracle playing” as “very leering” since the drama presents only “signs without deed” for the purpose of seducing viewers out of motives that are as shallowly hypocritical as those of a practiced “lecher” who “seeth signs of very love but no deeds of very love.”

Yet lechery and “lusts of the flesh” are referred to more often than “leering” in the Tretise, and in a variety of contexts, all of which point toward sexual desire as endemic to theatrical representation. And I think that the work’s Wycliffite authors are basically right about this.

Even in the passage Davidson refers to, lechery is a prominent theme:

mennus lecherye now on days to han ther owne lustus lieth to hemself whanne they seyn that suche miracles pleying is to the worship of God. For Crist seith that folc of avoutrie [adultery] sechen siche singynys as a lecchour sechith signes of verrey love but no dedis of verrey love. . . . thise miraclis pleyinge ben onely singnis, love withoute dedis. (195–201)

A little later, explicitly in order to counter the pro-theatrical argument that “by suche miraclis pleyinge ben men committed to gode livinge” (150–51), the author cites the prayer of Sara in the book of Tobit: “Lord, thou woost that nevere I covetide man, and clene I have kept my soule fro all lustis, nevere with pleyeris I mingid me mysilfe persin” (263–66). Thus “the bodily vertue of chastite” and even “the sacrament of matrimonye” are deemed incompatible with “al maner idil pleying and . . . al cumpany of idil pleyeris” (269–72).

What makes the Tretise’s claim that theater incites lechery seem unusual, and perhaps invisible to most critics, is that its primary target is “the pley of Cristis passioun” (309). Nor does the Tretise explain this merely through recourse to the charge—ubiquitous from Tertullian through the early modern period and beyond—that the theater is a site of prostitution and illicit sexual activity between audience members, as
Davidson suggests. Rather, the *Tretise* treats theatrical performance and spectatorship as themselves inherently sexual activities, most dangerously so when they are centered on a representation of the actions and body of Christ: “lasse yvele it were to pleyin rebauyde than to pleyin siche miriclis” (362–63). Any critical refusal to engage with the notion that such plays might indeed provoke lechery only confirms the Wyclifite authors’ anxiety: the body of Christ, unlike any other, must be seen as utterly antithetical to lechery; its theatrical representation cannot be seen to provoke erotic desire. My own response to theatrical performance also confirms the anxious assertions of the *Tretise*, but differently: the onstage display of a seminaked male body does indeed have an inherent erotic potential for me, even when that body represents the body of Christ. Moreover, for some plays, including Passion plays, I would consider the realization of that potential to be crucial: any theatrical representation of the body of Christ that does not at some level inspire erotic desire is for me a failure. Contrary to the presumptions of the *Tretise*, it is not lechery, but the lack of an erotic attraction for the actor who plays Christ, that can distract me from the spiritual pleasures of a Passion play. Any man who represents the heavenly spouse, the perfect man, must look the part, must seduce me into attentiveness.

Clearly, I am not alone in this. I am likely not even the only person who bought Leo Steinberg’s book *The Sexuality of Christ* primarily for the pictures.10 That book went too far for many readers in its revelations of early modern artistic interest in the genitalia of Christ, but not far enough for others. Richard Rambuss has criticized Steinberg, along with some of the book’s harsher critics, for the failure to explore the “possibility that these images of Christ’s naked body and his occasionally erect penis could have anything at all to do with sexuality or erotic desire—be it Christ’s, the artist’s who rendered it such, or even the viewer’s.”11 In *Closet Devotions*, Rambuss discusses “male devotional desire amorously attuned to a male Christ”12 in relation primarily to seventeenth-century devotional literature, but also to modern works ranging from the films *Priest* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* to photographer Andres Serrano’s infamous “Piss Christ”; the first chapter opens with discussion of a hard-core gay pornographic film, *More of a Man*, and its “redemptive conjoining of religion, sex, and political activism.”13

Late medieval mystical and devotional works, too, are filled with detailed, often erotically charged contemplations of the body of Christ.
Nicholas Love's influential, specifically anti-Wycliffite *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* argues that, for "symple soules,"

contemplacion of þe monhede of cryste is more likyng more spedefull & more sykere þan is hy3e contemplacion of þe godhed ande þerfore to hem is pryncipally to be sette in mynde þe ymage of crystes Incarnacion passion & Resurreccion so that a symple soule þat kan not þenke bot bodyes or bodily þinges mowe haue somwhat accordynge vnto is affecion where wij) he maye fede & stir his deuocion.14

That such devotion sometimes took on specifically sexual dimensions is perhaps most famously evident in the autobiography of Margery Kempe, who is told by Christ in a vision that she should take him to herself, in her bed, "as for þi weddyd husbond . . . & therfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kissen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete sa swetly as pow wylt."15 Margery was accused of being a Wycliffite, a Lollard, but her erotic envisioning of the body of Christ would hardly have been acceptable to the Wycliffite authors of the *Tretise*. Nor was such a vision restricted to women: Richard Trexler, in his article "Gendering Christ Crucified," cites a variety of examples, including that of Rupert von Deutz, early in the twelfth century, who "envisioned himself French-kissing the crucified Jesus."16 On the other hand, as Rambuss points out, Trexler tends in this article "to regard the male form of Jesus not as masculine but as feminine," and apparently endorses a view "that religious devotion always entails heterosexual object choice."17 In his dream, as Trexler indicates, Rupert's tongue penetrates the body of Christ, but this is not something only a man could or would do, nor only to a woman; doing so does not feminize any body, any more than placing food, including the host, into the mouth of another would. Male and female Christians alike are called to put Christ's body into their mouths; Rupert merely returns the favor.

The modern scholars I have cited here all deal primarily with literary and pictorial representations of Christ, but Steinberg cites one provocative sixteenth-century anecdote, uncovered by historian Natalie Zemon Davis, that suggests—to me, not to him—that theatrical representations of the body of Christ, too, were sometimes accorded an erotic dimension. In Senlis, near Paris, at the feast of Corpus Christi in 1530,
a local toolmaker twice accosted the twenty-year-old barber who has just come from “playing and representing the figure of Our Lord in his tomb,” asking him, “Did you keep your prick stiff in playing God?” Steinberg asks “what prompted the toolmaker to fantasize the young barber’s tunescence while acting Christ’s risen body,” but filters that question through another: “Why associate resurrection with phallic arousal?” Davis makes the same association, citing the first edition of Steinberg’s book. However, nothing in the original anecdote itself, either in the original account or in Davis’s translation, makes this association. The toolmaker’s question is prefaced by the remark, “I see the god on earth,” which could easily indicate attraction to the younger man. The barber responds to the question, in Davis’s translation, by stating that “his [own penis] was neither very hard nor heated up, and that he [that is, the toolmaker] was gelded.” What Davis translates here as “hard” is transcribed as “rasseré [that is, r-acéré],” which could be also translated as “sharp” or “keen”—a likely reference to the sharp cutting tools manufactured by the barber’s interlocutor, as opposed to the “tool” he is then said to lack. Unlike Chaucer’s often discussed description of the effeminate and sodomitical Pardoner as “a geldyng or a mare,” this sexual insult to me suggests a personal sexual rejection: “You’re not making my tool usably sharp, and you don’t have one to use on me.” Whether one accepts this interpretation or that of Steinberg and Davis, however, the toolmaker clearly associates the barber’s portrayal of Christ—not necessarily the resurrection itself—with sexual arousal, either of the barber as actor, or of himself as viewer.

The barber ultimately responds using another sharp tool, a knife, fatally wounding the toolmaker, apparently—and all too appropriately—in the eye. In his defense, he states that he found the toolmaker’s words “dishonest” (that is, “deshonestes”—immodest) and “insulting to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the holiness of the day.” The authors of the Treatise would surely have agreed. Yet they are themselves like the toolmaker, in that they obsessively associate the theatrical portrayal of Christ with lecherous impulses, and assume that others must do the same. Critics assume otherwise, in regard to both these texts, being apparently unable to imagine that a man—whether a modern scholar or a sixteenth-century toolmaker or a Wycliffite—might think lecherous thoughts in regard to another masculine, male body, especially when that body represents the corpus Christi. To the flesh that others see and desire, they turn a blind eye.
In medieval English Passion plays, Christ repeatedly, even insis-
tently, offers his flesh to the gaze of others, both on and off the stage. The York passion sequence in particular stresses not only the humanity of Jesus, but the need to see him physically, as well as the miracles he performs. It assumes that, like Thomas, we need to see flesh to believe in the spiritual truth it holds. It also stresses that this particular flesh is both beautiful and desirable: at the entry into Jerusalem, citizens greet Jesus with cries of “Hayll, comely corse” and “We þe desire” (25.529, 537). These plays also make it clear that not all flesh is equal, even when it might appear equally desirable: Pilate and his wife describe themselves and each other as beautiful, and repeatedly kiss onstage, but are chided for such “shames” by the Beadle (30.56). The “comely corse” of Christ is clearly the only one worthy of true desire; the problem is that the body onstage is not actually his. Indeed, “it” is many: a complete performance of the York plays would have presented an audience with fully two dozen different actors playing the adult Christ in successive pageants, each in multiple performances—one God in many persons. Although this might arguably deny to a viewer the possibility of identification of Christ’s body with any actual body, it might as easily allow the viewer to focus on the single most desirable body among the many—the most “comely” being the most properly Christlike—or to find Christ in a wide variety of bodies and body types, on or even off the pageant stage, and to desire them all.

Each of the various bodies of Christ in York, as elsewhere, exhibits what Laura Mulvey famously termed “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Pilate’s “Ecce homo” (John 19:5) is given an unusually flippant turn here (33.434: see headnote), but the good characters in the play from the Nativity onward display eagerness to behold Christ. At the entry into Jerusalem, immediately after the healing of a blind man, and citing other great marvels that “men þis tyme may see with eye” (25.395), Zachaeus climbs into a tree to “bidde in herte & þought / Till I hym se” (432–33); he sees and is seen by Christ, and comes down to him. When the crucified Christ tells the audience (in the singular, as “man”) to take “tente” to him (36.119, 190), he does not just mean we must pay attention to his words: “On me for to looke lette þou no3t, / Howe baynly my body I bend” (36.185–86). The crucified body itself invites our collective gaze, and the meditative tradition of imitatio Christi invites our identification with that body’s suffering. Yet Christ again reverses the gaze, looking back at us and finding us wanting:
Al men þat walkis by waye or strete,
Takes tente 3e schalle no traualye tyne.
Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
And fully feele nowe or 3e fyne
Yf any mournyng may be meete,
Or myscheue mesured vnto myne. (35.253–58)

We desire both Christ himself and identification with him, but fall short in our identification. At the Judgment, he again tells us, “Beholdis both body, bak and side, / How dere I bought youre brotherhede” (47.249–50). Our very participation in the church—which is both bride of Christ and corpus Christi itself—depends on our ability to look at Christ and to see in his flesh the cost of that participation. It depends also on our willing submission to the gaze of Christ, as he submits to ours; we too must exhibit “to-be-looked-at-ness,” both in the theater and in our Christian lives.

According to Mulvey’s argument, which pertained to classic Hollywood film, to be the object of the gaze always connotes powerlessness, and the feminine. Here, none of the female characters onstage is actually a woman; the actors are male. More important, it is an adult, masculine Christ who actively solicits our gaze, and gazes back at us; he is passively displayed, but, as God, actively controls even that display. This is not a case in which, as Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon have argued in regard to the opera Salome, “to be the object of the gaze is to have ultimate power”; Christ possesses that power a priori. He is God, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-seeing: his ownership of the gaze is absolute. Or rather, that is what the all-too-human body of the actor on display as Christ represents. The actor, too, deliberately puts himself on display, knowing and desiring the power of that display, yet any power the actor has over his audience depends on his being the object of the gaze, the object of desire. And that status is something he must earn from the audience through his performance—through his spectacular physical presence, and through his representation of an all-powerful, controlling gaze that no one present can actually possess.

Kaja Silverman has radically expanded Mulvey’s theory of the gaze by “exposing the impossibility of anyone ever owning that visual agency, or of him or herself escaping specularity.” Steven Shaviro, citing both Mulvey and Silverman, asserts that “To look at an image is to lose oneself within it, to be oneself transformed into an image.” He is writing
about a particular film, Fassbinder's *Querelle*, but the line could as easily describe what happens not in all films, certainly, but in the theater generally, and in Passion plays particularly. In a Passion play, Christ invites our contemplative gaze, and asks us to lose ourselves therein, to become, instead, what we see. But an audience, inevitably, watches more than the actor who plays Christ. Audience members watch other actors, and they watch each other—not to mention accidental distractions such as storm clouds rolling in overhead, or mishandled stage properties. Even in the darkened seating area of a modern proscenium-style theater, audience members look at each other, watch each other watching the stage; people go to the theater to be seen, as well as to see. The multiple audiences of a processional *corpus Christi* play are constantly reconfiguring themselves, finding new points of view, in regard not only to the wagon stage but also to others in the audience. The York plays are also famously self-reflexive, constantly blurring the already tenuous boundary between audience and actor, stage and street, turning "biblical characters into York citizens" and vice versa. In effect, everyone is onstage, and everyone is audience, in a spectacle in which Christ himself is every body, and everybody's mirror. Much as in the case of *Querelle*, the constant multiplication and fragmentation of stage images, and of people looking at those images or at other people, "leaves no room for the stability of an active and controlling subject position."

For Shaviro, as for me, this instability is exciting, and arousing; for anyone with an investment in the maintenance of that subject position, it can only be a source of anxiety. For evidence of that anxiety now, one need only look at the ongoing debate around gay men in the U.S. military: "don't ask, don't tell" also means "don't let me catch you looking at my body with desire." But it is the catching that counts: looking must be reciprocated to imply a sexual connection between men unless the spectacle is already explicitly sexual; even men who are openly cruising each other in a gay bar generally have to make eye contact before they proceed to anything more explicitly sexual. Women, in contrast, now as in the Middle Ages, are presumed always to be on display, and always the object of male desire, regardless of where or at what they are themselves looking. The display of a male body carries sexual connotations only if that body is naked, or too clearly on display. Anything else, in Western European culture at least, can be disavowed. Thus men can safely watch male hockey players, for instance, or even more scantily clad track and
field athletes, because they are ostensibly concentrating on a visible goal, and not on their audience; they are there to do, not to be seen. The sexuality of male figure skaters, however, is often questioned, because, like actors, their goal is more explicitly to be looked at; watching them is more questionable still—an activity for the privacy of the home rather than for the local sports bar.

Still, the aura of acceptability around athletics extends to some dubious fare for private consumption, such as bodybuilding magazines, which often function as a substitute for more explicit gay pornography, as they have done since the rise of “physical culture” at the end of the nineteenth century. As Thomas Waugh has argued, “Despite its fundamental disavowal of our desire for those taut pectorals and disarming grins, this first commercial and popular incarnation of gay culture in the age of modern mass media is a key to the formation of contemporary gay identities, cultures, politics, and sexualities.”

Through physique magazines and mail-order photographs and films, “the male body also emerged as an object of media consumption: it not only worked, presided, and earned but also played and competed, and was displayed, recorded, endlessly reproduced, sold, consumed, preserved, admired, emulated—and desired.”

Waugh’s statement could easily describe the body of Christ and its many visual representations in the later Middle Ages—on church walls, in plays, as holy sacrament. The chief difference is that, in the case of Christ’s body, disavowal of the sexual is far easier, thanks to the presumption of an opposition between sexuality and spirituality—a presumption that, as Richard Rambuss has shown, governs even the work of a modern critic such as Caroline Walker Bynum, who argues forcefully against the correlated, widely assumed existence of a medieval body/spirit binary.

Allowing a spiritual dimension or use to the body is apparently one thing, allowing such to erotic desire is quite another. The authors of *A Tretise of Miracles Pleyinge* draw a similar line between spiritually useful work and mere “pley,” between “dedis of charite” and “dedis of lustis and likenis and of feding of house wittis” (293–94). Yet those authors are also quick to condemn flesh as almost inescapably lecherous, and the senses as damnably sensual. The authors of the *Tretise*, it would seem, are incapable of the crucial disavowal of the erotic possibilities that are offered by fleshly representations of a body that supposedly rejected absolutely all fleshly desire. In their view, if it affords pleasure, seeing is not believing, but fleshly sin; to borrow a provocative phrase written in
praise of the pleasures of war, it is "what the Bible calls the lust of the eye and the Marines of Vietnam called eye-fucking." 35

Theatrical eye-fucking, however, like any sexual activity, need not even afford pleasure in order to be considered damnable. According to an often-cited passage in the Tretise,

the weeping that fallith to men and wymmen by the sighte of siche miraclis pleyinge, as they ben not principaly for theire oune sinnes ne of theire gode feith withinneforthe, but more of theire sighte withouteforthe is not alowable before God but more reprowable. For sithen Crist himsylf reprovyde the wymmen that wepten upon him in his passioun, mych more they ben reprovable that wepen for the pley of Cristis passioun, leevinge to wepen for the sinnes of hemsylf and of theire children, as Crist bad the wymmen that wepten on him. (301–11)

The possibility that the audience might indeed be weeping for their sins is never taken seriously, never again mentioned, as if unthinkable in this context. Their sight is directed toward mere human flesh, and that is clearly enough to taint the activity.

As Clifford Davidson points out, "According to the understanding of vision prevalent in both learned and popular circles at this time, seeing meant coming into direct visual contact with the object, which if it were idolatrous would contaminate the viewer." 36 In this view, seeing flesh is interaction with that flesh; one need not even look with sinful intention in order for that look to be considered sinful. A similar view informs modern arguments against pornography, and not just from fundamentalist Christian sources: as Cindy Patton explains, "Antipornography feminist analysis views pornography as an important direct cause of violence against women, and as an indirect support of misogynist ideology, and thus in itself a mediated form of violence against women." 37 The object of representation does not even need to be a woman: Patton recounts an incident in which a picture of a condom-clad penis, in a safe-sex ad in a gay community newspaper, was denounced as "assaultive to women." 38

In the Tretise, though, perhaps because everyone is deemed to have sinful flesh, whether or not they also possess a penis, there is no gendered divide between man as perpetrator and woman as victim—all who look at others, or subject themselves to the social gaze, are guilty of sins of the flesh.
Looking at people in a public environment, such as at the performance of a medieval Passion play, can only make things worse, because looking is itself contagious; people want to see what others are looking at. In the theater, an audience watches actual bodies, human flesh, on-stage and off; in medieval stagings especially, even the onstage flesh moves in close physical proximity to the viewer. One's mind can move with relative ease from a static verbal description or pictorial representation of something to consideration of the thing itself. Hence the *Tretise* treats these as potentially less harmful: "peinture, yif it be verry withoute menging of lesingis and not to curious"—that is, not too elaborate, and hence pleasurable in itself to view—"... they ben but as nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden the treuthe. But so ben not miraclis pleyinge that ben made more to deliten men bodily" (373-78). Obviously—to us, now, if not to these authors—theater does offer intellectual and spiritual pleasures, but only through obviously, often self-consciously physical means; any number of things can call attention to those means, and away from any other meaning. What Brecht called *Verfremdungseffekten*—"alienation effects"—can occur by accident as well as by design: a forgotten line, an awkward gesture, miscasting, or the too-familiar face of an actor can all make a viewer suddenly aware of the play as play; an actor's body can all too easily call attention to itself—to the too, too solid flesh on display, and away from the body it represents—simply by being too attractive, or not attractive enough, to the viewer. I have more than occasionally been told, or told others, to sit in a particular part of a theater in order to get the best possible view of a play's more erotic, fleshly attractions. I also have friends who love cinema but find live theater uncomfortable, too full of alienating distractions—too live, too fleshly—even given the relatively hermetic frame of a proscenium stage. No wonder the authors of the *Tretise* worry.

Steven Shaviro has argued that, "In contrast to the Brechtian paradigm, in *Querelle* and other postmodern works the alienation effect does not free the audience from involvement in the spectacle, but itself functions as a new mode of complicity." And that complicity is erotic, in *Querelle* as in Passion plays. The *Tretise* treats the self-consciously theatrical spectacle of the Passion play as drawing audiences into complicity with this "fleishly pleye" and away from "the ernestful dedis of Crist" (483-84) that they represent; it argues that "miraclis pleyinge" can offer little more than "occasion of perverting of men, not onely of oon singuler persone but of al an hool comynte" (239-41)—not simply individuals
with an already lustful eye, but whole communities, however well-intentioned. If, but only if, one considers an erotic complicity with others a problem, or deems all fleshly desire evil, and essentially opposed to the love of Christ, theater is indeed necessarily evil.

The theatrical display of Christ's flesh was of course eventually banned by a Protestant English hierarchy, along with dramatic representation of God more generally, and of the seven sacraments. When the ban was finally lifted in England, four centuries later, with the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's office in 1968, an almost immediate effect was for playwrights to begin representing that body once again, in shows such as Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell, which were, inevitably, denounced as blasphemous—a process that has continued with films such as The Last Temptation of Christ (1988) and Terrence McNally's play Corpus Christi (1998), with its contemporary gay Christ figure. Some of those who protest outside the theaters have possibly never been inside any; in some Christian circles, theater is still considered inherently sinful. But even more moderate Christians tend to object to any representation that makes Christ appear too human, which a human actor in the theater can hardly avoid doing. Some medieval productions did make the attempt: records indicate that in Chester, for instance, even "little God" in the pageant of Christ and the Doctors was gilded, marking him as being other than entirely human; the city's post-Reformation Banns suggest that God should rather have been represented merely as a voice in a cloud:

But sethence the face gilte doth disfigure the man yat deme
A Clowdye coueringe of the man. a Voyce onlye to heare
And not god in shape or person to appeare."

In my own experience at least, a gilded face is marvelously alienating, but in such a way as to emphasize its own sheer theatricality, thus drawing attention to the play as play, and to the actor as human after all.

Early in the Tretise, God is made a character in a brief dramatic fiction: like a master who slays a servant that "pleyde to homely with him," we are told, God tells us, "Pley not with me but pley with thy pere" (51, 55–56). In the York crucifixion, as already noted, Christ tells us explicitly that his suffering is beyond what we mere mortals can imagine; we are not his "pere." When Christ invites the Good Souls into eternal "joie and blisse" with him at the Last Judgment, however, he thanks them for their deeds of mercy to him: "yoe brought me of the beste / And made
my bedde full esyly” (297–98), he tells them, by attending to the physical, bodily needs of other human beings; that is, we are to treat our “peres” as Christ—to see his flesh in theirs, as in that of the actor who represents him onstage.

In The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, Nicholas Love upbraids the Wycliffite “heritykes” who,

presumptuosly leuyng vpon hir owne bodily wittes & kyndely reson, leue not þat holi doctours hauen tauht, & holy chirch determinede of þis blessee sacrament, bot falsly trowene & obstinately seyne þat it is brede in his kynde as it was before þe consecration, so þat þe substance of brede is not turnede in to þe substance of goddes body, bot duelleþ stille brede as it was before, bycause þat it semeþ so to alle his bodily wittes.\[42\]

The first of the two authors of the Tretise explicitly refers to the sacrament as “the precious body of Crist” (285–86), thus seeming to avoid this particular heresy. However, much the same heresy is evident in the assumption that theater cannot convey more than the mere flesh that is its medium. The Tretise assumes that, if one sees or desires an actor’s body, one cannot see or desire anything else which that body might signify, being unable to understand anything that is not empirically evident. Yet even Protestant orthodoxies demand some recognition of Christ in the breaking of the bread, a presence that is symbolic if not actual, like the presence of Christ in the human bodies of those around us. The body of Christ matters, as flesh.

In 1995, Garilyn Brune won the Emerging Erotic Artist Contest sponsored by the Tom of Finland Foundation for a painting called “Cocksuckers for Christ,” which shows a priest fellating Christ. Foundation President Durk Dehner writes:

A discussion amongst the Board of Directors specifically pertaining to “Cocksuckers for Christ” produced a variety of interpretations. One felt it was man ingesting the seed of God. Another saw it as man’s service to God. Yet another was a priest’s sexual perversion, thinking of Christ in a manner so degrading. My own personal view is that the priest is totally absorbed in his service, Christ’s erection signifies his humanness and that sexuality and humanity are connected.\[43\]
The Catholic Civil Rights League predictably deemed the work "a profound desecration, blasphemy and a symbol of hatred." In a sense, the painting literalizes what the authors of the Tretise suggest to be the chief danger of Passion plays, that audiences will look at a representation of the body of Christ and see only rising, arousing flesh. Still, I find the painting oddly unerotic. I see in it a sense of outrage—a protest, perhaps, against the hypocrisy of homosexual priests who publicly proclaim but privately do not practice sexual abstinence. However, I do not feel included here. Christ is looking at the priest—whom I neither identify with nor find physically attractive—rather than at the viewer; we as audience are not called to his bountiful lap. And because I do not feel called, or aroused, I will not come.

NOTES

2. The York Plays, ed. Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982) 33.434. All references to the York plays are to this edition, and will be given parenthetically in the text, by play and line number.
3. Clifford Davidson, ed., A Tretise of Miradis Pleyinge (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 96, ll. 112–14. All references to the Tretise are to this edition, and will be given parenthetically in the text by line number, unless otherwise indicated.
5. Davidson, Tretise, 7. The same association is made in his notes on this passage, as discussed later in this essay.
6. Ibid., 27.
7. The Tretise, which survives in only one manuscript copy, is generally considered to consist of two parts written by different persons; the text is generally referred to and treated as a Wycliffite document, although the first part, in Davidson's phrase, "has marks of being written by a priest who was not demonstrably heterodox" (4), notably—as discussed at the end of this essay—in regard to the host as being, not merely representing, "the precious body of Crist" (101).
8. The author here translates the Vulgate text of Tobit 3:14–17; see Davidson, Tretise, 141–42.
9. Lawrence Clopper, in an essay titled "Miracula and The Tretise of Miradis Pleyinge," Speculum 65 (1990): 878–905, points out that the term miracis is highly ambiguous. However, with Davidson and others (see Davidson, Tretise, 35n.4), I feel that the reference to "the pley of Cristis passioun" is clear enough to identify the tract's primary target as being the "corpus Christi" plays performed across England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,
only some texts and records for which survive, and any play that similarly attempts to represent biblical truth and characters.


12. Ibid., 7.

13. Ibid., 13.


22. Ibid., 125; cf. 31.


24. Christ is also twice hailed as “king comely” (25.491, 500) and once as “comely knyght” (25.514), as well as “lord louely” (25.494) and so forth.

25. The only other kissing in the entire play cycle is between Judas and Jesus (28.253) and between Abraham and Isaac (10.229), the latter being a fond farewell and blessing. Judas is said to have “a kene face vncomely to kys” (26.200).


34. Rambuss, Closet Devotions, 43–49.


36. Davidson, Tretise, 134.


38. Ibid., 374.


40. Jesus Christ Superstar was initially produced as a record in 1970; it was staged on Broadway a year later and filmed in 1973. The show continues to draw fire from fundamentalists; a quick search of the Internet pulled up two (undated) church-sponsored pamphlets condemning the show. Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice began writing their rock opera in 1968, in England, immediately after the abolition of the Lord Chamberlai’s office, and around the same time as John-Michael Tebelak first conceived what would become Godspell, with music by Stephen Schwartz, in the United States. Godspell was initially the subject of protests, but is now regularly staged by theater and church groups. As John R. Elliott Jr. has noted in his book Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), “one of the last plays to run afoul of the censor’s rules was A Man Dies, a modern version of the Passion set in working-class London” (109); the play was indeed licensed in 1966, after an initial refusal, “thus becoming the first post-medieval English play in which the figure of Christ was permitted to appear on the public stage” (109), despite a ruling that same year that “Christ could be represented only by ‘a bright light or a voice offstage’” (108).

41. Chester: Records of Early English Drama, ed. Lawrence M. Clopper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 247. For the “guildinge of little Gods face” in the Smiths’ pageant, see 67 and passim. The adult Christ’s face is likewise presumed to have been gilded throughout the cycle, as it was for the Corvisers’ or Shoemakers’ pageant (see 50), which included the episodes of Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper, the entry into Jerusalem and—uniquely—Jesus and the moneylenders in the Temple.

42. Nicholas Love’s Mirror, 227.

43. This text, quoted from the Tom of Finland Foundation Newsletter, can be found, with a copy of the painting itself, at http://members.hotbears.com/~alanandsteve/cocksuckers.html.

MEDIEVAL/POSTMODERN

HIV/AIDS AND THE TEMPORALITY OF CRISIS

STEVEN F. KRUGER

PERIODIZATION AND EXCLUSION

Margery [Kempe] lived during the Hundred Years War, the collapse of feudal systems, and the plague. Towns had walls; at night the gates shut. At the beginning of modernity the world and otherworld lay in shambles. Margery was an individual in a recognizable nightmare: the twentieth century will also be called a hundred years war. A simpler individual, she went by her first name except once before a high court. The same individual who now disintegrates. Inner life is a kind of greed, desire a form of personal profit. She pushes out of the flat pictorial plane into personality and suspense, illusion of escape, while I go back to the ruins of overall pattern and to the somber murmur of the already known.

ROBERT GLÜCK

One of the most productive insights of poststructuralist thought, and more specifically of queer theory, has been the recognition that normative regimes depend on the very terms they attempt to exclude: masculinity requires a devalued femininity and effeminacy for the maintenance of its power and stability; heterosexuality relies on a disavowed and ab-
jected queerness that continues to inhabit its margins. The process of fixing an identity or establishing a norm creates an outside characterized by all that is not allowable within normative identity. Repudiated, this outside is nonetheless necessary to that which disallows it, its presence maintained in order to make intelligible the boundaries its repudiation establishes. At the same time, this continuing presence, commanding attention (if only marginally) for what is supposedly beyond intelligibility, makes possible a disruption of the very entities created by its exclusion. The excluded and abjected haunt the borders of normalized categories, reminding us that these are constructed, not necessary or natural, and that they might, indeed, be defined otherwise—to include more or fewer or other qualities. Like Jacques Derrida’s specter, the excluded term serves as a projection point for what must be disavowed, “conjured away,” declared nonexistent, dead. But the process of projection itself calls the dead back into a certain life; the “conjuration” of the specter is always a “conjuring up” as much as it is a “conjuring away.”

As students of the Middle Ages have begun to recognize, such a poststructuralist and queer model of the construction of hegemonic terms might be useful for thinking, and troubling, processes of historical periodization, and particularly the establishment of the relation between a privileged modernity and that which the modern is thought, by its very “nature,” to exclude—the medieval, the primitive, the superstitious and irrational, the prescientific, and so forth. David Wallace sees “Renaissance critics” as “still generally content to locate the medium aevum as the far side of a paradigm shift that is never adequately explained and rarely even addressed but has always already happened.” Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, too, call our attention to “the fantasmatic figure of a modernity symmetrically and absolutely opposed to premodernity,” and they ask, in more specific relation to sexuality, “[t]o what extent . . . current histories of sexuality participat[e] in discourses of ‘enlightenment’—of which the notion of the Renaissance is itself an instance—that have sought, at various moments, to distinguish a darker, blinded, ‘other’ past from a more clear-sighted and splendid present.”

Or, as Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James Schultz recognize, “By banishing the medieval from modern discussions of sexuality, by assuming that the medieval subject ‘would not like it here,’ we attempt to reassure ourselves with a ‘myth of a heteronormative past and a queer modernity.’”
The modern explicitly defines itself in contradistinction to the medieval, but—despite modernity's claim to move beyond what preceded it—the medieval remains one of the crucial terms of its self-constitution and is thus available for its disruption. As Wallace notes, we might find a locus resistant to modern hegemonies under the sign of the “medieval”:

One particularly powerful set of terms has issued from the positive embrace of that which is framed pejoratively by the dominant culture (as, most famously, “queer”). Lower-case “medieval,” continually redefined as that which must be expelled from upper-case “Renaissance,” might similarly find cause for celebration precisely in the terms of its own supposed abjection.²

And, as Fradenburg and Freccero suggest, in a formulation evocative of Derrida’s spectrality: “The past may not be the present, but it is sometimes in the present, haunting, even if only through our uncertain knowledge of it, our hopes of surviving and living well.”² Of course, the ways in which the medieval inhabits the modern, the disruptions or resistances to modernity that the medieval might enable, are not necessarily liberatory or antihegemonic: witness how contemporary medieval studies has, in many ways, worked to support Eurocentric and conservative Christian agendas.

An analysis of periodization, at our present moment, has been rendered especially complex by claims for a postmodernity that would somehow put an end to the modern. As such claims gesture toward a new periodization—whether in the Marxist formulation of the postmodern as an expression of “late capitalism,” or in the anti-Marxist imagination of an “end of history,” or in poststructuralist definitions of new regimes of representation and communication—we must ask how the move to define a new era after, beyond, other than the modern, with its own possible hegemonies, might rewrite the relations between modernity and the medieval.³ At least two, contradictory, possibilities suggest themselves. One might imagine a conflation of the modern and the medieval within an undifferentiated past that, as a whole, becomes the other of postmodernity. Alternatively, one might see the self-conscious supersession of modernity as involving—as Robert Glück’s evocative positioning of the postmodern “I” of his text in relation to Margery Kempe might suggest—a return of sorts to that period, the medieval, against which
the modern has most insistently defined itself. In either case, the term of the medieval—at least as it has, however “inaccurately,” been preserved by modernity as part of its self-constitution—is crucial to an understanding of what is at stake in an emerging postmodernity.

The mechanisms of self-definition by exclusion and abjection tend to be most visible where an identity or norm is felt to be particularly threatened, and the move toward a postmodern supersession of modernity might be expected to produce certain strong defensive assertions of identity. This will be the case especially where “normal” experience undergoes an unwonted challenge, where the “everyday” is interrupted by some crisis. The goal of this essay is to examine the constructions of temporality in one contemporary crisis—that associated with HIV/AIDS—where issues of identity (sexual, racial, national, gender) have been particularly salient, and where, I will argue, there has been a consistent tendency to write HIV/AIDS out of a “proper” modernity. Ultimately, in pursuing this analysis, I am concerned to consider whether we might envision a different way of understanding our history, an alternative to a periodization based on schemas of exclusion and supersession, and one in which disturbing current phenomena such as the HIV/AIDS crisis might therefore not be so insistently subjected to a projection away from the present. My largest goal, then, is to suggest that historical work that questions the neat separation of medieval and (post)modern, disallowing the construction of a past that is simply or wholly other to modernity—and thus medievalist work that recognizes the complex dissonances and resonances of past(s) and present(s)—might play a crucial role in a thinking of the temporality of current crisis otherwise.

**Present (Medieval, Primitive) Plagues**

A biologist and two American physicians thought they recognized AIDS in the ancient Egyptian disease åãä, described in medical papyri of the pharaonic era. . . . John Gwilt, vice president of an American pharmaceutical company, has found an even more arbitrary precursor: according to him, AIDS was already brewing in the time of Moses, as witnessed by a description in the Book of Numbers. . . . A Marseille tropical disease expert wondered if the disease that ravaged Europe following the voyages of Columbus and that medical
historians regard as an acute form of treponematosis may actually have been an outbreak of AIDS, coming, even at that time, from the island of Hispaniola. Some aspects of fourteenth-century syphilis are indeed reminiscent of present-day AIDS, but it is impossible to confuse the two diseases. . . . In 1984 three Belgian physicians . . . considered the hypothesis that Erasmus, Rotterdam's celebrated humanist, was the first known casualty of AIDS.

Mirko D. Grmek

As is widely recognized, responses to HIV/AIDS have been crucially shaped by processes of othering, with a series of cordons sanitaires constructed around “risk groups”—gay men, intravenous drug users, and so on—and with HIV/AIDS always imagined, from whatever geopolitical point of view, as arising elsewhere. Less attended to have been the ways in which such processes operate temporally to remove HIV/AIDS not only from spatial and social proximity but also from a present, proximate moment.

Kathleen Biddick has recognized, in a very different context, the crucial temporal dimension to spatial mappings of difference, showing how medieval Christians worked “to translate the corporeal co-presence of Jews among whom they lived into a temporal absence.” We can recognize something similar in the contemporary processes of othering that have circulated around HIV/AIDS. From the moment it was identified as a distinct phenomenon in 1981, HIV/AIDS has been read as a break in modernity: the disease-free life seen to have been promised by “modern medicine” and medical technology is given the lie by an illness that is anything but modern, belonging to both the medieval world of “plague” and a “primitive” realm in which plagues are thought to have their contemporary origins. Of course, the vision of a life freed from infectious disease itself depends on a radical forgetting that is at one and the same time temporal and geopolitical—an erasure of the recent history of infectious disease (the 1918 influenza epidemic, to cite just one dramatic example) and an ignoring of radical discrepancies within the global deployment of medical technology (although certain diseases have, in theory, become preventable or curable, they most often remain, in practice, far from prevented or cured). Still, there has been the persistent tendency to see HIV/AIDS as an anachronistic irruption into the modern, a phenomenon that took the modern world by surprise because
its appearance so clearly reversed the modern movement toward eradicating disease.\textsuperscript{13}

The temporal distancing of HIV/AIDS from the present moment operates complexly and not wholly coherently in relation to the typical periodization of medieval, early modern, and modern. As the epigraph from Mirko Grmek's \textit{History of AIDS} suggests, HIV/AIDS may be associated as easily with ancient Egypt or a biblical moment as with the medieval, and as easily, again, with the early modern world of Columbus and Erasmus as with the fourteenth century. The crucial impulse, however, involves the treatment of HIV/AIDS as historically other, belonging not so much to our own time as to another, less advanced and rational, more precarious moment in human history: "The [tabloid] \textit{Globe} . . . ran a lengthy cover story [in 1983] saying that AIDS actually was part of King Tut's curse. . . . 'Either Tutankhamen died from the disease or it was placed in the tomb to punish those who might later defile his grave,' said a former San Diego coroner who dabbled in archeology."\textsuperscript{14}

The tendency to make HIV/AIDS somehow archaic is present not just in constructions like this that explicitly point to an earlier historical moment, but also in the geopolitical imaginings that, from a Western perspective, make HIV/AIDS essentially a Third World phenomenon. Here, we can see at work a dynamic like that Anne McClintock identifies as "anachronistic space": "According to this trope, colonized people—like women and the working class in the metropolis—do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographical space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency—the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive.'"\textsuperscript{15} Thus, HIV/AIDS has been consistently associated with Africa, construed as the "dark continent" (a sober, scholarly treatment like Grmek's does not hesitate to use this phrase), a place of strange sexual practices, a "primitive" world of "remote tribe[s]" that (in Randy Shilts's formulation) harbor unknown disease organisms set free into the wider (modern) world as Africa undergoes "rapid decolonialization" and "[p]opulation movements and changes in certain ancestral customs" (as Grmek would have it).\textsuperscript{16} In the literature on HIV/AIDS, "primitive" frequently and unselfconsciously describes Africa:

The earliest documented AIDS case was reported in the letters section of \textit{Lancet} on April 23, 1983. A brief letter from a Danish
communicable-disease doctor named Ib Bygbjerg told of a previously healthy Danish woman who worked as a surgeon in a primitive hospital in northern Zaire from 1972 to 1975. She had died from *Pneumocystis* in December 1977, Bygbjerg wrote, noting, "She could recall coming across at least one case of KS while working in northern Zaire, and while working as a surgeon under primitive conditions she must have been heavily exposed to blood and excretions of African patients."\(^{17}\)

Here, it is no mistake that the "earliest" case—closest to the origin and the essence of HIV/AIDS—is presented as an intrusion of the "primitive" into the modern. In its most radical movement, such thinking pushes toward seeing HIV/AIDS as so fully "primitive" a phenomenon as to be *prehuman*: the African origin hypotheses consistently depend on seeing HIV as originally a monkey virus transferred somehow to human populations.\(^{18}\)

It is not only Africa that is imagined as presenting an anachronistic survival of the "primitive" into the contemporary, and thus as especially to be associated with HIV/AIDS:

Surprises can come out of South America. Results obtained on testing the blood of aboriginal Amazonian people greatly perplexed researchers. . . . Was [HIV] endemic to the isolated Amerindian populations living on the margins of modern civilization?\(^{19}\)

A stark example is Thailand, a country whose sexual ecology is ideally suited to epidemic amplification. For centuries the male aristocracy of Thai society considered it their prerogative to have large numbers of wives and concubines.\(^{20}\)

Thai social practices, unchanged "for centuries," and an "aboriginal" South America, full of "surprises" for modernity, are here "ideally suited" to the preservation and transmission of HIV. And Western communities that have found themselves subject to HIV/AIDS are often strikingly presented as falling out of the First into the Third World, "dis[playing] the kind of stressed disease profile more typical of the poorer residents of Uganda or Bangladesh".\(^{21}\)
[In Friedman-Kien’s 1981 view, some American homosexuals in their own way might have reproduced, in their “back rooms” and with inadequate hygiene, the sanitary conditions of equatorial Africa. In the heart of the great American cities there may have been a “sexual third world.” Returning to a more civilized lifestyle and a little more propriety should suffice to nip this epidemic of poor people in the bud.]

He had frequented every sex club and bathhouse between the East River and the Pacific Ocean and had gathered enough venereal and parasitic diseases to make his medical chart look like that of some sixty-five-year-old Equatorial African living in squalor.

At the same time that HIV/AIDS is thus projected into pockets of “primitivity” thought to survive within the modern world, another, complementary, movement archaizes it by providing it with a “protohistory.” Epidemiological work that suggests that HIV might have long been endemic to humans, and that it has only recently been presented with the “ecological” conditions to become a pandemic, while in part opposed to theories of HIV/AIDS as a “new” phenomenon, shares with such theories an impulse toward distancing the origin of HIV/AIDS from the modern, conceived both as the contemporary moment and as the technologically advanced societies of the West. Both kinds of epidemiology have a tendency to evoke the medieval as closely linked to HIV/AIDS. Although the vision of Africa as a “dark continent” may only indirectly and unconsciously allude to a “dark ages” that would be the historical correlative to contemporary “primitivity,” conflation of an anachronistic Africa and a dark, premodern period does also occur more explicitly: thus, Grmek titles a discussion that poses the hypothesis of African origin against ideas that HIV/AIDS is first and foremost Western, “A Black Death or a White Plague” (148). And though Grmek sees no direct connection between “true plague” and HIV/AIDS, he does review the history of both “the grimly famous Black Death of fourteenth-century Europe” and “the English Sweate,” which first appeared in England around 1480, as part of his consideration of “the historical lesson of new diseases,” noting several parallels between these phenomena and HIV/AIDS (99, 102–3). He suggests that considering the question, “Why
did the plague bacillus,” which he identifies as “a disease of rodents,”
ever make incursions into human populations?” might help us under-
stand a similar move on the part of HIV from animals to humans (103).
And he draws a more direct connection between HIV/AIDS and “the
Sweate”: “Some physicians . . . thought it was somehow limited to the
British temperament . . . . This may have been a false impression or, like
AIDS in homosexuals, it may have had an approximate reliability only
during the first phase of the epidemic (ibid.).

The association of HIV/AIDS with the medieval has been most per-
sistent in the intractable appellation “plague,” assigned to AIDS even be-
fore its current name had been settled. “Gay plague” was a particularly
forceful, and stigmatizing, way of referring to AIDS in the early 1980s,
popular especially among Christian fundamentalists such as Jerry Fal-
well, but common, too, in the mainstream media.25 Although plague has
many associations—evoking all at once the Bible and Daniel Defoe and
Albert Camus—it calls to mind most directly bubonic plague and its
most striking outbreak, the fourteenth-century Black Death, “the most
deadly pandemic in all human history.”26 Although HIV/AIDS is not, in
any real sense, a “plague,” the name has continued to be widely used—
witness such titles as The Plague Years: A Chronicle of AIDS, the Epidemic
of Our Times, Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media, The
Slow Plague: A Geography of the AIDS Pandemic.27 Moreover, in the ten-
dency HIV/AIDS has had to bear stigma, it has been consistently associ-
ated with leprosy, another illness strongly associated with the medieval.28
Comparative historical work on HIV/AIDS and on the social phenomena
operating around it has often recurred to the Middle Ages as a privileged
site of study.29 Although, as Fradenburg and Freccero suggest, such work
might be powerful in (re)shaping current action regarding HIV/AIDS—
“That the plagues of the later Middle Ages were associated with sodom-
ites and Jews is crucial knowledge for AIDS activists, because it shows
that the repetitions of trauma, far from being the signs of something
sub- or ahistorical, are part of the changing work of history”30—it also
runs the risk of reinforcing the broad cultural impulse that, rather than
bring the significance of the past actively into the present, would cast
present crisis as part of an irretrievable past, and therefore as intractable
to contemporary interventions.

This impulse is especially legible, in the West, in the ways in which
the historical conjunction of HIV/AIDS and gay communities has been
treated. “Gay plague” has served not just as a name for AIDS but also
metonymically to refer to those sexual practices thought to "cause" AIDS: "The Alert Citizens of Texas [in 1983] inflamed local fears with their brochure 'The Gay Plague,' which provided detailed descriptions of bathhouses, rimming, and golden showers." Insofar as one originary point for HIV/AIDS is considered to be the gay liberation movement that followed Stonewall, there has been a consistent tendency to cast this as, like HIV/AIDS itself, somehow premodern—again, both "primitive" and medieval.

Gay liberation discourse itself has sometimes evoked the premodern as one means of oppositional self-definition: note, for instance, the naming of gay sexual spaces as "dungeons" and "infernos," the ways in which certain gay styles deploy archaism and anachronism (as in leather regalia's mixture of the cowboy, the [postmodern] policeman, and the premodern warrior), and the self-conscious claiming of a precivilizational status by an author such as Geoff Mains in the "celebration of leather-sexuality" he titles *Urban Aboriginals.* But gay sex has also been consistently stigmatized by homophobic associations with (psychological and cultural) underdevelopment, "primitivity," "barbarism," and animality, and these associations have been mobilized during the HIV/AIDS crisis particularly forcefully around sexual practices (even those like fist-fucking with no direct link to HIV transmission) and institutions (especially bathhouses) imagined as "responsible" for the epidemic.

Most disturbingly, recent gay rethinkings of the culture of 1970s sexual liberation—rethinkings that have everything to do with the intervening experience of HIV/AIDS—make extensive use of these same stigmatizing constructions. Brad Gooch's novel, *The Golden Age of Promiscuity,* might stand for a whole set of fictional rewritings of sexual liberation. Chronicling Sean's largely emotionless move from sexual experience to sexual experience, the novel consistently presents gay sex, and its consequences, as medieval and "primitive." Sexual experimenters are, as in Mains, "urban aboriginals"—but here also "possessed... like a devil" (191). At one point, rubbing Ben-Gay all over his body, "Sean felt a horrific burning that made him begin to howl on the floor, bleating like a sheep, crying out, barking, snorting. He was being turned into an animal," an experience compared, too, to "the twenty-four-hour trances used by the Balinese in the mountains to undergo transformation into wild beasts" (209). Although here, a primitivity that is both racialized and bestial characterizes gay sex, elsewhere, the characterization depends more specifically on the medieval. The loft in which a porn film is shot
contains “instruments redolent of the Spanish Inquisition” (192). Sean’s first experience with sexually transmitted diseases leads to treatment that he sees as “a medieval Inquisition of the insides of his body” (109). Soon after, in a bathhouse, he encounters the doctor who has treated him, transformed into an emblem of promiscuous, drug-riddled sex; in this tableau, sexual contact merges with medical technology (in a prolepsis of HIV/AIDS) at the same time that the whole scene replays an ancient story of violent punishment:

There among the human intertwinings in the orgy room stood a monumental Dr. Bennett, nude with poppers in both his nostrils, dominating a relief in which three other men were all over his body, like the marble snakes of the statue of Laocoön Sean had seen in the Vatican Museum, though in the original the dynamic was of resistance on the part of the main figure rather than indulgence. All those about him were similarly hooked up to vials, bottles, soaked handkerchiefs. Tubes might as well have been looped out of his nostrils into their anuses and out of their anuses through each other’s mouths. (109-10)

Later, fist-fucking evokes a reflection on “Penetration and death”—again, reminiscent in advance of AIDS—that is explicitly Dantesque: “To penetrate the dark tunnels was to possess them: pink kidneys, tan skin, celadon-green layers of muscle, black empty spaces. The way out of Hell was through the anus of the Devil, a mouth exhaling bodies like pebbles onto the shores of Purgatory” (185).

The whole trajectory of The Golden Age of Promiscuity leads Sean to a moment of choice. Involving himself in a master/slave relationship, he is brought close to death in a scene that strongly emphasizes regression, a backward movement out of the present that describes Sean’s whole prior life: “All along he’d felt he’d been moving back up the birth canal, as when a film is shown backwards in fast motion” (258). Saved from death, Sean returns to his life in New York, going again to gay bars like the (again, Dantesque) “Ninth Circle” (260), but the novel ends, in a conversionary chapter titled “U-Turn,” by blocking Sean’s “regressive” reentry into his former life. Finally, and for the first time, Sean falls in love. And in the novel’s final scene, set in one more gay club, the Anvil, where “The mood was Transylvanian mixed with Wagnerian mixed with Village People” (296), Sean finds, as he kisses his lover Willie, “kindness,
knowledge, love, sarcasm, doubt, happiness, incredible idealism” (301). At exactly the same moment, he turns away from the larger gay scene here represented—in Gooch’s most explicit gesture toward the impending HIV/AIDS crisis—by Gaetan Dugas, “Patient Zero,” the person who, in an imaginative epidemiology developed especially fully by Shilts, is fantasized as “the person who brought AIDS to North America” and whom Gooch, echoing Shilts, makes “the kind of gay boy whom everyone seemed to find attractive except [Sean]” (298). Kissing Willie, “Out of the corner of his eye, Sean shot a look sideways towards the crowd, animated by the natural anesthetic of operatic decadence. Gaetan was crowding his view with blond hairs plastered over his forehead in a Caligulan pattern of golden ivy. The music had turned into an unemotional freak show. / Sean felt a chill” (301). With this, the novel ends, presenting one final image of an anesthetic, decadent, unemotional, freaky gay world, associated here retrospectively with the cruelties of ancient Rome and prospectively with HIV/AIDS personified as the Caligulan Gaetan Dugas.

What is at stake in such a depiction of 1970s gay liberation is, quite simply, contemporary gay identity. How to reclaim gayness from its strong associations in the popular imagination with HIV/AIDS and with a promiscuous sexuality identified as the origin of disease? A writer such as Gooch returns to the 1970s to repudiate a prior vision of gay, as that vision has been reshaped retrospectively by the experience of HIV/AIDS: this was gay, Gooch says, but it is not gay any longer—or at least it need not be. Such a move accepts, and reinforces, the homophobic view that gay sex was always, somehow, doomed to extinction, was always already archaic, primitive, past. For Gooch, the route to a gayness that might be acceptable as modern, living and present, and not irremediably associated with an HIV/AIDS conflated with death, is to write the gay past as fully abandoned, valueless except as it teaches what gay should not be. The same is true in a “nonfiction” book such as Gabriel Rotello’s Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men, which sees gay sexual practices of the 1970s as so extreme as to separate them even from those of the most archaic and primitive societies. Noting that “Throughout history the voluntary control of sexuality has been a major preoccupation of all religions, all cultures, all peoples” (222), that “Every society on record has attempted to channel sexual desire in ways that promote stability” (ibid.), and that “All societies from small tribal groups to modern industrial civilizations, have moderated sexual behavior through a system that provides
direct benefits for those who exercise sexual restraint” (250), Rotello implicitly characterizes “promiscuous” gay communities, lacking (in his view) “sexual restraint,” as wholly outside the social. This has led, he argues, to the ecological catastrophe of HIV/AIDS, and the only way for gay men out of what Rotello calls “suspended extinction” (208)—a consignment to a permanent state of pastness—is a full change in sexual culture. Although Rotello claims to make no moral judgment here, but simply to present a “biological” argument, the effect of his presentation is much like that of Gooch’s novel: to have a present and a future, the gay sexual past must be made wholly past and a new sexual regime instituted. Certainly, HIV/AIDS calls for a rethinking of sexuality (and not just gay sexuality). But one might expect that rethinking to be most effective insofar as it incorporates and acknowledges, rather than throws out, a generation’s complex (and, of course, not simply “promiscuous”) experiences of sex. What Rotello imagines, however, is a gay sexuality as little different as possible from straight sexuality (he especially advocates marriage and child-rearing as ways of “encourag[ing] gay men to adopt a culture of sexual restraint and responsibility” [254–55]). And his motive here is explicitly not just to prevent further HIV transmission in gay communities but also to gain “the social acceptance of homosexuality itself” (283). Only through giving up anything that might be read as outside the norm can gayness become, in Rotello’s view, truly a part of the social world; otherwise, it must be consigned to the antisocial and as such must be, like the gay world of the pre-AIDS 1970s Rotello constructs, extinct.

**Future/Past**

*Influenza was the last of the classic pestilences; AIDS, both unpredicted and unpredictable within the framework of the old nosology, is the first of the postmodern plagues.*

**Mirko D. Grmek**

HIV/AIDS, of course, cannot be constructed wholly *outside* modernity. Associated in part with technological advances in medical treatment (the widespread availability of blood transfusions, the successful development of blood products such as Factor VIII for the treatment of hemophilia), with Third World urbanization, and with movements of “sex-
ual liberation" and a “drug culture” both linked in certain ways to the “progressive” politics of the 1960s and 1970s, HIV/AIDS is arguably not so much an anomalous intrusion into modern life and health as it is an outgrowth of modernity, as even those writers most eager to cast HIV/AIDS outside the modern have recognized. In Rotello’s formulation: “Then in the sixties and early seventies came a series of revolutions affecting what is sometimes called the ‘socioecology’ of the world. A huge increase in urbanization. A revolution in the use of blood transfusions and blood products. An explosion in the use of injection drugs. A sexual revolution. A gay revolution” (20–21). But the more HIV/AIDS comes to be associated with movements of “modernization,” the greater the impulse to distance it from the here and now. In part, this is accomplished through the means already outlined, through a denial that rests on the deployment of etiological narratives: AIDS is constructed as most “essentially” connected both to a gay sexuality released, in the 1970s, from “civilized” repression and to an African realm in which viruses “breed” and where sexuality, including heterosexuality, is somehow “primitive.” The association of AIDS with modern medical technologies or social movements is made secondary to such narratives of origin, and thus serves ultimately only to confirm how the modern has been corrupted by that which historically precedes it. Indeed, Rotello follows his discussion of the “revolutions” that led to HIV/AIDS immediately by a review of both the African origin theory and the idea that “AIDS is an old disease in humans” (30).

In addition, in a move that might at first seem contradictory but is in fact complementary to such affiliations of HIV/AIDS with the past, the crisis is subjected to a projection into the future: HIV/AIDS comes to be closely associated with postmodernity. Features of the modern that nonetheless seem somehow inappropriately to exceed the limits of modernity—a too rapid urbanization, a too highly technological culture, a too liberated sexuality, an ease of mobility that threatens social stability—come to be associated with HIV/AIDS and then dissociated from the truly modern, that which would enable a maintenance of the status quo. A postmodern HIV/AIDS is seen to arise from a modernity taken too far, into a future-modern that is precisely modernity’s end.

This projection of HIV/AIDS into the future operates particularly strongly by means of millennial and apocalyptic imaginations, and not just in the virulent rhetoric of the religious right. Novels by gay men
such as Jed A. Bryan’s *A Cry in the Desert*, Toby Johnson’s *Plague: A Novel about Healing*, Marty Rubin’s *The Boiled Frog Syndrome: A Novel of Love, Sex and Politics*, Tim Barrus’s *Genocide: The Anthology*, Geoff Mains’s *Gentle Warriors*, and N. A. Diaman’s *Private Nation* make HIV/AIDS central to dystopian futures involving, alongside projections concerning the pandemic, political conspiracies, concentration camps, ecologically devastated landscapes, the demise of civilization as we know it.¹³ Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* represents, in *Part One: Millennium Approaches*, an impending millennium that would involve the cessation of movement and time and whose appropriate “prophet” would be a person with AIDS, Prior Walter. *Part Two: Perestroika* in part reverses or redirects the millennial impulse into a modern politics of “progress” and “More Life,” but the association between HIV/AIDS and the apocalyptic and eschatological remains strong: Prior returns to life and progress only after a visit to a desolate Heaven, and the play’s other person with AIDS, Roy Cohn, is last seen on his way to Hell.¹⁴ In nonfictional considerations, too, the apocalyptic associations of HIV/AIDS are strong, and these often include comparisons to other modern phenomena—such as nuclear war—imagined as capable of bringing modernity, and the world as we know it, to an end. Grmek suggests that “A profound analogy exists between the process by which the AIDS epidemic came into being and one which, by exceeding a critical mass, touches off an atom bomb.”²¹ Rotello, whose book, after all, is subtitled “AIDS and the *Destiny* of Gay Men,” several times uses apocalyptic terms to describe sexual practices that he feels further the transmission of HIV: “the picture described by [Eric] Rofes [of a San Francisco sex club, Blow Buddies] is of a microbial disaster area waiting to explode” (272);²² “The question is, must gay men always be so much *more* promiscuous [than other populations] that our behavior will inevitably spiral out of control, leading to epidemic disasters?” (222). Although Rotello answers “no” to his own question, he here explicitly poses gay sexual behavior as an apocalyptic “biological self-destruction” in need of “rescue” by the conservative, life-preserving forces of “modern science” (ibid.). At the conclusion of his book, Rotello imagines two possible futures: “On the one side is a vista of pain, entangled with self-hatred, despair, endless infection, and death. On the other a vision in which homosexual people accept themselves and are accepted by others for who they are” (290). Here, the choice is between an apocalyptic future of uncontrolled HIV/AIDS, motivated by the failure of gay men to
change their sexual behavior, and a future of political success in which gay people finally gain true modern citizenship.

Explanations of HIV/AIDS as "unmodern," whether because of its supposed affinities with a primitive past or a bleak future, share with each other the desire to place AIDS elsewhere, and thus to maintain the purity, and health, of the here and now. Indeed, future-oriented thinking regarding HIV/AIDS is closely affiliated with attempts to cast AIDS as an intrusion of a premodern, medieval or primitive, moment into modernity: apocalyptic and millennial discourses themselves often evoke an end that is a return to a moment prior to civilization, as in the description (on its back cover) of Diaman's *Private Nation* as set in a future that is both "postindustrial" and a return to the "dark ages." As in much science fiction about a postdisaster future, the dystopian landscape of a novel such as Diaman's, or Barrus's *Genocide,* represents a return to a precivilizational and often explicitly medieval state, though certain remnants of modern technological advance may survive.

A slippage between the modernity of HIV/AIDS and its archaic or futuristic qualities tends to characterize even writing deeply aware of the complexity of the HIV/AIDS crisis and its temporality. Stephen Schecter begins his essay "What Makes AIDS a Modern Disease?" by emphasizing precisely what is not modern:

At once modern, not only in the sense of contemporaneous but also in the historical sense that has shaped modernity, [AIDS] also suggests features that are not modern: archaic, retrograde, the backlash against modernity and the sense of being left behind—hence the hasty overcoming, Nietzsche's route to national socialism—yet, possibly, too, something else, what some would call postmodern, the most contemporaneous of all, one-dimensional, dynamic, the will to total power.63

And Schecter follows this essay with a companion piece, titled "But Also a Postmodern One," that begins, revealingly, with reference to the medieval:

"It is hard to understand how AIDS can be at once an occult phenomenon, the object of medieval rumors, and simultaneously represent a big, televised spectacle, rich in aftershocks."

So wrote Alain Emmanuel Dreuilhe in *Corps à corps,* the account
of his personal struggle with AIDS. Indeed, it is hard, but it is precisely that juxtaposition that leads some authors to describe contemporary reality as postmodern. . . . [Postmodernism here] is seen . . . as the final unfolding of one side of modernity, that which links up with the more archaic forms of repression.  

Discussion of the modernity of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Schecter is thus as much, or more, about that which is not modern but rather both archaic and postmodern. Although more thoughtful than many other treatments, Schecter's thus also participates in the consistent tendency to find the temporal locus of HIV/AIDS elsewhere.

THINKING THE END OF THE END

In two weeks and twelve hours, Sniffles will die. The change will be almost too slight to detect—from his viewpoint, at least. Life will be dark gray by that stage, and death will just smudge it a little. That's a guess, need I say. His passing away will be a much bigger deal for the hospice's staff. Since Sniffles's family is untraceable, his remains will be their hot potato. Luckily there's a standard procedure. One morning the clone will make his rounds, open Sniffles's door, walk in, and the boy will look empty. Then some bureaucratic stuff will occur. Then the hospice will have him cremated. Then one of its lesser employees will drive the ashes out to Pacific Palisades and pour them over a cliff.

DENNIS COOPER

The displacement of HIV/AIDS into both past and future time occurs in the very structures of the language used to depict it. In this passage from Dennis Cooper's novel Guide, as in much other writing about HIV/AIDS, the verbal constructions operate in such a way that the claim of present-tense narration—to describe an action now, as it emerges—is contradicted by its fusion with a future tense that presents, as known, an action logically unknowable in the present. Such a temporality, with its denial of the contingency of present and future, reflects the consistent Western understanding of HIV/AIDS as fatal, as carrying with it an inexorable destiny. Such an understanding is clearly related to the impulse to make HIV/AIDS, as pandemic and crisis, either (both) an archaic phenomenon "properly" consigned to a past moment or (and) a "postmodern
plague,” only “improperly” intruding on a present modernity. Understood as invariably fatal, HIV/AIDS comes to be identified simultaneously with a future and a past. The future that is death is made to characterize the person with HIV/AIDS even while s/he is alive; this future death defines life, in the here and now, as already past. In the process, the possibility of presentness, of a living with HIV/AIDS that might be undetermined and unpredictable, evaporates.

In a historical text such as Shilts’s *And the Band Played On*, this future/present temporality is transposed into an equally troubling form: a knowledge of what was to come is presented in the past as future prediction, a prediction that will necessarily be confirmed, since the once-future events it points to are, at the moment of writing, already over. From Shilts: “If he did not have AIDS now, Gary [Walsh] knew, he was certainly about to get it and there was nothing he could do except wait.”47 Of course, Shilts knows, as he writes, that Gary Walsh will become ill and will die, since these events have already occurred. But did Gary Walsh really know, in the moment that Shilts sees retrospectively, his future? Does HIV/AIDS really deny contingency, unpredictability, to the present moment, making of the present a necessary future? Might we not imagine (must there not have been) someone like Gary Walsh, who “knew” (imagined) “he was . . . about to get it,” but didn’t?

The projection of future certainty back into the past—and into the minds of characters supposedly experiencing an uncertain present—operates repeatedly in Shilts to make the whole history of the AIDS crisis seem already decided in advance. Shilts suggests in his Prologue: “The timing of [American] awareness [about AIDS] . . . reflected the unalterable tragedy at the heart of the AIDS epidemic: By the time America paid attention to the disease, it was too late to do anything about it. . . . The tide of death that would later sweep America could, perhaps, be slowed, but it could not be stopped.”48 The apocalyptic strain in Shilts’s language here is no mistake: the first part of *And the Band Played On* is called “Behold, a Pale Horse,” and has an epigraph from Revelation (6:8). Indeed, the future/present temporality of writing and thinking about AIDS—whether applied to individuals or to the whole course of the epidemic—functions apocalyptically, to “shew . . . things which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1).

One might expect, at the current moment, with treatments for HIV illness increasingly successful, that the idea of “living with HIV/AIDS”—living in an uncertain, contingent, and ongoing present—might begin
more successfully to challenge or replace apocalyptic formulations. On the contrary, however, a future/present temporality, and an associated apocalypticism, strongly reasserted themselves in the late 1990s. Rather than think the current moment in its full contingency—after all, the new treatments work differently for different individuals, are available not at all for the bulk of people with AIDS, and have unpredictable long-term effects and efficacy—public discourse most strikingly presents this moment as one end replacing another, with the inexorable end that AIDS signifies being overcome by another sort of inexorable end.

An article by Andrew Sullivan published in the New York Times Magazine in November 1996 mobilizes all the temporal tropes about HIV/AIDS that we have so far considered. Announced, on the cover of the magazine, as “When AIDS Ends,” the article’s title, inside the magazine, is grander: “When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic.” These titles gesture simultaneously toward the future and the past: “When AIDS Ends,” though a present-tense construction, operates with future force (“when AIDS ends, it will be like this . . .”); “When Plagues End,” also in the present tense, operates with a generalizing force that makes it point to both past and future (“when plagues end, it generally works like this . . .”). The gesture toward the past is strengthened by the use of the word plague, and the metaphor of “twilight” evokes a Wagnerian “Dämmerung,” that liminal moment when the end has not yet come but is nonetheless inevitable. Already, then, the article’s frame participates in a disjunct, apocalyptic temporality, evoking a future with the certainty used to describe the past.

The essay itself begins by reconfirming a sense of the fatality of HIV/AIDS: in recounting a friend’s death, Sullivan returns to an earlier moment, and this movement into the past operates—as in Shilts—not to reconstruct uncertainty but to charge the past through and through with anticipations of an inexorable future: “he knew something was about to happen. . . . The glance conveyed a complete sense of finality, the subtlest but clearest sign that it was, as far as he was concerned, over” (52, 54). But Sullivan ends this familiar story of the fatality of HIV/AIDS with a twist, suggesting “that this ordeal as a whole may be over” (54), and he goes on to particularize the “good news” (52, 54) of the end of AIDS, news that he couches in a familiar future/present tense. Talking about the remission of his own HIV illness, he notes: “In the past six months, I have begun to believe I will live a normal life” (76). And look-
ing at the larger picture of the epidemic, he suggests: “A difference between the end of AIDS and the end of many other plagues: for the first time in history, a large proportion of the survivors will not simply be those who escaped infection, or were immune to the virus, but those who contracted the illness, contemplated their own deaths and still survived” (58). Here, even as HIV/AIDS is conflated with other, past “plagues,” its anticipated end becomes historically unique; it moves toward a future place outside of history—indeed, toward a millennial (almost a resurrectional) moment of survival through and past death.

In his recent work, Jacques Derrida has suggested that declarations of ends operate not as constative but as performative speech acts, wishfully attempting to call into being the situations they claim to describe. This is a powerful way to read the apocalyptic language that has circulated throughout the AIDS crisis—as declaring the “end of queerness” (gayness, injecting drug use, African heterosexuality, etc.) through the agency of a so-called plague. In one sense, an essay such as Sullivan’s operates to develop an apocalyptic counterdiscourse, a (wishful) performative enacting now not gay extinction but gay survival past the end.

Apocalyptic formulations in the Christian tradition posit not a universal destruction, but selective destruction and preservation, salvation and damnation. What seems to have changed recently in the AIDS crisis enables a writer such as Sullivan to transfer at least some of those previously marked for destruction (in punitive understandings of AIDS) into the winners’ category. Thus, Sullivan structures his essay in part around reversals. “People I had seen hobbling along, their cheekbones poking out of their skin, their eyes deadened and looking down, were suddenly restored into some strange spectacle of health, gazing around as amazed as I was to see them alive” (60). Sullivan counterbalances the opening story of Patrick’s death with the anecdote of another friend’s, Greg’s, miraculous survival.

Such reversals do not, however, simply operate as wishful attempts to put an end to HIV/AIDS; rather, in Sullivan’s presentation, they—like earlier, and explicitly punitive and homophobic, apocalyptic formulations—understand HIV/AIDS still as a transformative force with the power to put an end to life. Sullivan’s account of Greg’s and others’ return to health does not in fact abandon the idea that AIDS equals death, though it transfers the meaning of death from a literal to a metaphoric realm: “I’ve become used to Greg’s describing the contours of what he
calls his 'second life.' . . . The successive physical and material losses of his illness stripped him, he recalls, of everything he once had, and allowed him, in a way that's unique to the terminally ill, to rebuild himself from scratch" (ibid.). For those who have not literally died in the AIDS epidemic, AIDS effects a transformation of self that is, here, still seen as a death—and more specifically, in Sullivan's treatment, the death of a particular kind of gay man's self with a concomitant rebirth into a new future.

Sullivan makes Greg's survival not simply the effect of changes in medical treatment. More important in this account is a whole moralized understanding of the course of Greg's prior illness. Sullivan reports Greg reflecting on his "second life" and saying: "'You don't squeak under the bottom wire unless you're meant to.' And I feel that there's this enormous responsibility on me that I've never felt before" (61). Sullivan follows this immediately with a generalization that casts Greg as emblematic gay man:

Responsibility is, perhaps, an unusual word for Greg to be using, and until AIDS it was not one usually associated with homosexuality. . . . This was the Faustian bargain of the pre-AIDS closet: straights gave homosexuals a certain amount of freedom; in return, homosexuals gave away their self-respect. But with AIDS, responsibility became a central, imposing feature of gay life. Without it, lovers would die alone or without proper care. Without it, friends would contract a fatal disease because of lack of education. Without it, nothing could be done to stem the epidemic's wrath. (Ibid.)

In this formulation, what allows gay survival has nothing to do with medicine, but rather with social changes forced by the epidemic. These, for Sullivan, are twofold—first, the newfound responsibility sketched here, "creating] bonds and loyalties and solidarities that homosexuals had never experienced before" (56); second, he sees "AIDS and its onslaught imposing] a form of social integration that may never have taken place otherwise" (ibid.):

AIDS has dramatically altered the psychological structure of homophobia. By visiting death upon so many, so young, AIDS ripped apart the notion of subterranean inviolability that forms
such a potent part of the fear of homosexuals. As tens of thousands of sons and uncles and brothers and fathers wasted away in the heart of America, the idea that homosexuals maintained a covert power melted into a surprised form of shock and empathy. . . . Death, it turned out, was a powerfully universalizing experience. Suddenly, acquiescence in gay-baiting and gay-bashing became, even in its strongholds, inappropriate at a moment of tragedy. The victimization of gay men by a disease paradoxically undercut their victimization by a culture. There was no longer a need to kick them, when they were already down. (Ibid.)

I will not attempt here a full analysis of this odd, factually incorrect, and sinister rewriting of history—including the comparison Sullivan draws at some length between HIV/AIDS and the Holocaust, with the latter read as “in one hideous swoop . . . help[ing] destroy the myth that Jews were somehow all powerful” (ibid.). I want here to emphasize the ways in which his account of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its supposed supersession is an account of both gay men’s maturation and their assimilation, just as, in Rotello’s very different account, the only way to avoid the renewal of HIV/AIDS and to guarantee gay men’s acceptance in society is through their throwing off the older patterns of their lives, identified as a sexual liberation leading inexorably to “extinction.” A previously irresponsible group of social misfits learns, through hardship, to behave responsibly. Simultaneously—dying, stripped of power—they can be recognized as human and integrated into society. Sullivan’s account of gay men’s experience of HIV/AIDS is ultimately an account of a conversion that guarantees full social assimilability.

What Sullivan presents, then, is not so much a reversal of the homophobic apocalypticism that makes HIV/AIDS “just” retribution against immoral (or irresponsible) behavior as an acceptance of apocalypticism—with the added claim that gay men have moved past their prior selves. Somehow (almost, perhaps, miraculously) the moment of gay overcoming of irresponsibility—both in the story of Greg’s illness and recovery, and in the larger account of the epidemic’s positive effects on gay men—coincides with the moment of new treatments, so that Sullivan is able to conflate physical health with a newfound moral and social health.

If apocalyptic understandings in the Western tradition, as Derrida would argue, depend on the declaration of an end that is also a fantasy of a new beginning (an end of Judaism that allows the birth of Christianity;
an end of Marxism that establishes a new world order; an end of queerness that will result in the reassertion of "traditional values"), Sullivan's formulation of the end of HIV/AIDS itself declares the death of a pre-AIDS gayness and the advent of a post-AIDS world in which to be gay means to be fully assimilable—in Sullivan's own phrase, "virtually normal." And this millennial vision of a post-AIDS world further depends on a willful forgetting of people with HIV/AIDS who continue to get sick and die and who may not be easily integrable into mainstream society—a continued move to project certain lives into an irretrievable past. Not surprisingly, these are "social misfits" in the First World, and the Third World as a whole, people whose lives are unassimilable to the "normality" of the modern. Thus, Sullivan draws a line of demarcation between gay men, who have gained an "awkward [societal] acceptance," and "other victims of the plague": "With inner-city blacks and Latinos, with intravenous drug users, there was no similar cultural transformation, no acceleration of social change" (56). And he notes, in a disclaimer toward the beginning of his essay:

Most official statements about AIDS . . . do not, of course, concede that this plague is over. And, in one sense, obviously, it is not. Someone today will be infected with H.I.V. The vast majority of H.I.V.-positive people in the world, and a significant minority in America, will not have access to the expensive and effective new drug treatments now available. And many Americans—especially blacks and Latinos—will still die. Nothing I am saying here is meant to deny that fact, or to mitigate its awfulness. (54)

But the remainder of Sullivan's essay in fact serves as a denial of just these facts. It is, after all, only "in one sense" that the experience of "the vast majority" matters at all to Sullivan's argument. In the most important senses—that is, as HIV/AIDS directly concerns himself and people like him—Sullivan is quite prepared to declare an end.

Despite any disclaimers attached to such a declaration, it operates with a certain material violence. The understanding of HIV/AIDS since the early 1980s as an inexorable end, with a temporality resolutely denied presentness, has consistently pushed toward the erasure of the lives of people with HIV/AIDS from public recognition and discourse. The declaration that an end has now come to HIV/AIDS—though this
may seem to present itself in less problematic terms, as a relieved declaration of victory over HIV/AIDS—pushes just as insistently toward a forgetting of those who may be unassimilable to “normality,” and those who may not benefit from the proclaimed end. Like millennial declarations more generally, this one functions to separate the saved and the damned—and, in Sullivan’s formulation, all people with HIV/AIDS who are not being helped by the newer drug treatments fall into the latter category. While some people receive treatments effective at least for the moment, others simply disappear from view.

**The Future and Past of a Present**

[T]he moderns indeed sense time as an irreversible arrow, as capitalization, as progress. . . . As Nietzsche observed long ago, the moderns suffer from the illness of historicism. They want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with the past. . . . But are we as far removed from our past as we want to think we are? No, because modern temporality does not have much effect on the passage of time. The past remains, therefore, and even returns. Now this resurgence is incomprehensible to the moderns. Thus they treat it as the return of the repressed. They view it as an archaism. “If we aren't careful,” they think, “we’re going to return to the past; we’re going to fall back into the Dark Ages.”

*Bruno Latour*

The point in analyzing the complicated ways in which HIV/AIDS has been displaced from a current moment within modernity is not to insist that HIV/AIDS be resituated in its “proper” place as modern rather than pre- or postmodern. Doing so simply reaffirms a rigid periodization in which the present age stands somehow firmly separated from what preceded and what might supersede it, and it is precisely such a rigid separation that enables the temporal displacements of crisis from the current moment. But how to intervene in a dynamic that seems so effortlessly, so “naturally,” to make the temporality of crisis a series of historical projections, displacements, and denials?

In part, the response must firmly situate itself in the present moment, resisting the tendency to displace HIV/AIDS, or any crisis, elsewhere. The activist insistence that we attend to HIV/AIDS here and now
has arisen in part from a recognition (though not always explicit) of the significance of temporality in the crisis—the emphasis, since the early 1980s, that HIV/AIDS does not simply "equal" death, that we are living with, not dying from, HIV/AIDS; and, more recently, the insistence, in light of declarations of the "end of HIV/AIDS," that, despite the improvements in treatment for some, the crisis is far from over. In the spring of 1997, for instance, ACT UP/New York organized a series of events to commemorate its tenth anniversary and to emphasize the need for continued activist work. But such activist resistance to dominant constructions is, of course, not immune to those constructions: ACT UP's actions were greeted by press coverage that attempted to turn the insistence on renewed action instead into the declaration of the demise, the pastness, of HIV/AIDS activism. The headlines in the New York Times were "Act Up Doesn't Much, Anymore" and "A Decade-Old Activism of Unmitigated Gall Is Fading," and the accompanying story emphasized that "the organization is a shadow of its former self."  

Is there any route to an activist engagement with present crisis that is not so easily subject to a countermovement of temporal displacement? Here, perhaps, a historicist intervention would be useful. An analysis of the ways in which temporal constructions have operated during the years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, as well as a consideration of the ways in which activist responses to other crises have been contained (in part, through declarations of their pastness—as with the recent rush to declare Marxism's death), might provide a certain ground for the reaffirmation of work in the present. A history, that is, that considers critically both the years of the HIV/AIDS crisis and its broader historical placement might provide the basis for a resistance to the impulse to remove HIV/AIDS from attention. But, as I hope the preceding discussion has suggested, a certain historicism—represented here by the work of Shilts, Rotello, and Grmek—depends on, or at least does not challenge, constructions that displace HIV/AIDS from the current moment.  

What is needed is a different sort of historicism, one where periodization might not operate so efficiently to segregate time from time and where, therefore, phenomena in the present might be connected to both the past and the future without being thereby projected into a wholly alien moment. Walter Benjamin provides one model for such historical work in the contrast he develops between "historicism" and "materialist historiography." For Benjamin, "historicism" presents history as
a "continuum" in which time is filled with events that, unidirectionally, succeed one another: here, crises become part of an inevitable course of history in which there is no possibility for intervention. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, makes a "tiger's leap into the past" that allows the historical continuum to be "rent," the resonances between a current and a past crisis—unresolved, still calling out to the present for urgent attention—to "crystallize" into "a configuration pregnant with tensions," and "a specific era" to be blasted "out of the homogeneous course of history." Such work might provide "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" that would be, simultaneously, revolutionary work in the present, toward the future. Thus, as I have suggested elsewhere, the political work of Kushner's Angels in America might be read as a Benjaminian intervention into the HIV/AIDS crisis:

Asking how to move forward in a world whose present and past are both deeply traumatic, it insists that whatever "painful progress" (2:144) might be possible will be achieved not by moving beyond trauma but by grappling with a traumatic present and by recalling past traumas as a way of being released from these, just as the play itself grapples with the crises of its present moment (AIDS, environmental disaster, Reaganism) and reinvents the vexed, complex, and disturbing elements of the past (McCarthyism, the Mormon experiment, family histories [including, for Prior Walter, a medieval history]) in order to facilitate a movement beyond these into an uncertain but promising future.

Rather than cast the crisis out of the present, making it most "properly" part of some prior moment with no significance for the present, such work brings the past to bear on the present in such a way that the presentness of the crisis, with its complex inheritances from and resonances with the past, may be most fully felt.

Precisely that which we might most wish to disavow as archaic, "primitive," premodern, medieval, and as queer, or to imagine as belonging only to some threatening future, is what we need to attend to if the present is not simply to retain its current shape, a normative structure buttressed by exclusions. There is, as Judith Butler's work consistently suggests, no hope of finding a standpoint fully outside that structure, but a historical
awareness like Benjamin's that does not work simply to normalize the shape of the present might be one means toward disrupting current hegemonies. As Derrida's *Specters of Marx* suggests, much as we might move in the present to declare the end of those disturbances to our place and time that we would like to have disappear, the very act of declaring the end makes it clear that an end is not yet here. The present is always, for Derrida as for Benjamin's materialist historiographer, a complex inheritance of the past, filled with “specters” that we might conjure away, but only at the expense of conjuring them up. A historical work that refuses to make its task simply a confirmation of the conjurings away—that recognizes how the archaic, the past, the “primitive,” the medieval continues to inhabit the present as an inheritance of traumas unresolved and still demanding resolution—might also recognize the possibility that doing history can mean a commitment not just to excavating the past but to considering how the past inheres in the present in such a way as to demand that the present, and thus the future, be thought otherwise.

Might historical work, then, in challenging the divisions that would strictly separate past, present, and future—premodern, modern, and postmodern—help enable a challenge to movements, like those that have been so powerful and persistent in the HIV/AIDS crisis, that try to protect the present from anything that might disturb its hegemonies? Might we conceive of a history that is, all at once, a consideration of the past, a grappling with the present, and a movement toward a better future? Medieval studies, in examining that which has been most rigorously excluded from modernity, might become especially crucial to such historical work. Medieval specters continue to haunt our present—as I hope to have made clear in my discussion of HIV/AIDS—and medievalist work tracing their complex genealogies might make for a significantly different present. A medievalism engaged with the present, too, might make for a very different understanding of the past, recognizing in a preceding and distant period like the Middle Ages not a radical other but a complex world both dissonant and resonant with our own, and therefore a world whose history, texts, and discourses might speak to us not just of what we wish to disavow but also of our present realities and struggles, and their future possibilities.
I would like here to acknowledge the contributions of my research assistant David Watt to the completion of this paper.


11. On the significance of narratives in the construction of HIV/AIDS, and on some of the temporal effects of narrative understandings, see Kruger, *AIDS Narratives*.


13. Largely in response to HIV/AIDS, a whole popular scientific literature has emerged concerned to warn us about the appearance of new disease phenomena. See, for instance, Laurie Garrett, *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance* (New York: Penguin, 1995), and Jeffrey A. Fisher, *The Plague Makers: How We Are Creating Catastrophic New Epidemics—And What We Must Do to Avert Them* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994). Here, however, the "new" diseases are still presented as largely antimodern in character. From Garrett: "But as the world approaches the millennium, it seems, from the microbes' point of view, as if the entire planet, occupied by nearly 6 billion mostly impoverished Homo sapiens, is like the city of Rome in 5 B.C." (619).


18. Similarly, the fact that the depressed immunity associated with AIDS makes people susceptible to infection by organisms that usually affect animals is used to gesture toward HIV/AIDS as somehow essentially foreign to a human realm: "one of Simon Guzman's doctors tracked down the preeminent expert of *Cryptosporidium* at the agriculture department of the University of Iowa. Of course, he was very familiar with the *Cryptosporidium* parasite, the Iowa professor said. The San Francisco doctor was relieved; maybe there was some easy treatment. / 'What do you do with sheep that get this?' he asked eagerly. / 'There is no treatment,' the expert said. 'We shoot them'" (Shilts, *And the Band
The discourse of "primitivity" is at work as well in the characterization of HIV—because viruses are thought to be the simplest, most "primitive" forms of life, or even perhaps not quite living; see the discussion in Kruger, *AIDS Narratives*, 11–15. For one complex intervention in thinking about the origins of AIDS, see John Greyson’s film *Zero Patience* (Zero Patience Productions Limited, 1993; Cinevista, Inc., 1994).


21. Ibid., 70.


24. Grmek, *History of AIDS*, 120. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.


33. See, for instance, the repeated references to fist-fucking, especially in association with bathhouse sex, in Shilts, *And the Band Played On*.

34. Brad Gooch, *The Golden Age of Promiscuity* (New York: Hard Candy/Masquerade, 1997 [Knopf, 1996]). Subsequent references to Gooch will be given parenthetically in the text. Fictional rethinking of gay sexual liberation predate AIDS—see, most famously, Larry Kramer’s *Faggots* (New York: Random House, 1978)—but have taken on added urgency in the 1990s. For an example in addition to Gooch, see Andrew Holleran, *The Beauty*
of Men (New York: Morrow, 1996). There have also been recent attempts, most notably by Kramer, to police fictional representations of gay sex. See especially Kramer’s “Sex and Sensibility," Advocate, 27 May 1997, 59ff., which attacks Edmund White for, in his The Farewell Symphony (New York: Knopf, 1997), “parad[ing] before the reader what seems to be every trick he's ever sucked, fucked, rimmed, tied up, pissed on, or been sucked by, fucked by, rimmed by, tied up by—you get the idea": “Surely life was more than this, even for—especially for—Edmund White. He did not spend 30 years with a nonstop erection and an asshole busier than his toilet.” White responds briefly in an interview with Sarah Schulman, “The White Party,” Advocate, 16 September 1997, 61.

35. Shilts, And the Band Played On, 439. Gooch's description of Dugas is clearly modeled on Shilts: “Gaetan was the man everyone wanted, the ideal for this community, at this time and in this place" (And the Band Played On, 21): “At one time, Gaetan had been what every man wanted from gay life; by the time he died, he had become what every man feared” (439).

36. When contextually clear, further references to Rotello, Sexual Ecology, will be given parenthetically in the text.

37. “Extinction” here is “suspended” because gay populations are not self-reproducing but rather “replenished by heterosexuals” (Rotello, Sexual Ecology, 208).


41. Grmek, History of AIDS, xi; also see 158.


44. Ibid., 45. Schecter here cites Emmanuel Dreuilhe, Corps à corps: Journal de SIDA (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 154, in his own translation of the French text; the corresponding passage in the published English translation is Mortal Embrace: Living with AIDS, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 121. I cannot here do full justice to Schecter’s treatment of the temporality of HIV/AIDS. For an argument complementary in interesting ways to Schecter’s, see William Haver, The Body of This Death: Historicity and


47. Shilts, And the Band Played On, 176.

48. Ibid., xxi.

49. For an early and influential text emphasizing the importance of reconceiving AIDS as something one can live with, see Michael Callen, Surviving AIDS (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).


54. Reactions against declarations of the “end of AIDS” themselves often invoke a similar discourse of apocalyptic end. See, for instance, the recent Esquire cover story by Laurie Garrett, “The Virus at the End of the World,” Esquire (March 1999): 102–9, 170–72: “We thought the worst epidemic in history had been subdued. But this is not the same AIDS. This is a monster that is mutating faster than we can keep up. It’s alive. It’s healthy. And the worst is yet to come” (103).


56. See the analysis in Derrida, Specters of Marx.


On 31 January 1882, Oscar Wilde gave a lecture at the Boston Music Hall. He had been in the United States less than a month, but as the self-proclaimed “Apostle of Aestheticism,” he had already created a sensation. Hordes of reporters followed him wherever he went, faithfully reporting his epigrams, and even on occasion ascribing to him epigrams they had actually invented themselves. While most took his critical claims seriously, some were also scandalized by the ambiguous sexuality his dress and demeanor seemed to imply—so much so that Mary Warner Blanchard has suggested that Wilde’s yearlong lecture tour constituted a watershed in public sexual attitudes: “his commitment to aesthetic style, and his renown as the Apostle of Aestheticism introduced a daring new category of the masculine self, the ‘invert,’ a definition greeted cautiously by an interested America.” In response to the event in Boston, these lines appeared in the Boston Evening Transcript:

Is he manne, or woman, or childe?  
Either,  
and neither!  
She looks as much like a manne  
As ever shee canne;  
He looks more like a woman  
Than any feminine human.
As it happened, however, his attire in Boston was uncharacteristically subdued. Sixty Harvard students had reserved the first two rows and appeared just before the lecture was to begin “dressed in the high aesthetic line with breeches, dinner jackets, Whistler locks of white hair, hats like Bunthorne’s, each bearing, in a stained glass attitude, a sunflower.”

Having been tipped off, Wilde triumphantly eschewed the knee breeches, rouge, and painted eyebrows he otherwise affected, wearing conventional evening clothes instead. To the delight of the rest of the audience, he teased the students both at the beginning and at the end of his lecture, assuring them “that there is more to the movement of aestheticism than kneebreeches and sunflowers.”

As might be expected, Wilde dominated the next issue of the Harvard Advocate. Four separate pieces dealt with various aspects of the event, including a sketch by the current president of the magazine’s editorial board, a senior named George Lyman Kittredge. It is a remarkable piece. Written in the voice of a teenage girl, it expresses some of the anxieties that animated the press coverage of Wilde’s tour. She notes Wilde’s “queer profile,” and then his “poor little voice. . . . And how funny he talks, and how queerly he makes his mouth go”—the “monotonous lisping” and lack of “manly accent,” of which the newspapers complained. Yet even more remarkable are the ambiguities that emerge from Kittredge’s dramatic premise. First, the speaker notes the desirability of “the Harvard boys”: “Some of them are real handsome, too. Don’t think so? Well, I do.” She then focuses on a student in drag:

Oh! but see that pretty girl with the big hat in the midst of those Harvard boys! I should think she would be ashamed of herself, so there! Hear the people applaud her. What a brazen thing she must be! What? She a boy? One of the boys from Cambridge dressed up like a girl? Dear me, I didn’t think of that. But what a pretty girl she makes. See the airs he puts on. I think it’s real funny. And she’s got a peacock-feather, too, to take notes with in that little red book!

And she returns to this figure a paragraph later: “Oh! now he’s chaffing the Harvard boys. See how they blush! All but that girl—she’s taking notes.” It seems likely that Kittredge was referring to one of his fellow students in particular, perhaps even another member of the Advocate
staff—or could it be himself? In any case, it is striking that this figure in drag recapitulates the piece's premise. Like Kittredge, this Harvard boy is writing as if he were a girl. Moreover, this act of cross-gender impersonation insulates him from the humiliation Wilde visits upon the other Harvard boys. While they blush, "she" takes notes. If, as seems obvious, what Kittredge seeks in adopting the narrative voice of a girl is some distance from the challenges Wilde's triumph posed to Harvard manhood, then this last, superogatory detail secures it. The cross-dressing scribe outwits Oscar in recording Oscar outwitting the other Harvard boys. There is a mastery in his/her note-taking that transcends the ambiguities of drag. It enables one Harvard boy to play Wilde's gender-bending game and retain his manliness.

In this odd (not to say queer!) piece of juvenilia we can detect anticipations of a few of the fascinations that will make the mature Kittredge the founder of modern Chaucer studies and that will give his work a dominant force it retains even today. There is the keen interest in impersonation, which will issue in the "dramatic principle": for Kittredge the Canterbury collection's fundamental rhetorical motive. But the connection between impersonation and sexual identity suggests a stronger link between this formal principle and two of his most influential thematic concerns than may be evident on the surface. These are the "Marriage Group" and his reading of the Pardoner as the pilgrimage's one "lost soul." Indeed, what is most noticeable about these two concerns is their lack of any explicit connection whatever. In Chaucer and His Poetry, Kittredge spends much of his discussion of the Canterbury Tales detailing a marriage debate that begins with the Wife of Bath and is brought to a "definitive conclusion" by the Franklin. After a paragraph denying that any biographical conclusions can be drawn from his reading—"We know that Chaucer was married, but we know nothing whatever of the happiness or unhappiness of this married life"—Kittredge turns abruptly to the Pardoner, with whom the book concludes. He makes no mention of marriage in these final pages, and almost no reference to the Pardoner's sexuality, defining his degradation purely as a function of his clerical hypocrisy. Yet the sexual reemerges at the very end of the discussion, first as a metaphor, then as assertion of dramatic fact. "Under the spell" of his own story, the Pardoner suffers a very "paroxysm of agonized sincerity," only to take "refuge from himself in a wild orgy of reckless jesting." Then, in his very final sentence, Kittredge imputes to Chaucer a
singular knowledge of the Pardoner’s character that has nothing to do with his clerical failings, and that connects Chaucer’s power of dramatic impersonation with the sexual:

For nobody but Geoffrey Chaucer divined the tragic face behind the satyr’s mask.—Geoffrey Chaucer, poet, idealist, burgher of London, Commissioner of Dykes and Ditches, who loved his fellow-men, both good and bad, and found no answer to the puzzle of life but in truth and courage and beauty and belief in God.¹¹

It is now a commonplace of queer theory that the invention of the term *homosexuality* in the second half of the nineteenth century enabled the subsequent currency of *heterosexuality* as its binary opposite and undergirded modern regimes of the heteronormative.¹² This philological argument helps explain in broad ideological terms why Kittredge juxtaposes the utter desolation of the sexually ambiguous Pardoner with his claims that the Canterbury collection’s central quest is to resolve a marriage debate. But this remarkable Wildean moment in Kittredge’s intellectual formation gives such an explanation biographical specificity—not necessarily because it gives us any window on Kittredge’s own sexuality, but because it forcibly reminds us of the world he lived in. We are not accustomed to thinking of Kittredge and Oscar Wilde as occupying the same intellectual universe, but in fact they did, and here is the proof. Alan Sinfield calls this century “The Wilde Century.”¹³ If Sinfield is right, then Kittredge’s reading of Chaucer—whom he proclaimed “the most modern of English poets”—should be viewed as substantially driven by emerging modern ideologies of gender and sexual identity.¹⁴ It seems there was something queer about modern Chaucer studies from its inception.

I suspect this possibility will surprise equally many Chaucerians and many queer theorists. But it will not surprise the authors of the preceding four essays, for whom it will simply constitute another instance of the complex and still underexamined connections between sexuality and history. All four of these essays make good on the promise of this volume’s title. They all queue the Middle Ages. But they do so precisely by interrogating the schemes of periodization that give the *Middle Ages* its conventional meanings. With impressive theoretical sophistication, and with a range of erudition that would make Kittredge himself envious, they demonstrate convincingly how much more there is to learn
about both the Middle Ages and its modern refigurations when questions are posed from a queer perspective. It is not just that there are lost histories to be recovered. It is also that the process of recovery puts historical temporality itself into question.

These essays all confront the effects of a repression, in the general meaning of that term, that is, any active process of denying, obscuring, or forgetting. But they are also particularly concerned with what remains, what can be recovered, with what resists or returns. This concern suggests repression in its more properly psychoanalytic sense: in Lacan’s celebrated dictum, “repression and the return of the repressed are the same thing.” I want to pursue this suggestion and use the complex view of time summed up in the phrase “return of the repressed” to characterize an epistemology I would argue all of these essays share. “Return of the repressed” describes a sequential chronology punctuated by moments of repetition. In Freud’s basic understanding of repression, its purpose was the avoidance of psychic pain. He defines it as “the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness.” Banished to the Unconscious, the repressed idea can return because it never really goes anywhere. Instead, it “exercises a continuous striving in the direction of consciousness, so that the balance has to be kept by means of a steady counterpressure.” This counterpressure not only ensures the return, but also, as Lacan would have it, means that the return originates at the same moment as the repression. The return of the repressed is thus an ostensibly sequential process that throws sequence itself into question. This paradox is particularly evident when viewed from the standpoint of the analytic encounter. In making the repressed return, analyst and analysand reveal a lost past that has been there all along.

Queer theory has from its inception had a conflicted relation with psychoanalysis. The issue of repression has provided an important node of that conflict. Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* clears the ground for a new field precisely by deconstructing “the repressive hypothesis.” Yet even in this text the notion remains at work: one of Foucault’s points is that psychoanalysis itself has repressed its debts to earlier discourses of sexuality. A return was perhaps inevitable; in any case, recent queer theory has grown increasingly interested in Freud and psychoanalysis. Although their own engagement with psychoanalysis varies, these essays all have a contribution to make to this trend. With their insistence that questions of sexuality always be asked against the
backdrop of history’s *longue durée*, these scholars focus the problem on the specific difference the return makes. Specificity is crucial: they are always dealing with repression from at least one remove. As queer theorists, they confront psychoanalysis with forms of subjectivity and sexuality it has not fully acknowledged. As queer theorists interested in the Middle Ages, they confront their own postmodern moment with a past it has not fully acknowledged—at least not yet. They are thus concerned with what remains repressed even as the repressed returns. Paradoxically, this secondary position, this distance from psychoanalysis’s originary senses of repression, actually affirms its complex temporality.

The object of repression as treated in these essays is always doubled. Its first aspect is sexual, which both accords with the discourse of psychoanalysis and troubles it. Its second aspect is chronological and it accords quite neatly with the deceptively straightforward temporal sequence the phrase the “return of the repressed” seems to promise. The Middle Ages has long been the object of multiple repressions; such repressions may have indeed motivated the term’s invention by the humanists of the Renaissance, who needed a benighted past as added relief to their own self-proclaimed luminosity. These repressions construe the Middle Ages as the quintessence of pastness, as the premodern, or nonmodern, or antimodern. They serve radically disparate philosophical and political agendas in modalities that are themselves disparate. The Middle Ages can be either a golden age of spiritual concord or a nightmare of ideological conformity. As golden age it can serve the needs of traditionalist rejections of modernity, but it can also underwrite the utopian desires of a revolutionary leftism. As conformist nightmare it can underwrite a similar leftism, but it can also secure the technofuturist fantasies of right-wing free marketeers. To paraphrase Kathleen Biddick slightly: the Western epistemology of classical, medieval, modern causes damage. One of the most compelling features of these essays is their demonstration of how much damage, in how many different ways—whether we are discussing postcolonial ethnography, the construction of a gay and lesbian literary canon, the tangled relations among sexuality, visual pleasure, and spiritual devotion, or the politics of HIV/AIDS.

Their insistence on the irreducibly double aspect of repression means that dealing with this damage can never be a simple matter of renunciation, and disavowal or expiation. The past can never be simply left behind, and this impossibility is epistemological as well as political—
and political as well as epistemological. The past not only haunts the present but lingers in the very intellectual tools, such as periodization, that we use to protect the present from it. For Biddick periodization is a fetish. Citing Freud’s famous essay, she argues that “the gap of the fetish, that temporal moment in between the ‘last impression’ and the ‘trauma,’ need not be read as ‘before’ and ‘after.’” Instead, “it can be experienced . . . as new temporal folds of contiguity” where “queer retemporalizing of historiography can usefully” begin: “This is a work, a labor, for medieval studies.” What form might such a quintessentially psychoanalytic labor take? One answer comes from Lacan, who describes Freud’s methodological approach to trauma as follows: “we have here patient historical reconstructions, which are remarkably surprising. Freud proceeds as if with monuments, with archival documents, employing textual criticism and exegesis.”

It is not just the Middle Ages, but also the intellectual practices particularly associated with medievalists that cannot be left behind. These essays redeem such practices once again precisely by showing that they are never just an end in themselves.

In *Moses and Monotheism*, his last and most extravagant version of the return of the repressed, Freud argues that the figure of the “primeval father” lies behind all repression. It is striking that three of these essays centrally concern originary, if not primeval, father figures. For Kathleen Biddick, it is Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. For Glenn Burger, it is Chaucer, the father of English poetry. For Garrett P. J. Epp, it is the Christian deity, the father of us all, albeit in his filial form. In making this observation, I do not mean to suggest that these scholars express the same “longing for the father” that Freud describes. Indeed, what makes these recursions to the father noteworthy is that they are made in the name of deconstructing the heteronormative regime that Freud encapsulated in the Oedipal father. The way past this figure is clearly through it in its many guises.

Biddick confronts Freud directly, and she moves from Freud’s own Freudian slip in his famous discussion of the fetish to the sexual dimensions of constructions of the Middle Ages as a golden age, focusing here particularly on Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land*. Ghosh’s uneasiness in dealing with the cross-cultural specificities of circumcision and clitoridectomy represents for Biddick “clues to sites of historiographic trauma that remain unthought.” She links the territorialization of the body that such rituals enact to the boundaries of empire and suggests
that Ghosh’s sexual uneasiness mirrors his desire to romanticize medieval slavery, and distinguish it from modern slavery. The only way to escape this sort of nostalgia is to think through the “historiographic trauma” that conventional period boundaries enable us to avoid. These borders must be crossed, in a manner that Biddick herself displays in this virtuosic essay that begins with Freud’s fin-de-siècle Vienna, jumps quickly through postcolonial scholarship on the fetish before settling on Ghosh, and, following his own complicated temporal scheme, moves there back and forth between the medieval past and the Mediterranean present. She contextualizes Ghosh with a brief invocation of Partha Chatterjee’s discussion of the cultural trajectories from colonial to postcolonial India, and then concludes by negotiating between Teresa de Lauretis’s revisionary reading of psychoanalysis and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. This recurrent, self-conscious shuttling among various pasts and between past and present indeed produces “a different kind of history.”

Because I am convinced of the need for this kind of history, I remain somewhat fixated on the figure of Freud. Freud’s influence on this essay, while certainly not “unthought,” is also not as fully acknowledged as it might be. Following Sander Gilman, Biddick uses Freud by historicizing him, by placing psychoanalytic discourse in the context of contemporary discourses of racial superiority. Yet she begins the contextualization with a Freudian slip, that is by playing one bit of Freudian discourse against another. And she ends the essay, through the intermediate authority of de Lauretis, with a similar gesture. If psychoanalysis is too invested in the phallus, the solution is not to find another theoretical model, but to counter this mistaken emphasis with a greater emphasis on another psychoanalytic concept, castration, which Biddick, following de Lauretis, renames “dispossession.” Clearly, this is one case where the master’s tools are precisely what is needed to dismantle the master’s house. I am not suggesting that this dependence on Freud in any way compromises Biddick’s complicated, suggestive, and allusive argument. Quite the contrary. Her appropriation of psychoanalysis raises the question of Freud’s authority precisely because it is so convincing. However, that question will eventually need answering, especially if medievalists are to succeed in constructing the “much-needed ethical relation to the political project of rethinking the humanities” that Biddick makes one of her goals. Not unlike Milton’s Satan, we rebels may find our most difficult ethical challenge to be negotiating our own debt to
what has gone before. With that thought, I turn now to Glenn Burger's
negotiations with Chaucer.

Burger endeavors to answer a question that takes at its word the
easy iconoclasm that has by now become a modernist cliché—perhaps
the modernist cliché. Why, he asks, do we still need Chaucer? In partic-
ular, why might queer readers not only need, but want Chaucer? The an-
swer will need to move beyond both “historicizing grands récits” and
“simplistic models of recuperation and revolt.” After deftly sketching the
modernist confusions of David Leavitt’s attempts to define a gay canon,
Burger finds the answer to his question in the “rhizomatic connection”
between the *Miller’s Tale* and John Preston’s anthology of gay porn *Flesh
and the Word*. A surprising place to look, perhaps, but Burger’s answer
is convincing because it both fulfills vanguardist “models of recupera-
tion and revolt” and exposes a bit of their bad faith. Porn has become
something of a vanguardist final frontier. I write these words three days
after purchasing the current issue of the *New Yorker* magazine, featuring
an article by James Atlas on the academic study of porn. Atlas declares—
in a tone that manages to be world-weary and prurient at once—that
“the core [i.e., core curriculum] has become hard core.”22 And the lead
article in the Style section of last Sunday’s *New York Times* was headlined
“The Mainstream Flirts with Pornography Chic.” It cites no less an au-
thority than John Waters, who declares of porn, “It’s the only real outlaw
left—that’s why it’s hip.”23 Yet both of these articles treat the genre as if
it were exclusively heterosexual. Its ostensible hipness serves both of
them as a defense against its perversity.24 Indeed, as Burger shows,
porn’s main business is desire. And the last thing desire worries about
is whether it is hip.

Burger observes that the space porn inhabits is not “utopian” and
“free,” but “impure.” In that space, gay desire can confront—indeed,
embrace—the intensities of shame directed at it by a heteronormative
culture and at the same time imagine the “transformative identifications”
this explicit confrontation makes possible. Burger focuses in particular
on what he calls Preston’s “primal scene”: his recollection of purchasing
gay porn at a kiosk in Harvard Square in his pre-Stonewall, teenage years,
and then studying them in a “private place” like a “library.” In that par-
adoxically public private space, Preston begins to construct a gay iden-
tity out of the performatives of shame he feels directed at him. Preston’s
desire as a fully adult and out gay man to hold on to that earlier shame
leads Burger to the Prologue of the Miller’s Tale, and its paradoxical promise of pleasure, a promise that can never be disentangled from its projection of shame. In a sense, this turn to Chaucer is an extension of “Preston’s backward glance.” Since contemporary representations of gay desire at their most explicit must include the immediate, closeted past of the pre-Stonewall days, why stop there? The “rhizomatic connection” works not because there is some inevitable genealogical relation between Preston’s introduction and the queerness of Chaucer’s Prologue, but precisely because there isn’t. The lack of direct relation is what makes so striking the discovery in the Prologue of the same abandoned embrace of shame as erogenous. However, there is something even more impressive about this conceptual connection: Burger’s very use of the term rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari are the most vanguardist of the French theorists. The rhizome is their alternative to “tree logic,” the hierarchical, systematic, “arborescent” thinking that has dominated Western philosophy from Plato to the present, and which almost no thinker but Nietzsche and some scattered modernists like Joyce and Proust has escaped. Although Burger may disagree with this assessment, I find his deployment of the rhizome convincing because he uses it to do something Deleuze and Guattari never could. He uses it to complicate the opposition between mystified past and vanguardist, demystifying present that they take as axiomatic. The repressed returns, precisely as the more complex version of a past hitherto understood as wholly repressive.

If I can be permitted a rhizomatic connection of my own, I want to linger briefly on another detail in the Preston anecdote. That is its setting. In this kiosk in Harvard Square, we find pre-Stonewall gay porn’s very particular form of lower knowledge at the gates of North America’s greatest institution of higher learning. The detail is symptomatic. It anticipates the more generic library where Preston goes to “study” his images, and it recalls (if somewhat ironically) David Leavitt’s Palo Alto bookstore of the 1970s. Indeed, this detail offers a striking illustration of Eve Sedgwick’s notion of the “open secret.” Good porn can be found in places other than communities of higher learning, but its dependable presence within such communities foregrounds in a different way the secret but inevitable commerce between the higher knowledge and the lower revealed by the perverse delights of a cultural monument such as the Miller’s Tale. As Burger makes clear, these delights are not incidental. They occur at a key moment of initiation in the Canterbury collection (for Lee Patterson,
where the Tales “really begin”), and they rejoin a host of social concerns that, as Burger rightly observes, the best recent Chaucer criticism has identified as the mainspring of Chaucerian innovation. The end of the fourteenth century in Britain was a moment of profound social and cultural transition. That this moment also opened up, at least briefly, a vista of perverse desire with uncanny resemblances to our own postmodernity is a fact that poses a challenge of the most radical sort to the conventions of periodization.

At the center—indeed, at the literal, dead center—of all notions of the medieval past as perfect harmony (or pure mystification), we find the figure of the Christian deity. Whether he is taken as figuring harmony or repression, the figuration is always taken as pure, complete, and unproblematically self-evident. Accordingly, queering the Middle Ages cannot avoid queering Christ. For some scholars, this imperative will only serve to confirm their worst fears about queer theory’s presentism, its easy iconoclasm, its all-round trendiness. But as Garrett P. J. Epp shows, there is nothing easy or the least bit self-evident about this matter. Indeed, the radical absence of self-evidence is precisely the point. The figure of Christ is of necessity always potentially erotic. But the proof is in the performance. That I take to be the point of the deliberate (and equally literal) anticlimax of the essay’s conclusion. The spectacle of Christ’s body is a dense mystery that always includes the erotic among many other possibilities, but which of these possibilities gets activated depends on the multiple specificities of the medium of representation, social location, and the interests of the observers. Thus, even a frankly homoerotic depiction of Christ designed by a gay artist for a gay audience, and judged so successful in its execution as to win a prize, can leave another gay spectator cold.

Epp’s judicious, lucid, exquisitely crafted account obviously rejoins the notions of gender and sexual performativity that Judith Butler has made central to queer theory. But it also rejoins some traditional scholarly concerns: the profoundly contested role mimesis plays in theatrical representation, and the even bigger and more traditional problem of Christianity’s incarnational theology. The Wycliffite Tretise of Miracles Pleyinge belongs to the same historical moment as the Middle English Passion plays. Its central charge that theatrical representation generally, and “the pley of Cristis passioun” specifically, are inherently erotic provides the hard historical evidence for a queer reading of the plays them-
selves. As Epp goes on to show, this evidence can be supplemented by a variety of other sources: the mystical tradition, the imitatio Christi, the Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ by the anti-Wycliffite Nicholas Love, and the slightly later anecdote of the exchange between a toolmaker and a barber who played Christ in a French Corpus Christi performance. The ramifications of this welter of historical material are far-reaching. It calls into additional question the heteronormative assumptions animating some of Caroline Bynum's landmark work. But it also complicates contemporary critical accounts of the gaze and its relation to spectacular representation, both theatrical and filmic. Finally, it also connects the historical status of the Passion plays as cultural artifacts of later medieval England to their continuing role in our own culture. For if this essay displays Epp's considerable abilities as a queer theorist, it also expresses from start to finish his deep commitment as engaged spectator of these plays. Indeed, I think one could justly observe about this essay that is no less pious than it is queer. (To paraphrase Epp himself: if a Passion play is not erotic, it is not spiritual.)

The punning title of this piece has a variety of intertextual resonances, some of which Epp displays in his epigraphs. One resonance he does not mention is Nietzsche's work of the same title. Ecce Homo could be described as Nietzsche's Retractions: his retrospective account of his own canon. The title testifies to Nietzsche's lifelong fascination with Christianity, the irony of which is underestimated even by many of his most acute expositors. Nietzsche's most famous pronouncement is the claim that "God is dead." Heidegger took the certitude of this claim literally, interpreting it as establishing the death of metaphysics and the end of an epoch. Viewed in its original context, the first paragraph of book 3 of The Gay Science, the claim tells a different story:

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.²⁵

More than a century after these words were written, God, measured as a social reality, is more alive than ever, and even confirmed atheists like me have to concede that his shadow remains to be vanquished. Epp's
essay deals with one aspect of the shadow; Steven Kruger's essay with another. "Millennial and apocalyptic" rhetoric features prominently in narratives of the HIV/AIDS crisis. At the edge of this complicated discursive field we can find the coarse bad faith of Christian fundamentalists such as Jerry Falwell, but the most salient aspects of the problem lie in the middle. In the work of gay novelists, historians, and analysts, in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, and in the reports of mainstream science and the media, apocalyptic impulses return again and again. Although Kruger does not spend a lot of time explicating the most complex occurrences of these impulses, it is clear that they are not univalent, or even continuous. Yet for all the richness apocalyptic figures bring to a writer such as Kushner, what is most striking is their hackneyed impoverishment in the work of a gay neoliberal such as Andrew Sullivan, where they support a prim, small-minded, Christian moralism of the most repressive sort.

Of the four essays, Kruger's is the only one that does not engage with the figure of some father. In my reading of the problematic they collectively establish, this feature makes it the exception that proves the rule—or, more precisely, the rule that mobilizes the exceptions. Kruger's imperative is to "think the current moment in its full contingency." The other essays construct their accounts against the same intellectual horizon; their return to various figurations of the father does not so much reveal his essence as map his multiple contingencies. Following Derrida, Kruger construes apocalyptic readings of the HIV/AIDS crisis as performative. In their moralistic strain, they declare "the 'end of queerness' (gayness, injecting drug use, African heterosexuality, etc.) through the agency of a so-called plague." The standard scheme of periodization—medieval, early modern, modern, postmodern—provides the discursive framework supporting such performatives. It enables HIV/AIDS to be treated as "historically other, belonging not so much to our own time as to another, less advanced and rational, more precarious moment in human history." This tendency in turn rejoins the more established temporal distancing associated with characterizations of HIV/AIDS as non-Western. African origin hypotheses for the syndrome present Africa as the "primitive" source of this "intrusion . . . into the modern." These constructions of temporality do the work of a profound and totalizing denial, enabling HIV/AIDS to be imagined as always "arising elsewhere." From this primary act of repression, more specific secondary
ones follow, obliquely expressing a variety of homophobic and racialist agendas. The discourse of periodization is by no means incidental to these expressions. On the contrary, its self-evident plausibility, its status as neutral, fundamental historical fact is precisely what allows the homophobia and racialism to remain oblique. Kruger demonstrates convincingly that, in the HIV/AIDS crisis, the discursive damage of standard periodization enacts itself not only in epistemological terms, but in directly political ones as well.

Nowhere is the damage more political than in the assimilationist re-thinkings of 1970s gay liberation, which take HIV/AIDS as the definitive repudiation of the era’s nonmonogamous sexual practices. It is not just that such rethinking constitutes a fairly blatant case of post hoc ergo propter hoc. It also collapses the essentially moral problem of monogamy into a symbolics of ritual pollution of the sort Mary Douglas so ably explicated in her classic study *Purity and Danger*. To posit monogamy retrospectively as the prophylactic that would have spared gay men from HIV/AIDS is to invest it with a biological (not to say magical) value it does not really have, and which plays no significant part in its institutional structures or moral ideals. Yet, as Kruger shows, writers as diverse as Brad Gooch, Gabriel Rotello, and Andrew Sullivan, each working in a different genre, employ monogamy as the moral principle enforcing a retrospective narrative unity on an essentially contingent chain of events. It could be that all of these writers come to this ideal for itself. But the ideal’s close association with the Christian tradition suggests otherwise. It seems likely that, having drawn on Christian apocalypticism to characterize the crisis, they have, with whatever degree of self-consciousness, drawn on the Christian sexual ethos for its solution. Douglas argues that cultures deal with pollution by constructing images of social totality beyond the bounds of which the polluting entity is to be expelled. In this, the long-established ideological coherence of Christianity may well be providing an implicit totality.

Can we get beyond this dilemma? Turning to Walter Benjamin, Kruger suggests that the moving beyond involves a certain staying put. We must grapple with the “traumatic present” so many accounts of the crisis hold at a temporal distance. Paradoxically, this means bringing “the past to bear on the present” precisely so that “the presentness of the crisis . . . may be most fully felt.” It means disrupting standard notions of periodization which “segregate time from time,” and most crucially
segregate the modern present from all pasts. For Kruger, this disruption is a version of Benjamin's celebrated “tiger's leap,” another era blasted “out of the homogeneous course of history.” In its most obvious sense, Benjamin's leap is a break with the immediate past for a more congenial one further removed, Robespierre's reincarnations of ancient Rome. But Benjamin's most immediate concern was the triumph of fascism and the aura of historical inevitability it thereby acquired: “in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm.”

Rending the historical continuum cannot be confined to disrupting the continuum itself. One must also confront the period boundaries that mark the continuum's apparently imperturbable progress. We cannot assign the present its full contingency—we cannot completely face its full contemporaneity—without facing the pasts it has never quite left behind. Benjamin also recognized this necessity. Indeed, he dramatizes it throughout the “Theses” precisely as a matter of millennial desire. He begins with an oblique suggestion that historical materialism enlist “the service of theology.” He ends by recommending the Judaic tradition's notion of futurity: “For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.” Benjamin locates his hope not in the certainties of history, but in its contingencies. Of these four essays the same thing should be said.
At the Music Hall

Dear me! how crowded the hall is. Where can Oscar be? and the Harvard boys,—did you say they’re going to sit on the stage? I believe it’s all newspaper talk, anyway. No? Well, then, I think it’s just horrid, the way they do carry on.

And then to pretend it’s all the Freshmen, too! Why, my cousin Tommy—he’s at Yale, you know—says that at his school the Seniors are a good deal worse than ever the Freshmen think of being. He says some of them even chew. And when I told him that was a horrid habit, he laughed and said he didn’t mean tobacco. So I asked him what he did mean, and he said ears. I don’t know what he meant, do you? You think I must have misunderstood him? Perhaps I did; it doesn’t seem as if he could have said they chewed ears does it? Why, that’s almost nonsense.

Oh! here the Harvard boys come! What a lot of them! Some of them are real handsome, too. Don’t think so? Well, I do. You think some of ’em look rather scared? Suppose they do. Wouldn’t you look scared if you were in their place? Just see their green neck-ties! Quite appropriate? Is that what you said? I think that’s real horrid.

My cousin Tommy says—he goes to Yale, you know—that down there at Yale, where he goes to school, the boys have a fence,—that is some of them,—and they won’t let the little boys sit on the big boys’ fence, and the little boys get real frightened, and go off and play nigger baby. I don’t know what he means. I wonder if it’s as nice a game for little boys as battledoor?

Oh! but see that pretty girl with the big hat in the midst of those Harvard boys! I should think she would be ashamed of herself, so there! Hear the people applaud her. What a brazen thing she must be! What? She a boy? One of the boys from Cambridge dressed up like a girl? Dear me, I didn’t think of that. But what a pretty girl she makes. See the airs he puts on. I think it’s real funny. And she’s got a peacock-feather, too, to take notes with in that little red book!

Oh! here’s Oscar at last. What a funny-looking man. But where are his knee-breeches? Frightened out of wearing them by the Harvard boys, I do believe. Why, if they kept on, they might frighten him into common sense. Oh, isn’t he funny? What a queer profile he’s got, what a big mouth
and what a little bit of a forehead! But then, he's got lots of hair, and lots and lots of white neck-tie.

Oh! now he's chaffing the Harvard boys. See how they blush! All but that girl—she's taking notes. Oh, isn't it funny! What a poor little voice Oscar has. He can't begin to fill the hall with it. And how unhappy he looks, too. And how funny he talks, and how queerly he makes his mouth go.

Oh dear! I'm tired. Haven't you heard enough? He doesn't say anything new. He isn't half so bright in his lecture as he is in “Patience.” Let's go home.

And they went.

Notes

10. Ibid., 217.
11. Ibid., 218.
12. The most authoritative discussion is David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 15–40.
17. Ibid., 111–12.
18. This trend has obviously been influenced by a similar trend in current feminist theory. One key figure is certainly Judith Butler, who develops her notions of gender as performance in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and Lon-

21. Ibid., 140.
24. I hasten to add that this is not a defect common to current scholarship on pornography, on which Atlas in particular depends, consistently misapprehending most of its subtleties.
26. Of course, it is by no means clear either that gays as a group were more promiscuous during this period than heterosexuals, or that there was significantly more promiscuity during this period than any other.
28. Ibid., 94–128.
30. Ibid., 253.
31. Ibid., 264.
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