



THE PROBLEM OF GENIUS'S INTENT

IN

JOHN GOWER'S

CONFESSIO AMANTIS

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BY

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To my mother,

And to the memory of my father.

So it goes.

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## SUMMARY

In book I of the Confessio Amantis, Genius undertakes to tell Amans of the vices which may be associated with the rites of secular love (I, 253-80); however, at the end of the shrift Genius claims that secular love is essentially sinful -- at least as the lover experiences it (VIII, 2084-91). We further learn that Amans is an old man and no longer able to fulfil love's requirements (VIII, 2417-20). It is possible to view the confession as an elaborate device intended by Venus and Genius to deter Amans from his quest. This raises the possibility that Genius's exempla have two functions: overtly, under the pretence of assisting Amans, they serve to explicate the dangers which may await an unwary lover; covertly, in order to discourage Amans, they denigrate the value of secular love by suggesting a necessary connection between it and sin, and (more directly) they also show Amans examples of 'unkindely' love which parallel his own 'unnatural' desires. My reading sees the Confessio Amantis as an organised and purposeful work, and not as the loose collection of fables it has sometimes been labelled.

The thesis begins with a brief discussion of how some readers have viewed the form and purpose of Gower's poem. In chapter 2, I discuss the basics of my method of reading with examples taken from book I; in

chapter 3, I give a close study of book IV (sloth). In chapters 4 and 5, I deal with two areas of the poem which have been traditionally viewed as problems: the 'Education of Alexander' (book VII); and Genius's use of incest as a topic for his tales. I argue that both of these apparently anomalous occurrences in the poem are part of a consistent purpose: incest represents the worst of secular behaviour; and the 'Education of Alexander' proposes an elaborate system of secular control for Amans to follow -- with particular emphasis on the idea of chastity. My thesis concludes with a brief reflection on the relevance of the Prologue and 'Epilogue' to the dialogue between Amans and Genius.

## Declaration

This thesis does not contain any material which has been previously presented by me for the award of a degree or diploma from any university. To the best of my knowledge I have not incorporated the work of another writer except where proper acknowledgement is given in the body of the text. I give my permission for this thesis to be made available for loan if it is accepted for the award of Master of Arts.

Dallas Simpson  
28 August 1989

## Preface

Thanks are due to my primary supervisor, Dr T.L. Burton, for his patience and support. During the preparation of this thesis he made many hundreds of written comments and emendations, and for 6 months these were mailed to me as he undertook study leave in America and England. Further thanks are owed to Dr K. Magarey who read and commented upon chapters 1 to 4 while engaged with his own substantial projects. I am grateful to Shirely Bowbridge and Maria Cominetti of the English Department Office for their friendly help, and to the Department in general for the provision of word processing facilities.

My final thanks are to Annely Aeuckens, my wife, who completed her own Master of Arts thesis while I wrote this one. She would agree with me, I think, that the Wife of Bath was wrong.

All quotations from the Confessio Amantis are taken from the standard edition by G.C. Macaulay, any opinions of Macaulay are also taken from this work. Robinson's edition is the source for all Chaucer quotations.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND ARGUMENT

### 1.0 CRITICAL OPINIONS

This thesis is about the nature of Genius's intent in John Gower's Confessio Amantis and how it affects the telling of his tales. Superficially, at least, what Genius sets out to do seems to be obvious, and he outlines it quite simply to Amans at the beginning of the text: he will hear the lover's shrift, as he has been instructed to by Venus (I, 233-6), but he must also talk to him about 'othre thinges,/ That touchen to the cause of vice' (I, 240-1) because this is part of his duty as a priest (I, 242-8). Genius undertakes to tell a narrative about secular love and about vice, and he suggests to the lover that these two tasks are separate and unrelated:

So thenke I to don bothe tuo,  
Ferst that myn ordre longeth to,  
The vices forto tell arewe,  
Bot next above alle othre schewe  
Of love I wol the proprettes,  
How that thei stonde be degrees  
After the disposicioun  
Of Venus, whos condicioun  
I moste folwe, as I am holde.  
(I, 253-61)

But at the next moment Genius changes his position and claims that as he only really knows about love he will combine a discussion of vice and love by talking of the

former as it is related to the latter (I, 262-80). It is implicit at this point that he will treat the contingent vices of love: that is, those sins to which one might fall victim in the pursuit and practice of secular love.

Genius's manner is open and clear, and furthermore he promises Amans openness and clarity in what is to follow,

For what a man schal axe or sein  
Touchende of schrifte, it mot be plein,  
It nedeth noght to make it queinte,  
For trowthe hise wordes wol noght peinte:  
That I wole axe of the forthi,  
My Sone, it schal be so pleinly,  
That thou schalt knowe and understonde  
The pointz of schrift how that thei stonde.  
(I, 281-8)

What could be more simple? The frame is set and all that remains is for it to be filled out with thirty thousand or so lines of exempla. This model has found many supporters, and even the more sympathetic readers have been all too ready to dismiss Chaucer's 'moral Gower' as an able storyteller and no more. Helen Cooper appears to suggest such a view when she begins a brief discussion of Gower (within a longer work on Chaucer) with the sentence:

Sheer delight in telling or listening to stories characterised late fourteenth-century England as it did in Italy. (36)

Such a statement is just as applicable to the Canterbury Tales, and Cooper herself sees a conspicuous narrative element as one of the common features of the poetry of the period (36-7); but one would be more reluctant,

perhaps, to begin a discussion of Chaucer with such an observation because it is accepted that Chaucer is much more than just a storyteller. Gower attracts no such indulgence. Cooper grants that Gower's poem does have an overall order and purpose; however, she suggests that these follow a somewhat arbitrary model when she writes that the Confessio Amantis is organised

as its title indicates, on the model of a penitential manual. A work such as Robert Mannyng's Handlyng Synne has close similarities to Gower's poem, with the sins being listed and analysed in turn and each variety and sub-division illustrated by example of the sin in action. Gower gives a secular version of the same thing. (37)

Although Mannyng's work has some charm, it seems to do poor credit to the subtlety of the Confessio Amantis that such a comparison should be made! John Speirs is even more explicitly damning: he allows Gower less than two pages in his section of The Pelican Guide To English Literature (and even this must be shared with Mannyng under the heading 'Gower and Mannyng') and he finds that, in comparing Gower with Mannyng, 'the comparison is not in every way to the advantage of Gower' (81). For Speirs, 'the principal interest of the Confessio Amantis is as a collection of tales' (82). Although an attempt was made in 1982 to update Speirs's essay (written in 1954) with the addition of a brief paper by Derek Pearsall (97-102), Speirs's estimation of Gower's work is left to stand without challenge. It is implicit in approaches such as these that Gower is

closer to the style of the penitential manuals than he is to Chaucer: his tales are, therefore, substantially devoid of art and subtlety -- their function is that of moral exempla. Speirs does grant that

In Confessio Amantis -- otherwise a typical medieval collection of tales within a framework -- Gower is less single-minded than Manning (sic) and manages, indeed, to combine the roles of courtly-love poet and a Christian moralist; the courtly lover must learn to be a good and virtuous man. (81)

It is Speir's opinion that Gower's talent does what it can 'manage' but he is surely wrong to claim that Amans is a 'courtly lover' who 'learns to be a good and virtuous man': there is no evidence that Amans has ever done anything more than aspire to the values of courtly love; and one must question how much the lover has learned at the end of the poem when he changes his ways not by choice but by compulsion. In stressing the narrative element of the Confessio Amantis, and by accepting that its genre belongs to that of the penitential manuals, Speirs has simplified the literary nature of the poem. A similar approach is taken by Gerald Kinneavy who finds that 'the penitentials influenced Gower and did so in a massive way ... [and] ... that the confession technique serves as an organizing principle and focuses the work as an exposition by doctrine of an ordered and Christian world' (144). I have no difficulty in accepting the presence of the penitential form in Gower's poem; my concern is that this should not obscure the work of

Gower as an artist who uses irony to move as much against the confessional tradition as with it. For example, Kinneavy makes the astute observation that the final confrontation between Venus and the penitent in book VIII follows an essentially penitential form when Venus prescribes Amans's penance 'to follow reason and abandon love's ways, externalized by the command to wear the beads around his neck' (152). However, the use of Venus in such a way would seem to invite a reading based on irony and wry humour, and yet Kinneavy later remarks that 'the poem is not a comedy. On the contrary, it is genuinely sober' (158). By largely ignoring the possibility of irony, and by fixing the poem within the penitential tradition, Kinneavy is able to conclude that it is Gower's intention to show that

It is bad for an old man to be foolish; old age is for wisdom. By bringing his audience to this specific awareness, the poet has simultaneously brought his audience to that larger truth -- not limited by the lover's particular situation: proper Christian behaviour leads to a reasonable, ordered universe. To achieve this didactic end, the poet has exploited the penitential tradition and matters of common knowledge in that tradition, stressing the reasonableness of the principles. To make his readers receptive to this material, he has exploited the courtly love tradition, a matter of common interest. (160)

I agree that Gower exploits the two traditions of courtly love and the penitentials; however, I will argue that he strikes a more artistically satisfying balance -- one more complex and less obviously didactic in its method -- than that which is claimed by Speirs and

Kinneavy. Gower's seriousness eschews simple classification; it is a seriousness which is prepared to admit comedy and irony to its method. Perhaps, it should come as no surprise that critics have generally emphasised the purely narrative element of Gower's poem when even the text's great editor, G.C. Macaulay, says that it 'is all machinery, sometimes poetical and interesting, sometimes tiresome and clumsy ... the stories are the main thing' (Vol.I, x)?

The apparent simplicity of the Confessio Amantis makes dismissive judgements easy. J.J. Murphy convincingly argues in his doctoral dissertation and several related articles that Gower shows little knowledge of formal rhetoric and that the argument forms represented in the Confessio Amantis are not much more than elementary exercises. I have no cause to disagree with this as my own thesis does not concern formal rhetoric but is based more closely on the ambiguity of Genius's language and his dramatic motivation in telling the tales. However, although Murphy does not seem to draw the specific conclusion that the Confessio Amantis as a work is unstructured because of Gower's ignorance of rhetoric, he is dismissive of its form: 'Essentially the poem is a vast collection of exempla loosely tied together by the device of a lover confessing to Genius, the priest of Venus' ('John Gower's Confessio Amantis and the First Discussion of Rhetoric of the English

Language', 402). Such words as 'essentially', 'loosely', and 'vast' are commonplace in Gower criticism and generally have a pejorative meaning.

There have been counter views expressed which stress the unity of the Confessio Amantis; however, these have tended to have an historicist leaning in that they have sought to unify the poem by the application of models which are derived from medieval social or literary history. Patrick J. Gallacher considers the importance of the figure of the god Mercury at key points within the text 'not only as a symbol of rhetoric and of elegant speech ... but also as the Word Himself' (25). In Gallacher's reading, the poem becomes an expression of the human desire for perfect communication -- a state that eludes us in secular activity but which may be found in communion with God -- and he argues that 'spiritual fulfillment in the Word is the resolution of the many conflicts arising out of the nature of human speech in the Confessio Amantis' (25). The poem is a structured progress from the flawed words of secular love to the flawless Word Himself. To establish his case Gallacher provides a lengthy discussion (25 pages in a text of 161) of the spiritual and intellectual importance of the 'word' in medieval life, and the Confessio Amantis is explicated according to the model he derives. Russell A. Peck finds that the text is unified by aspects of political and social theory: the notion of 'common profit' is carefully

defined in the Prologue to Gower's work which

establishes the central theme of the poem and sets up the dimensions of the basic plot, that is, the movement from confinement and singular profit to a recognition of personal kingship and the recovery of domain. (23)

Peck's introduction refers to Gower's political views as he constructs a key to the work based on authorial attitudes and medieval political theory. We are told of Gower's 'concern with the commonweal' -- a concern which is 'preeminently humanistic' (xx) -- and his 'insistent correlation of social criticism with a benevolent psychology of personal ethics' (xxi). I am in agreement with both Gallacher and Peck to the extent that they stress the important change in the tone of the poem which occurs between its beginning and its end. My reading differs from their position in that it attempts to show how the text is shaped by the internal constraints of its own form and, in particular, the dramatic motivation that Genius has in telling the exempla. Gallacher and Peck are also concerned with the form of the Confessio Amantis, of course, but it is a form which follows a pattern largely exterior to the poem.

Some historicist interpretations are more successful than others. A.J. Minnis places the Confessio Amantis within the context of medieval literary theory. He stresses medieval 'conceptions of ethical poetry which accommodated both profit and

delight, and of efficient literary form or "organisation of parts" which enabled a writer's material to be 'disposed and displayed to best advantage' (50). Minnis draws on the 'ubiquitous ... medieval vocabulary of literary criticism' and employs such terms as 'ethicae subponitur ("it pertains to ethics"), forma tractatus ("form of the treatise") and intentio auctoris ("intention of the author")' (50). He shows how these medieval literary terms are reflected in Gower's text and, in particular, how the educated listeners of the time were accustomed to the mix of 'lust' and 'lore' which Gower purports to give. Minnis argues that Gower's audience was happy to accept works which were 'sometimes sexually risque' because these could then be subject to interpretations which rendered them 'in the final analysis, ethically edifying and conducive to virtue (the establishment had the last word)' (57). He claims that modern readers are wrong to be puzzled by Gower's choice of topics because these become perfectly explicable when viewed in the correct context:

Once Gower's ethical interest and intent are recognised as all-pervasive -- essential aspects of the stories themselves as much as of their penitential framework -- the principles in accordance with which he composed his poem emerge with striking clarity. (66)

Minnis believes that the 'forma tractatus' of the Confessio Amantis is not only consistent with contemporary methods of literary composition but is also consistent within itself:

To judge by the standards of the compilations of ethical and political lore ... the forma tractatus of Confessio Amantis is both reasonable and natural. The poem's compendiousness would, in the fourteenth century, have been a definite mark in its favour, yet there is no reason to suppose that Gower was content to unload information unthinkingly -- on the contrary, there is plenty of evidence to support the view that he sought to deploy it appropriately and functionally, making it serve an overall strategy. (78)

Minnis demonstrates the consistency of Gower's poem in terms of medieval literary conventions; I attempt to show how the dramatic narrative of the text displays a satisfying unity which also illustrates 'Gower's ethical interest.' My approach is based on a close reading of the language of the poem because Gower's primary concerns seem to me to be the use of language as a persuasive force and its capacity for subtle deceptions -- and I will show that there is more than a little deception between the covers of the Confessio Amantis.

### 1.1 CLOSE READING AND THE INORGANIC MODEL

I propose a close reading of the poem, but is it valid to apply such a method when some readers claim that medieval texts lack the internal coherence and sustained development which close reading takes as assumed? The trend to stress the architectural and 'inorganic' nature of many medieval texts has been led now for more than twenty years by Robert Jordan, principally through his two books, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation and, more recently, Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader. As the titles suggest, Jordan's main interest is Chaucer

but his views have application beyond this single author. Jordan claims that when modern readers come to consider a medieval work they are influenced too much by the nineteenth-century tradition of verisimilitude in the portrayal of character: we look for a degree of consistency and depth in characterisation that is simply not there and could not be reasonably expected. Again, as with Murphy's argument, I have no particular cause to disagree with Jordan's view, although there is a danger that by inference or misunderstanding his thesis might be used to suggest that medieval texts are incapable of sustaining close and detailed dramatic action over a lengthy narrative. This is not Jordan's opinion, at least as I understand his work. In his introduction to Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader, having outlined his 'poetics', he goes on to write:

Readers of a realist persuasion are likely to regard such a poetics as destructive of the verities of character and meaning, but I hope to demonstrate the contrary that a poetics based on ambivalence and uncertainty nevertheless possesses aesthetic integrity and speaks to a human condition we can recognize as our own. (2)

A.C. Spearing, one of the first critics to argue for the value of a close reading of medieval texts, agrees with Jordan's basic argument (25-26); nevertheless, an "aggregative" structure need not imply a lack of concern for connected meaning' (Spearing, 26).

Gower possesses an extensive knowledge of Ovid, whose works present the ideal model for a sustained tone of irony within narrative poetry, and this should

alert us to the danger of dismissing too quickly the capacity for irony, complexity, and deception within the Confessio Amantis. The Ovidian technique is to present a polished and serious surface which on closer inspection carries a secondary and usually comic meaning. So it is in the Metamorphoses: Ovid's declared intent is to list a series of tales involving the idea of transformation but time and again traditional stories are recast and subtly satirised by an urbane wit. David W. Hiscoe, writing of Gower's use of Ovidian comic strategy, notes that Gower and Ovid share a 'comic strategy' and that the 'Confessio Amantis deserves attention for the skill with which it captures the spirit of Ovidian comedy' ('The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower's Confessio Amantis', 369). Hiscoe is responding to the challenge of explaining why some of the tales in the poem seem to vary strangely from their traditional or classical versions, and he argues that this is part of a deliberate authorial method. He goes on to describe the technique and accepts it as one with which both Gower and his audience were familiar:

Ovid creates laughter in the Metamorphoses by allowing his readers to watch his characters falsify the myths that Roman society received from antiquity. The laughter of the reader evidences the ability to evade rhetorical manipulation. Gower transforms Ovid's old way by applying to it the new matter that medieval allegorists created with their spiritual readings of mythological tales. The audience of Confessio Amantis signals

with its laughter its ability to detect the moral and spiritual distortions that Genius inflicts on Ovid's tales as the priest of love bends them to Amans's pursuit after strange gods. (382)

In my own reading of the Confessio Amantis I am inclined to see Genius's manipulation of the content of the shrift as having a more elaborate purpose than Hiscoe allows, otherwise I am largely in agreement with his view. But what is this purpose? and to what ends do I see it at work within the text?

### 1.2 GENIUS'S INTENT

G.C. Macaulay notes in his edition of the poem that there is a strange predominance of determinism and fatalism in his author's work: 'Notwithstanding his general strictness in matters of morality, Gower was something of a fatalist ... and he repeatedly emphasizes the irresistible character of the impulses of nature in love' (Vol.I, 493). Macaulay observes an unusual phenomenon within the text and, in search of an explanation, relates this to some implied characteristic of its author. He has already denied that the work possesses much complexity (Vol.I, x) and so he does not consider the possibility that the phenomenon he notes may have its source, not in the personality of the author, but in a carefully defined dramatic context within the poem itself.

Genius undertakes to speak of the vices as they apply to love; love is not necessarily sinful, nevertheless the tales are understood to illustrate each

of the Seven Deadly Sins. It might be suggested that the persistent -- albeit contingent -- association of love and sin could assume the characteristics of necessity and, hence, produce a mood of determinism: by the nature of its presentation, the sin which may follow love becomes the sin which must follow. This explanation is one way of viewing the determinism of the Confessio Amantis. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be sufficient to explain what has been observed: the determinism of the poem is pervasive, as Macaulay notes, and the coincidental association of love and sin is unable to account fully for its presence.

A better solution is found in some comments by the American medievalist, Robert Yeager. We recall that Genius bluntly tells Amans in a lengthy speech (VIII, 2060-148) that secular love (at least as the penitent experiences it) is sinful, 'thou seist it is a Sinne,/ And Sinne mai no pris deserve' (VIII, 2088-9), and that he would be best to seek the divine love which 'mai noght faile' (VIII, 2086). In concluding, Genius expresses the hope to Amans that he has 'conceived/ Somwhat of that I wolde mene' (VIII, 2142-3), ironically recalling his initial promise of clarity and openness at the start of the confession (I, 281-8). Yeager remarks that Genius's comments at the beginning and end of the shrift are indicative of two aspects of his role, and it is useful at this point to quote his view at some

length. He begins with a reference to Genius's initial statements to Amans:

[Genius's] office, as he claims, is two-fold: first, he is the priest of Venus, and so bound to shrive Amans specifically as a worshipper of Love; he is, however, also a priest in general, with a responsibility to discuss vice qua vice. In book after book, he does just this, beginning with a description, and examples illustrative, of 'real' sins, then turning from these to their amorous incarnations. As the poem progresses, these two roles of Genius are brought together. When Venus is restored to her original role as 'sub-vicar of God', servant of 'kind' and interested only in admitting to her court those true lovers capable of performing their duties according to natural, Christian law, Genius too is revealed as a priest of an increasingly Christian order. By the conclusion of the Confessio Amantis, this Genius -- a far cry from his 'brother' in Jean de Meung's Roman, where he incites the lover to seize the Rose in the garden -- is gently admonishing the aged Amans to consider his true state and give over his unnatural desire for the young lady. (486-7)

In this Yeager, like Peck and Gallacher, takes note of the importance of Genius's initial and concluding declarations; unlike the two other critics, he begins to look into the artistic role played by Genius for an explanation of what he has found. Yeager recognises the poetic merit of the Confessio Amantis (merit not limited to the often noted regularity of its verse) and acknowledges the poem's capacity for self-sufficiency. At one point Genius is 'pro' secular love, at another he is 'con'-- and now we have a reason for his actions which can be clearly stated in the context of the book's own needs. However, Yeager does not fully consider how the attributes of the two Geniuses to whom he refers are detectable within the exempla, not only at the extremes

of beginning and end, but throughout the text. It is the implication this observation holds for the individual tales of the collection, as well as the overall form of the poem, which I wish to explore.

We learn in book VIII that Amans is an old man, and Venus makes it clear to him that he is not equal to the task of love:

For thogh thou myhtest love atteigne,  
Yit were it bot an ydel peine,  
Whan that thou art noght sufficient  
To holde love his covenant.

(VIII, 2417-20)

Such facts have been plain to Venus from the start. I suggest that the purpose of Genius's stories has been to delay and to discourage Amans from his quest, and that there has never been any chance that his supplication to the goddess would be granted. Amans has been the victim of an elaborate hoax. At the beginning of the shrift we expect tales which will illustrate the contingent vices of love; at the end, we discover that Genius's stories have been intended to demonstrate the necessary connection between secular love and sin. Genius's text does two things at once (this much he himself admits): it has an overt narrative level which illustrates the contingent function I have described, and also an underlying covert task which seeks to suggest the necessary relationship between secular love and sin. It is this latter role which exploits the use of determinism and fatalism, and generally downgrades the

value of secular love. It must also be remembered that the only part of life which Genius considers is that concerned with love -- it is through the window of love that he shows Amans the secular world -- and so the priest effectively conflates secular love with secular activity in general. The importance of this conflation is that it provides an easy link between the dialogue of the priest and penitent, and the political values of the poem's Prologue and 'Epilogue'. When Genius talks of the evils of physical love he is also talking, to a degree, about the evils of the physical world. I believe that Gower suggests that both life and love are improved by a recollection of the values of divine grace; and I will point to this further in my concluding chapter. The connection between fatalism and the sins of love is apt because of the commonly expressed theological view that it is best to avoid sexual temptation (and not to confront it) due to a perceived causal link between thought and act in such matters. Thomas Aquinas puts the idea succinctly in Summa Theologiae (35,2) :

Sin must always be avoided, yes, but we should sometimes run from and sometimes resist its onslaught. Turning tail is the answer when continual thinking about it increases the incentive to sin (as in sexual sin): hence the advice, 'avoid fornication'. Whereas resistance is called for when steady thought would help to remove the incentive arising from some less pressing persuasion. (25)

In matters of secular love, sin follows temptation in a way which almost establishes a causal link between the

two. Consequently, Genius will suggest to Amans that his best interests would be served by fleeing physical love.

Overtly, Genius is the priest of love; covertly, he functions as a priest of a more conventional order and consistently undermines with Ovidian irony the tales of Amans's shrift. Hence, it is quite logical that the supposed priest of love should criticise Venus (V, 1382-1443): he appears to argue for secular love; in practice, he argues against it. The consequences of this simple observation are substantial for the way we read many of Genius's exempla and help greatly in understanding the traditionally 'difficult' sections of the Confessio Amantis. Before moving on, I must add that I do not claim that the Confessio Amantis is a poem which decides in favour of the spiritual over the secular, as Yeager implies (486-7). Nor do I argue that Gower attempts the kind of synthesis of the flesh and the spirit that one finds in Dante's Divine Comedy. For all the power of Genius's reasoning (which is considerable) Amans is not convinced that he should abandon secular love; indeed, the very premise that one might be reasoned out of love may be absurd. Amans is forced to leave his quest by both age and the specific command of Venus. In this one instance the debate between secular and divine is decided, more generally, it is not:

Gower has no simple cures for the sexual passions he so effectively portrays; the result ... is

that the Confessio Amantis is less rigidly prescriptive and a more complex literary achievement that we might expect from 'moral' Gower. (Benson, 108)

Genius describes a world of secular love which is parallel but opposite to the world of divine love; however, the moral tone of the lover's shrift is complicated and obscured by the ironic context in which it is placed. We cannot be sure of Genius's morality because the priest manipulates appearances to achieve his own ends; we can be even less certain of 'moral Gower.' For example, I do not think that we should accept as authorial the despairing pessimism of the Prologue to the Confessio Amantis, any more than we should regard Genius's final advice to Amans as being intended for all Gower's readers. What is universal in this work may be simply stated: Gower calls on us to retreat from our personal interests and consider those of society, and he sees the divisiveness of humanity as ended only by the communion of spirits offered by God. The poem mocks a foolish old man; but more generally (and more seriously) it considers the predicament of an earth-bound soul.

In what follows I have avoided a 'book by book' approach to the poem and have chosen instead to begin with a general discussion of my method -- with examples taken from book I -- and then, in the following chapters, I consider some of the more interesting sections of the poem in the light of my suggested

reading. I conclude with a brief discussion of the relevance of the Prologue and 'Epilogue' to the remainder of the text.

[\*]

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND EXAMPLES

### 2.0 THE SINS OF THE SENSES

Genius begins the confession with a series of brief exempla, drawn from classical mythology and fables, on the sins of the five senses, and these establish his basic methodology for much that is to follow. In an unpublished doctoral dissertation James Foster discusses the processes by which medieval writers reinterpreted pagan myths in the light of Christian theology and made them vehicles for Christian instruction. He summarises as follows:

By the close of the Middle Ages ... [the] ... rationalistic and ethical treatment of the fables had made the personages of myth into figures of history or embodiments of natural truth. More importantly, it made these figures from the Book of Nature exempla in the moral drama in which every man acted. (73)

The relationship which Foster outlines between pagan narratives and the Christian writers who reinterpreted them has some relevance to our understanding of Genius's method. Genius's overt function within the confession is essentially pagan -- he represents the goddess of love and serves her interests -- and in this role he makes use of the Greek and Roman fables. Covertly, however, he will fulfil a generally Christian function

in that he will urge the penitent to serve not the world but God, and to this end his retelling of the pagan fables persistently shows the influence of non-secular Christian values. I do not imply by these comments that readers have a ready formula by which they may unlock the ironies of the Confessio Amantis. It might be noted, for example, that the role of Genius is not as simple as I have implied: it is true that Genius exhorts Amans at the end of the shrift to consider higher Christian values, but is this simply another part of the ploy to turn the lover from his quest? It is typical of the poem's ironies that such a question seems impossible to answer, and our inability further suggests that caution is required in making prescriptive judgements on the Confessio Amantis. Caution is also warranted (as James Foster has shown) because of the availability of various interpretations which may have been familiar to a medieval writer for any given exemplum based on a classical text. Allegory, by its nature, invites a plurality of meanings, and Genius is free to work with these as he chooses, picking whichever he requires to complete the task at hand. He may use a pagan or Christian interpretation of a tale, depending on his needs, and one must remember that ambiguity is inherent in the dual role he fulfils as priest to both God and goddess. Paul Beichner has sounded a warning for the unwary on the subject of allegory and symbolism

in medieval literature. He notes that 'The concentration of allegory in the air in the Middle Ages was heavy' (33); he does not deny that medieval literary works often employ symbolism, but his concern lies with

allegoresis or allegorical exegesis -- specifically, with the question of giving allegorical interpretations or moralizations to writings which are not primarily allegories. How far should a modern interpreter go? (33)

Beichner prefers a cautious approach and warns the reader against 'engaging in creative writing' in the act of analysis (38). It is the primary premise of this thesis that there is a background of allegory maintained in the Confessio Amantis; and my claim for this will be supported by evidence from within the text. However, there are two occasions in my reading of the poem where I will invite the reader to see more specific and sustained allegories at work, and these occur when I discuss the tales of the Trojan Horse (chapter 2) and of Apollonius (chapter 5). To what extent my efforts represent 'creative writing' may be judged at the time.

In his treatment of the 'Sins of the Senses' we have our first example of the priest's deft use of allegory and symbolism. One of the consequences of his method is that we are often unsure of the exact focus of his criticism: is it secular love, or 'unkindely' behaviour, or secular activity in general that he decries? Dramatically, all are valid for a shrift in which the penitent is reluctant to admit that his love

is 'unkindely' but who may be convinced (perhaps) of the fickleness of worldly life and love in general, and so set his sights on a higher prize. Structurally, such vagueness is also of use to Gower as it allows Amans's shrift to meld into the social concerns which sit at the confession's borders; however, for now we need to consider the Tale of Acteon.

#### 2.0.1 ACTEON (I, 333-78)

The Tale of Acteon, as the first of hundreds of exempla, occupies a significant place in the confession. It is told as a warning against the sins to which Amans might be led by the sense of sight, and before commencing the tale Genius exhorts Amans his 'yhe forto kepe and warde,/ So that it passe noght his warde' (I, 331-2) because 'an yhe is as a thief/ To love, and doth ful gret meschief' (I, 319-20). The priest is concerned with those lovers who deliberately choose to misuse their sense of sight:

Ful manye suche a man mai finde,  
Whiche evere caste aboute here yhe,  
To loke if that thei myhte asprie  
Fulofte thing which hem ne toucheth,  
Bot only that here herte soucheth  
In hindringe of an other wiht;  
And thus ful many a worthi knyht  
And many a lusti lady bothe  
Have be fulofte sythe wrothe.  
(I, 310-18)

Foster claims that the common medieval view of this tale accepted that it was concerned with 'mislooking':

Gower and his audience knew that the tale in fact reveals the danger of a man's gazing upon any delightful fantasy in the mind whose sight

brings psychological and perhaps physical harm to the viewer. The Lover has made his lady into precisely this sort of fantasy. (169)

However, we need not assume that this is the only available interpretation of the tale. Genius says that his source for the exemplum is Ovid who 'telleth in his bok/ Ensample touchende of mislok' (I, 333-4) and it seems that the priest has returned to Ovid for the inspiration of his own retelling. Ovid makes the Acteon myth a vehicle for his urbane wit as he plays upon the imputed guilt of Acteon: did the huntsman deliberately gaze at the naked goddess or was he just the victim of chance and misunderstanding? He apparently pleads for the latter but there seems to be more than just a touch of irony in his claim that

calm reflection will show that destiny was to blame for Actaeon's misfortunes, not any guilt on his own part; for there is nothing sinful in losing one's way. (77-8)

Perhaps the real irony of Ovid's story is that irrespective of whether Acteon dies as a result of conscious sin or simply because of misfortune, his death is appropriate to his blood-thirsty interests -- interests which Ovid is careful to articulate by references to the huntsmen's 'nets and swords ... dripping with blood' and to the 'ground ... stained with the bloodshed of wild beasts of many kinds' (78). Not all critics agree with my reading of Ovid. Peter Beidler seems to find no irony at all and considers the Roman poet's treatment of the Acteon story 'vivid and

moving'; he accepts without question that Ovid's Acteon sees the goddess 'through no fault of his own':

Far from suggesting that Acteon was in any sense guilty of sin or even of bad judgment, Ovid specifically exonerated Acteon by stating that his downfall was caused by destiny and not by guilt. If Gower's exemplum, however, is to have any force as a guide to the actions of Amans, it must lay at Acteon's own feet the responsibility for his terrible punishment. (9)

In my reading of Genius's technique it is precisely the fact that he does not lay responsibility 'at Acteon's feet' which gives force to his exemplum. However, Beidler is not alone in his interpretation. Russell Peck writes of Acteon as 'Having mislocated his proper purview by gazing lecherously on the chaste Diana' (39) and so also seems to disregard any capacity for irony which the text may hold. In doing this Peck and Beidler are in keeping with the particular school of medieval thought on this exemplum which Foster has previously outlined. But how does the priest use the Ovidian irony of his source?

Genius's retelling of the tale returns to Ovid, and the essence of Ovid's witty treatment is deeply entwined into the narrative. Genius declares that Acteon is guilty of a conscious abuse of the sense of sight; however, his text points to circumstance and misfortune as the causes of Acteon's fall. In fact, the issue at stake is not whether it is fate or free will that leads to the death of Acteon (in this regard Genius recalls Ovid who also leaves the matter undecided), but

whether or not secular activity is necessarily or contingently sinful -- and the bias is strongly in favour of the former.

We are told of Acteon that 'Where him best thoghte in every place/ To finde gamen in his weie,/ Ther rod he forto hunte and pleie' (I, 346-8). He chooses where he wishes to hunt, but it is a choice determined by his perception of where game might be found. It is this interaction of choice and circumstance which leads Acteon to the forest; Genius again suggests the role of chance, and hints at Acteon's vulnerability: 'So him befell upon a tide/ On his hunting as he cam ride,/ In a Forest al one he was' (I, 349-51). The forest is a convenient symbol for secular confusion, and the images it impresses upon Acteon suggest its intoxicating power:

He syh upon the grene gras  
The faire freisshe floures springe,  
He herde among the leves singe  
The Throstle with the nyhtingale.  
(I, 352-5)

Under the influence of these images Acteon moves 'Thus er he wiste into a Dale' (I, 356). Ovid too describes the beauty of the grove (78) but Genius introduces the sensual interaction between the huntsman and the rich natural imagery which surrounds him. The two texts are also distinguished by differences of tone and imagery. The nature described by the Roman Poet is ordered and controlled: Ovid writes of a personified 'nature [whol by her own devices has imitated art' (78); it is a

context in which a goddess may 'bathe her fastidious limbs' (78). The imagery of the priest's narrative is much more intoxicating, less contrived, and essentially romantic. Peck notes that Genius's description of the huntsman in the forrest resembles 'a conventional romance description' (39):

The situation recalls Amans' own venture into the hortus deliciarum out of which he is unable to proceed once he is trapped by Cupid's dart. Acteon's punishment for his mislook is a transformation and death. Amans suffers a comparable transformation as he is changed from a rational man into a weeping 'caitif' wishing death. Thanks to Genius' good instruction, he ultimately gets out of the wood. But only after Cupid's dart is removed. (39)

Peck's analysis is persuasive but he perhaps underestimates the complexity of Genius's 'good instruction', the compulsion to which Amans is finally subject and the dark nature of Cupid's dart. The plight of Amans and Acteon is 'comparable' not simply because both have difficulty with a lady, but because both are part of a secular context represented by Genius as cruel and irrational, and symbolised by the deadly presence of Cupid's Dart. James Foster perceptively notes that Cupid is a dark force within the poem and that 'Cupid's dart and blindness, both aspects of the evil Cupid, depict the irrationality of earthly love from which the Lover must free himself' (146).

Circumstances take Acteon to the edge of a clearing

All round aboute wel besein

With buisshes grene and Cedres hyhe;  
And ther withinne he caste his yhe.  
Amidd the plein he syh a welle,  
So fair ther myhte noman telle.  
(I, 358-62).

The dale is attractive and its focus is a beautiful well 'In which Diana naked stod/ To bathe and pleie hire in the flod/ With many a Nimphe, which hire serveth' (I, 363-5). It is the well and not Diana which first draws the eye of Acteon, and once he has looked at the well it becomes inevitable that he should also see Diana. There is an element of playfulness in Genius's use of language when he describes the well as 'So fair' immediately before he mentions Diana whom he honours with no such description. Although Diana is the focus of a sensual image she does not occupy that image exclusively. Acteon has not chosen to look at the goddess but does so as a consequence of previous events; Genius has ample opportunity to show Acteon's free will at work in choosing to commit a sin of sight, but he fails to do so. Even at the moment of looking directly at the naked goddess, the whole sum of Genius's description is simply that Acteon 'his yhe away ne swerveth/ Fro hire' (I, 366-7), and this does not make the conscious element of the hunter's action clear: is he simply startled and fearful at the unexpected sight of the goddess, or has he committed a sin? Why does he not move his eyes away? If Genius's purpose were as simple as Peter Beidler seems to think we would not find such ambiguity at this crucial moment in the text. Ovid's conclusion to his

tale and his summary of Acteon's fate are thoroughly ambiguous:

When the story was told, opinions were divided: some thought that the goddess had been too cruel, others praised her, and declared her act in keeping with her strict chastity. Both sides could justify their views. (80)

Ovid's irony remains, but it has been put to a new purpose in Genius's text, and the priest's summary of the tale's moral to Amans recalls something of Ovid's tone:

Lo now, my Sone, what it is  
A man to caste his yhe amis,  
Which Acteon hath dere aboght;  
Be war forthi and do it noght.  
For ofte, who that hiede toke,  
Betre is to winke than to loke.  
(I, 379-84)

Acteon has no chance to 'winke'; his only hope of escape lay in not entering the forest at all -- it is the forrest and all that is in it which kills Acteon. Genius had said that he would tell a tale about mislooking in a secular context but the resultant story's clear implication is that to survive one must avoid the secular chase altogether. To take part in the hunt is to die. Genius preserves the heart of Ovid's ironic method (he has kept the tale in its basic pagan form) but he developes the sensual elements of his source, which are essentially decorative, to a point where they become an important part of his meaning. Ovid playfully explores the problem of free will and determinism; Genius keeps the dichotomy although he

slightly changes the terms involved. In the priest's version Acteon dies because of his lust, or because of the sensual distraction represented by the forest: whichever reason we accept, we are left with the conclusion that Acteon is the victim of secularity. Whereas Ovid's irony turns on the death of the hunter at the jaws of his own hounds, Genius portrays a sensual man entrapped by his own sensuality.

#### 2.0.2 MEDUSA (I, 389-435)

The second of Genius's exempla follows the theme of mislooking. Medusa is, at least overtly, symbolic of 'fol delit', as Genius makes clear in his moral to the tale:

Lo now, my Sone, advise the,  
That thou thi sihte noght misuse:  
Cast noght thin yhe upon Meduse,  
That thou be torned into Ston:  
For so wys man was nevere non,  
Bot if he wel his yhe kepe  
And take of fol delit no kepe,  
That he with lust nys ofte nome,  
Thurgh strenghte of love and overcome.  
(I, 436-44)

James Foster conveniently summarises a common medieval view of the Gorgons:

They represented all lustful, evil women who have but a single sense of malice (one eye) and who through sensual attraction destroy the reason of men (transform them to stone). The just man (Perseus), however, can overcome them through reason and discretion. (156)

Patrick Gallacher notes that the 'association of excessive love, or lust, with Medusa has some foundation in Ovid, who explains her ugliness as the result of an unchaste action -- her rape by Neptune in the temple of

Athena' (112). Gallacher sees elements of specific symbolism within the text, and he extends these to yield a fixed reading of the tale itself:

The significance of the story is as follows: Amans can be cured of his sickness, admittedly an effect of gazing on Medusa, by learning from the example of Perseus -- that is, by using the shield of Pallas, which is an obvious metaphor of self-knowledge, and the sword of Mercury, which I interpret, on the evidence of the mythographical commentaries, as a metaphor of speech. (112)

Perhaps, the situation is not quite so clear as to warrant Gallacher's confident interpretation of the exemplum: Medusa is 'fol delit', yet what is that? She and her sisters embody the idea of mislooking and Genius warns that:

What man on hem his chiere caste  
And hem behield, he was als faste  
Out of a man into a Ston  
Forschape, and thus ful manyon  
Deceived were, of that thei wolde  
Misloke, wher that thei ne scholde.  
(I, 413-8)

Like Diana in the Tale of Acteon, the Gorgons are the forbidden fruit of their exemplum but what they precisely represent is unclear. Gallacher sees no ambiguity and claims that

It seems quite obvious ... in view of the connection between Medusa and lust, that when Amans admits to having gazed on her, he is designating excessive love or lust as the cause of his present sickness. (113)

The difficulty with this assertion is that Amans does not believe his problem to be 'excessive love'; he does not identify with that idea. This is also a problem for

Genius, and so he is wisely indirect in his approach as he suggests the sinfulness of some undefined secular pleasure. Medusa's victims are like Acteon; we are unsure of the precise cause of their fall. Was Acteon destroyed by a specific lustful act or by a general secular misfortune? Is Medusa 'fol delit' in its fullest sense, or does she merely serve the function of a generic label for the secular distractions of the world?

We are told of the Gorgons that 'Fro kynde thei be so miswent,/ That to the liknesse of Serpent/ Thei were bore' (I, 395-7), and so Genius separates what belongs to human nature from that which does not. Clearly, the Gorgons are 'unkindely' irrespective of their specific significance and this, it seems to me, is the heart of the exemplum. It may be that Medusa represents 'lust' or it may be that she is a more general representation of secular temptation in keeping with the somewhat general approach of the 'Sins of the Senses'; more importantly, it is clear that she is the horror of 'unkindely' behaviour and that in her the lover may confront a ready identification with himself. It is this confrontation which Amans will face at the end of the shrift: in the meantime Genius skilfully blurs the division between sensuality and sin as he attempts to deter the lover from his secular quest.

Perseus destroys Medusa with the shield of Pallas and the sword of Mercury which apparently

symbolise 'wisdom and prouesse' (I, 429) respectively. Is he the just man who sees the world for the evil place that it is? Intriguingly, he does not look at Medusa in the reflection of the shield -- as in Ovid (115) -- but instead 'covereth sauf his face' (I, 432): the protection of wisdom lies in its shuning of 'unkindely' concerns. We cannot be sure whether Perseus is protected against sin or the more general idea of secular temptation; we can be certain that he covers his eyes against that which is 'unkindely'. Nevertheless, Perseus does confront Medusa and this, I think, tends to further suggest that she is not purely representative of lust. Sexual temptation, as such, in the Confessio Amantis is defeated by retreat; however, the whole thrust of the confession administered by Genius will be that Amans should confront the sin constituted by his 'unkindely' thoughts. The philosophical position adopted by Genius in the exempla so far considered is one often repeated in the course of the poem -- and this is especially so in the remaining stories on the 'Sins of the Senses'.

### 2.0.3 SERPENT (I, 463-80); SIRENS (I, 481-529)

A thief attempts to steal the serpent's treasure by the use of musical charms, and by implication it will yield the treasure if it hears the charm; to escape this it blocks its ears and so

Of his enchantement ne hiereth;  
And in this wise himself he skiereth,

So that he hath the words weyved  
And thurgh his Ere is nocht deceived.  
(I, 477-80)

To be preserved from the evils of sensuality one must withdraw from them: if the serpent had heard the charm it would have yielded. Gallacher argues that Medusa is excessive love, but Genius's use of the charm in this exemplum (and the cumulative effect of the poem's exempla) suggests that these stories are more generally concerned with sensual distractions (and occasional reference to 'unkindely' behaviour) than the extremes of lust. Sensuality, within the Confessio Amantis, is treated as a distraction in the same way that Augustine writes of it in his Confessions (X, 33):

I ought not to allow my mind to be paralysed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place. Simply because I allow them their due, as adjuncts to reason, they attempt to take precedence and forge ahead of it, with the result that I sometimes sin in this way but am not aware of it until later. (238)

Sensuality takes one's attention from God and His will, and this will be Genius's final message to Amans.

An approach similar to that of the previous exempla is found in the tale based on Ulysses and the Sirens: the Sirens have the appearance of beauty, and have a beautifully alluring song, but they will destroy all those who approach -- and anyone who hears their song must be drawn to them. Ulysses escapes this fate by blocking the ears of his men and (so Genius seems to imply in his chosen version) his own. In Homer, Ulysses

resists the Sirens' song by having himself strapped to the mast of his ship, and the omission of this detail is a significant aspect of Genius's exemplum. If Genius had allowed Ulysses to hear the song of the Sirens, it would have implied that secular temptation could be experienced and resisted (just as if Perseus had looked at the reflection of Medusa, or if the serpent had heard and resisted the charm); but Genius claims that the only protection against vice is to shun secular temptations altogether: the shield must cover one's face and one's ears must be blocked.

There is nothing unusual in a religious context about the claim that the way to avoid vice is to shun secular concerns. As just mentioned, the beginning of Genius's discussion of the sins of the senses recalls Augustine's discussion of the same topic in the Confessions; in particular, Genius's implicit advice to Amans that he should turn his back on secular matters brings to mind Augustine's prayer to God (X, 31):

I have also heard these words of yours: Do not follow the counsel of appetite. Turn your back on your own liking. By your gift I have also heard and found great comfort in the words: We gain nothing by eating, lose nothing by abstaining . . . . I have learned to be content with my circumstances as they are. (236)

Genius's treatment of the 'Sins of the Senses' demonstrates his methodology for much of what follows; however, in the longer exempla of the 'Seven Deadly Sins' he finds an even better vehicle for expressing his intent.

## 2.1 HYPOCRISY: MUNDUS AND PAULINA (I, 761-1059)

Genius gives the moral for his tale of Mundus and Paulina in its preamble:

To love is every herte fre,  
Bot in deceipte if that thou feignest  
And therupon thi lust atteignest,  
That thou hast wonne with thi wyle,  
Thogh it thee like for a whyle,  
Thou schalt it afterward repente.  
(I, 752-7)

This anticipates the character of Mundus -- the word 'Mundus' is, ironically as Peck notes, Latin for both 'world' and 'pure' (41-2) -- a man who deceitfully achieves his lust but enjoys its possession for only a short time. Mundus seems to stand at the centre of the exemplum's meaning in that its moral (that Amans should shun hypocrisy) is drawn from his failings. But do his fate and actions agree with the story's moral? Genius's tale is set with numerous references to an inevitable chain of cause and effect, and this brings about a surprising shift of emphasis within the story.

Paulina is described as the best and most beautiful woman in the city, and Genius states that it is this, and not the sinful will of Mundus, which initiates the events of the tale:

It is and hath ben evere yit,  
That so strong is no mannes wit,  
Which thurgh beaute ne mai be drawe  
To love, and stonde under the lawe  
Of thilke bore frele kinde,  
Which makth the hertes yhen blinde,  
Wher no reson mai be comuned:  
And in this wise stod fortunéd  
This tale, of which I wolde mene.  
(I, 769-77)

So, in spite of Mundus's 'sin', he is also a victim of his circumstances -- his circumstances, in fact, cause his crime. Paulina herself is part of the web of cause and effect, and Genius makes this clear in his description of her:

This wif, which in hire lustes grene  
Was fair and freissh and tendre of age,  
Sche may noght lette the corage  
Of him that wole on hire assote.  
(I, 778-81)

It is Mundus's will that initiates the action against Paulina, but it is a will spurred by her beauty and vulnerability; and it is a will to which she must succumb because she is 'freissh and tendre of age'. Ironically, neither Mundus nor Paulina is a free agent, as each plays out a predetermined sequence of actions. The Duke is a 'worti knyht' (I, 785),

Bot yet he was noght of such myht  
The strengthe of love to withstonde,  
That he ne was so broght to honde,  
That malgre wher he wole or no,  
This yonge wif he loveth so,  
That he hath put al his assay  
To wyne thing which he ne may  
Gete of hire graunt in no manere,  
Be yifte of gold ne be preiere.  
(I, 786-94)

The other protagonists in the deception brought about by Mundus are the 'false Prestes' (I, 871). Unlike Mundus, they are driven by commercial greed, not love, and their motivation is significant when one considers the punishment given to them. Paulina escapes punishment because, in spite of all her shame, she is the innocent victim of circumstance, and her husband assures her

'That he with hire is nothing wroth' (I, 986); Mundus is exiled and suffers no harsher penalty because 'he with love was bestad' (I, 1049) and, hence, was not fully responsible for his actions; however, the priests are killed because they betrayed their office (I, 1023-46). In Genius's exempla love is an irrational force which brings about irrational conduct -- and excuses crime. I do not think that Genius, the priest who will finally exhort Amans to take love 'where it mai nocht faile' (VIII, 2086), can be thought to condone the state of affairs which we find at the conclusion of Mundus and Paulina. On the contrary, he presents love in a poor light, intending to invite a negative audience response as he describes a world where passion both causes and excuses crime. Genius's story does little to illustrate the point he promised in his preamble regarding the dangers of hypocrisy: Mundus in fact achieves his desire and suffers little penalty for it! Elizabeth Porter sees this situation as exemplifying the workings of an idealised form of justice:

Thus, the 'Tale of Mundus and Paulina' (I 761-1069), told ostensibly as a warning against hypocrisy in love, serves also as a condemnation of hypocrisy among the priests ... and, in the emperor who punishes the priests and Mundus for their treachery, offers an idealised portrait of the royal virtues of reverence for justice.  
(147)

Peck seems to be largely in agreement with such an approach: 'After the crime is committed the true community, which is beyond worldly deceits, repairs

itself' (43). Both of these views distort the tale unduly in an effort to make it conform to an exterior model; the assumption, for example, by Porter that the emperor's punishment of the priests and Mundus is the major event of the narrative ignores the detail and importance of the other characters, and I find little of Peck's 'true community' in the values expressed by the tale. Mundus is thoroughly corrupt and one wonders about his motivation in telling Paulina of his deception (I, 940-51) -- in particular the last lines:

Fro this day forth I am al thin,  
And if thee like to be myn,  
That stant upon thin oghne wille.  
(I, 949-51)

Does he really expect a favourable reception from Paulina? Or, as seems more likely to me, is this a simple example of gloating by a man who has had what he wanted and now lost interest? Even Peck seems to agree that Mundus is callous (41). To state that the issue is a matter of Paulina's 'oghne wille' must surely be ironic when it follows after so much calculating deception, and Mundus shows no concern or respect for his lady's feelings. The Duke deserves a worse punishment than he receives, and his failure to be properly punished exemplifies the inequity of secular life and love. It is Paulina as victim who has our sympathy and, for that matter, occupies most of our attention within the narrative. Paulina is the victim of her own sex, beauty, religious observance, the greed

of the priests and, lastly, the deception of Mundus. She is, in fact, a victim of the world and its deception -- hence the useful significance of Mundus's latinized name. This is not an exemplum against hypocrisy but a demonstration that the evil of secular life is self-generated from circumstances over which the individuals involved have little control, and that evil finds no consistent punishment. That Peck's concern with social models distorts his reading of the tale is shown by the moral he derives from Mundus and Paulina: 'In such a world where there is no trust, we must learn to steer most carefully' (45). It is precisely the point of this exemplum that careful steering is not enough to save one from evil; nor will careful steering after the event guarantee that the punishment meted out to the guilty is appropriate to the sin of each. Nevertheless, Peck and Porter are right when they point out that there is a political element to the exemplum and that Genius deals with more than the strict affairs of love. However, I contend that Genius is not concerned here with the solutions claimed by Peck and Porter but with a statement of problems -- a statement of the inequities of worldly affairs. His solution, tailored to Amans's needs, is articulated at the end of the shrift.

The priest's exempla on hypocrisy are interesting because they fail to fulfil their overt purpose, which is to illustrate and warn against the wickedness of that

sin, and instead provide startling examples of the success and usefulness of hypocrisy. The reason for this is that their purpose is not to argue against and explicate the sin, as Genius claims, but to show that sinfulness is the normal state of sensual activity. To use Peck's expression once more, Genius's implicit advice to Amans is not that he must 'steer most carefully' in the world but that he should steer away from worldly concerns completely!

#### 2.1.1 TROJAN HORSE (I, 1077-1189)

Overtly, the Tale of the Trojan Horse is told by Genius to warn against the use of hypocrisy. This intention on Genius's part poses the same problem that we encountered in Mundus and Paulina: the Trojan Horse story is a further example of the successful use of hypocrisy and not a counter-example against it. We have already seen Genius's use of the goddess Diana and the Gorgons as secular lures; the story of Narcissus provides a further example in which Narcissus is destroyed by the fatal attraction of his own image (I, 2254-366). In the present exemplum, I believe Genius employs symbolism -- an ideal device for covert purposes -- to aid the text as a counter-example against love, and I suggest the following reading: the tale parodies a love-story; the role of the beloved is played by Troy; her would-be lover is represented by the Greek army. One can never be certain in this kind of analysis of correctly identifying the author's intent or the

presence of symbolism -- Paul Beichner warns that

Not every lion encountered in a story represents either Christ, or St. Mark the Evangelist, or the devil, or a vice; some lions represent only themselves. (38)

As it is with lions, so it may be with horses; it is only possible to point to what appear to be a consistent series of correspondences within the text which argue for a particular interpretation. The metaphorical use of war is not new to love poetry, and it is not difficult to see phallic and vaginal imagery lurking in Genius's description of the citizens of Troy and their efforts to bring the horse within the body of the city:

Bot of here entre whan thei soghte,  
The gates weren al to smale;  
And therupon was many a tale,  
Bot for the worschipe of Minerve,  
To whom thei comen forto serve,  
Thei of the toun, whiche understode  
That al this thing was do for goode,  
For pes, wherof that thei ben glade.  
The gates that Neptunus made  
A thousand wynter ther tofore,  
Thei have anon tobroke and tore;  
The stronge walles doun thei bete,  
So that in to the large strete  
This Hors with gret solempnite  
Was broght withinne the Cite,  
And offred with gret reverence,  
Which was to Troie an evidence  
Of love and pes for everemo.

(I, 1144-61)

Genius speaks against the deceptive nature of any worldly display; more subtly, he advises against the false hopes and expectations of sexual union. These meanings are both further aided by his reportage of the hopes held by the Trojan citizens 'whiche understode/ That al this thing was do for goode' and the high seriousness of the

manner in which they seek their own destruction. The horse is ironic 'evidence' (I, 1160) of the destructive power of love. Like Troilus, the Trojans make the error of taking secular displays (even when made for the benefit of a goddess) more seriously than they should. Yeager describes the horse as 'the emblem of deceit and hence of the entire tale' (255) and refers to the passage describing the building of the horse (I, 1077-106): 'Again and again, in keeping with his theme of Hypocrisy ... [Genius] ... emphasizes with adjectives, verbs, and adverbs the guile involved' (253-4). But the guile in the tale cuts in two directions, against both Trojan and Greek, as I shall show.

Genius admonishes Amans at the end of the Trojan Horse exemplum:

Bot what man that his lust desireth  
Of love, and therupon conspireth  
With wordes feigned to deceive,  
He schal nocht faile to receive  
His peine, as it is ofte sene.

(I, 1205-9)

In doing this he reinforces the symbolic reading of the text I suggest, but at this crucial point he fails to provide a suitable exemplum to substantiate his point. The Greeks have desired, conspired and feigned; yet how do they fail? How do they receive their 'peine'? The priest could, for example, have described the fate of many of the Greek leaders after the fall of Troy, but he does not. Genius's words provide the moral to the tale of the Trojan Horse; however, moral and tale seem to be

discordant. Or is it that they are in concord at another level of interpretation? By assuming the form of the Trojan Horse, the Greeks (the 'lovers' of Troy) have, in effect, assumed a more pleasing shape in order to mask their essentially destructive intent. The Horse acts as an enticement to the visual senses by its intricacy and beauty, and Genius describes the activity of the Greeks as they produce this effect:

Anon with alle besinesse  
Here Hors of Bras let faire dihte,  
Which was to sen a wonder sihte;  
For it was trapped of himselve,  
And hadde of smale whieles twelve,  
Upon the whiche men ynowe  
With craft toward the toun it drowe,  
And goth glistrende ayein the Sunne.  
(I, 1130-7)

The existence of the horse seals the fate of Troy; it is the cause of the city's destruction, and in this way it belongs to the same category of secular lures as the Sirens. It is only a short step from this simple correspondence between beauty and destruction to an actual identification between the two. In the reading I suggest, the Horse is not only an example of hypocrisy but also a symbol of the destructive reality of secular passion. The intent of the Greeks, to rape and destroy, is not concealed by the display of the horse but, metaphorically, represented by it. In the lines concluding the exemplum, Genius readily applies his story (supposedly told as an example of the hypocrisy of man against man) to the context of secular love:

Fulofte and thus the swete soureth,  
Whan it is knowe to the tast:  
He spilleth many a word in wast  
That schal with such a poeple trete;  
For whan he weneth most beyete,  
Thanne is he schape most to lese.  
And riht so if a womman chese  
Upon the wordes that sche hiereth  
Som man, whan he most trewe appiereth,  
Thanne is he forthest fro the trowthe.  
(I, 1190-99)

Both the Trojans and the Greeks are part of a secular illusion; both find that the 'swete soureth'. The Greeks take what they want and destroy it, just as the Trojans are destroyed by what they thought they desired. Each becomes the dupe of a secular illusion. The Trojans, as Acteon had done, gaze upon beauty and die; however, the image of Troy with its enticing wealth has no more substance than the reflection of Narcissus, and so the Greeks too are trapped by a deception. Within the metaphor of the lovers, both lover and beloved are deceived; both pursue an illusion.

We can now view Genius's apparently discordant moral (I, 1205-9) in a new light: the Greeks fail in their quest because they have destroyed the object of their love, and they have done this because secular passion is, in Genius's hands, necessarily deceptive and destructive. Amans himself is engaged in a kind of deception: he is devoted to secular love and he has also sought the help of the gods to obtain an unwilling lady. The implications of Genius's story for him are clear.

2.2 INOBEDIENCE: FLORENT (I, 1407-1861) AND THE WIFE OF BATH

Genius is quite broad in his definition of 'Inobedience', a word he uses to represent a whole attitude of mind:

This vice of Inobedience  
Ayein the reule of conscience  
Al that is humble he disalloweth,  
That he toward his god ne boweth  
After the lawes of his heste.  
Noght as a man bot as a beste,  
Which goth upon his lustes wilde,  
So goth this proude vice unmylde  
That he desdeigneth alle lawe:  
(I, 1235-43)

This definition of the vice is tailored to have particular regard to the personal circumstances of Amans. References are twice made to 'lawe' and 'lawes' which define the proper bounds of natural behaviour and against which 'lustes wilde' rebel (we recall that Amans ultimately will be told by Venus that he is simply too old to practise the rites of love, and that it is against the laws of nature to attempt to do so.) The lover gives a lengthy reply to Genius on the subject of 'Inobedience' and the pursuit of his lady, and he ironically echoes much of what Genius has previously implied about the irresistible and overpowering nature of secular passion:

This is a wonder retenue,  
That malgre wher sche wole or non  
Min herte is everemore in on,  
So that I can non other chese,  
Bot whether that I winne or lese,  
I moste hire loven til I deie.  
(I, 1328-33)

In a piece of advice given a short space later, Genius



adaptations of tale to teller -- the 'Lothly Lady' underscores with her arguments the views of the outspoken Wife. Gower, on the other hand, is interested in illustrating 'Murmur and Complaint', two divisions of 'Inobedience', the second minister of Pride. (266)

What makes Yeager's remarks so interesting is his willingness to see an interaction between tale and teller in Chaucer and his comparative reluctance to see the same process at work in the Confessio Amantis. However, I see Genius's treatment of the story as being just as heavily influenced by the personality and purpose of its teller as the Wife of Bath's.

Florent is a commanding figure, a 'worthi knyht' (I, 1408) and 'Nevoeu to themperour' (I, 1409). Genius say that he chose to ride the 'Marches al aboute' (I, 1417) because 'Of armes he was desirous,/ Chivalerous and amorous,/ And for the fame of worldes speche,/ Strange adventures forto seche' (I, 1413-16). Florent consciously commits himself to secular life and so places his future in an uncertain state. Chance and fortune have significant roles in Genius's story, as we can see in his description of Florent's capture:

And fell a time, as he was oute,  
Fortune, which may every thred  
Tobreke and knette of mannes sped,  
Schop, as this knyht rod in a pas,  
That he be strengthe take was,  
And to a Castell thei him ladde,  
Wher that he fewe frendes hadde:  
For so it fell that ilke stounde  
That he hath with a dedly wounde  
Feihtende his oghne hondes slain  
Branchus, which to the Capitain  
Was Sone and Heir, wherof ben wrothe

The fader and the moder bothe.  
(I, 1418-30)

Florent suffers a double blow from fortune: he is taken, apparently by the chance of battle, by people who have good cause not to regard him highly. The basis of his captors' animosity lies in a blood feud which could well demand a life for a life. There is nothing to show firmly that Florent has done anything wrong, and he is trapped apparently by the fortunes of battle. By contrast, at this point, the Wife of Bath's knight is very much a criminal -- a victim of his own corrupt will. From the start Alisoun gives a moral tone to her tale and it is this tone which is generally lacking in Genius's tale (although he and the Wife of Bath draw essentially the same conclusion) and this basic difference between the two develops as their respective narratives progress.

Alisoun's knight is spared from immediate death by the charity of 'the queene and othere ladyes mo' (894); in Genius's version Florent is also spared but only by the animal fear of the captain:

And fain thei wolden do vengance  
Upon Florent, bot remembrance  
That thei toke of his worthinesse  
Of knythod and of gentillesse,  
And how he stod of cousinage  
To themperour, made hem assuage,  
And dorsten noght slen him for fere.  
(I, 1433-9)

Alisoun's setting is ordered by moral purpose; Genius allows only for the laws of cause and effect. In the Wife of Baths Tale, the chance to find what women most

desire is an opportunity for moral salvation, whereas in Genius's telling it is simply part of a mechanism of entrapment devised by 'a lady, the slyheste/ Of alle that men knewe tho' (I, 1442-3). In the Wife of Bath's version, the captor only briefly alludes to the knight's being bound by a formal bond to return in a year's time: 'And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,/ Thy body for to yelden in this place' (911-2). This aspect is significantly expanded by Genius and its articulation is transferred to Florent himself when he seeks a formal contract with the old woman of the castle:

This knyht, which worthi was and wys,  
 This lady preith that he may wite,  
 And have it under Seales write,  
 What questioun it scholde be  
 For which he schal in that degree  
 Stonde of his lif in jeupartie.  
 With that sche feigneth compaignie,  
 And seith: 'Florent, on love it hongeth  
 Al that to myn axinge longeth:  
 What alle wommen most desire  
 This wole I axe, and in thempire  
 Wher as thou hast most knowlechinge  
 Tak conseil upon this axinge.  
 (I, 1472-84)

Florent -- 'This knyht, which worthi was and wys' (I, 1472) -- has an almost business-like caution. But for all his caution he is nevertheless in the process of making a contract with a woman who merely 'feigneth compaignie' (I, 1478); the dangers may be even greater than he suspects, and this implied inability to estimate and overcome the dangers of secular life is a typical feature of Genius's confessional. In spite of the danger and uncertainty, Genius repeatedly stresses

the importance of obedience: 'This knyht hath levere forto dye/ Than breke his trowthe and forto lye/ In place ther as he was swore,/ And schapth him gon ayein therfore' (I, 1511-14). The secular bonds of Genius's story are nearly all abstract (with the exception of Florent's initial capture) but they are generally highlighted or carefully articulated. Sister Mary Grellner writes with respect to Florent and his ultimate 'education':

The education of the hero is accomplished through a series of testings .... Florent is not persuaded by the argument as is Chaucer's nameless knight, but impelled by an inner commitment to the performance of his duty. Though Florent is not a complex character, he does undergo a moral conflict in which he must weigh the value of the knightly trait he prizes most highly. (146)

Sister Grellner's use of the term 'moral conflict' is an acknowledgment of the invisible ties at work in Genius's story. An example of the difference in treatment between the two tales is given by a comparison of how Genius and Alisoun treat the knight's first meeting with the old woman in the forest. The Wife of Bath gives the woman a clearly magical presence by the dance of the maidens and it is this which draws the knight's attention. The old woman has the aura of a deus ex machina -- she is someone to be listened to. Genius's treatment of the same event is much more low key; the old woman's words to Florent recall those of the witches to Macbeth, and they have a similarly tantalizing

quality:

'Florent be thi name  
Thou hast on honde such a game  
That bot thou be the betre avised,  
Thi deth is schapen and devised,  
That al the world ne mai the save,  
Bot if that thou my conseil have.'  
(I, 1541-6)

Florent simply has less assurance than Alisoun's knight at this point that the old woman can save him. He is immediately confronted by the old woman with the price for her secrets and consequently his vulnerability to fate is given a high focus; twice she reminds him that he will die without her aid (I, 1544-6, 1563-4). In the Wife of Bath's Tale it is the knight himself who raises the fear of his death and it is the old woman who readily assures him that this may be avoided:

'My leeve mooder,' quod this knyght, 'certeyn  
I nam but deed, but if that I kan seyn  
What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.  
Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire.'  
'Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,' quod  
she.

(1005-9)

Alisoun's knight refers only in passing to any material reward he may be prepared to offer to the woman for her assistance, 'I wolde wel quite youre hire' (1008), but this detail is much expanded by Genius:

Florent behihte hire good ynowh  
Of lond, of rente, of park, of plowh,  
Bot al that compteth sche at noght.  
Tho fell this knyht in mochel thoght,  
Now goth he forth, now comth ayein,  
He wot noght what is best to sein,  
And thoghte, as he rod to and fro,  
That chese he mot on of the tuo,  
Or forto take hire to his wif  
Or elles forto lese his lif.  
And thanne he caste his advantage,

That sche was of so gret an age,  
That sche mai live bot a while,  
And thoghte put hire in an Ile,  
Wher that noman hire scholde knowe,  
Til sche with deth were overthowe.  
(I, 1565-80)

Florent is still to learn the lesson of sovereignty which will also teach him to distance himself from secular concerns.

The pattern established by Florent's first meeting with the woman of the forest is repeated in subsequent events: he proceeds alone to the castle and alone returns to the forest, pulled along by invisible threads. Alisoun's knight is accompanied by the old woman to the court and at the appropriate moment she makes her demand for marriage. The bonds of cause and effect in Genius's version are all the more obvious for being invisible. For example, as Florent returns to the castle, Genius portrays him as a pawn who is unable to control his destiny:

He goth him forth with hevy chiere,  
As he that not in what manere  
He mai this worldes joie atteigne:  
For if he deie, he hath a peine,  
And if he live, he mot him binde  
To such on which of alle kinde  
Of wommen is thunsemliest.  
(I, 1619-25)

Florent's return journey to the forest fulfils a similar function as it provides a further opportunity for reflection on his fate:

Florent of his answeere is quit:  
And tho began his sorwe newe,  
For he mot gon, or ben untrewed,  
To hire which his trowthe hadde.  
Bot he, which alle schame dradde,

Goth forth in stede of his penance,  
And takth the fortune of his chance,  
As he that was with trowthe affaited.  
(I, 1664-71)

The Wife of Bath's knight is pointedly immoral (at least initially); Genius's Florent is pointedly moral. In the former, the knight plays his part in a tale of moral redemption; in the latter, Florent serves to show the clockwork nature of secular life. In this 'nutshell' comparison I do not wish to underestimate the complexity of either tale (the Wife of Bath's story, in particular, is moral, ironic and sensitive at turns); my point is simply that both stories have been shaped by the characteristics and designs of their tellers, Genius and Alisoun. Few readers would dispute Marlene Lundberg's view that the Wife of Bath's Tale

'is a projection of Alice's inner wishes .... By means of the tale Dame Alice has the magic power of the hag; she can use her power of rhetoric to achieve the ideal; she can regain her youth and beauty; and she and Jankyn can live happily ever after. (176)

Unfortunately, just as few have agreed that an interaction almost as complex takes place between the teller and his tale in Florent.

In the light of the differing purposes of Alisoun and Genius it is not surprising that the two tales differ significantly in the way they end. Alisoun's knight is finally overcome by moral argument: it is only after his reply to his wife's apparently hypothetical question that he receives his reward. In Genius's treatment, moral argument is replaced by

physical description as the moments of the knight's agony are detailed:

And whan thei were abedde naked,  
Withoute slep he was awaked;  
He torneth on that other side,  
For that he wolde hise yhen hyde  
Fro lokynge on that foule wyhte.  
(I, 1781-5)

When Florent does turn to look at his lady he sees a beautiful woman 'Of eyhtetiene wynter age' (I, 1803): the choice which he must make is far from hypothetical and once more his dependence on secular matters is stressed. The exemplum is intended to identify Amans with Florent, at least to the extent that Florent provides a moral exemplar for Amans to follow -- and there is an added edge and twist to this identification when we recall that Amans is old. Florent, as a youth, is repelled by the advances of an old woman; Amans's lady does not speak but might she not also be repelled by the advances of her aged lover? Once more Genius has subtly suggested the inappropriateness of his penitent's behaviour.

Florent obeys his lady and is, therefore, rewarded. The implication seems clear that Amans should do the same. But Genius is coy in promising results:

And clerkes that this chance herde  
Thei writen it in evidence,  
To teche how that obedience  
Mai wel fortune a man to love  
And sette him in his lust above,  
As it befell unto this knyht.  
(I, 1856-61)

Florent is saved by magic; no such hope is offered to Amans. Nominally, Genius promises an exemplum which would

illustrate the importance of obedience for a lover; secretly, his intention is to influence Amans to obey his lady and, hence, abandon his quest. To carry out this intention he once more stresses the cold and mechanistic nature of secular life. In this way the Tale of Florent typifies the balance within the Confessio Amantis as a whole between overt purpose and concealed intent.

In this chapter I have discussed some of the principal tricks that Genius uses to construct a consistent and pervasive secondary meaning within his text. There are others, but these can be considered as they occur within the relevant sections of the poem. My next chapter concerns book IV of the Confessio Amantis, which deals with the sin of sloth, and this provides an example of how a closer knowledge of Genius's intent informs our understanding of the broader structure and nature of the shrift.

[\*]

### Chapter 3: Sloth

#### 3.0 TRISTESCE

In all the tales of the Confessio Amantis there is none on the topic of Senex Amans and such an omission is not surprising when we realise that the entire poem is addressed to a Senex Amans. Amans is an old man; his age is a substantial cause of his plight; and an understanding of this is a first step to an appreciation of the form and purpose of book IV of the Confessio Amantis and, ultimately, of the poem itself.

As an old man Amans is especially vulnerable to the charge of sloth: he has been slow at the task of love and his labours have yielded few results. Amans is, perhaps, a little shy to admit this to Genius: when asked by the priest whether or not he has been guilty of sloth, he replies by asking Genius to define his terms so that he may 'wite plainly what thei meene' (III, 2761). But Genius, as ever, remains gentle and understated in his approach to the penitent -- even though the latter's guilt seems manifest. One might be inclined to think that Genius is altogether too indirect with Amans in conducting what is by any account an extraordinarily circuitous treatment of the lover's

confession. At one level we already have an explanation of Genius's motivation in that the shrift is a kind of ruse to delay and distract Amans from his quest; to this end the longer Genius takes, the better! But this is not quite sufficient to explain fully the complexities of the priest's approach, particularly in book IV, and in this chapter I will offer an additional solution. I hope to explain also why Genius chooses to insert a discussion of alchemy and linguistics into a section of the shrift concerned with sloth.

Genius has a notably gentle disposition: certainly, Amans fares much better at his hands than at those of Cupid. In this regard Genius's behaviour is in keeping with his priestly role; however, book IV adds an additional reason for Genius's chosen method and this is found in the priest's discussion of the very last element of sloth, despondency or 'tristesce'. Genius logically connects sloth with despair:

Whan Slowthe hath don al that he may  
To dryve forth the longe day,  
Til it be come to the nede,  
Thanne ate laste upon the dede  
He loketh hou his time is lore,  
And is so wo begon therfore,  
That he withinne his thoght conceiveth  
Tristesce.

(IV,3389-96)

In subsequent lines he goes on to develop this thought at some length and his meaning seems clear: one must certainly avoid sloth but, if guilty of sloth, one must dread sinking into despair. Within the Confessio Amantis, the link between sloth and despair is a

necessary one: if one is slothful, ultimately despair must follow. Amans is old, and since he has not begun to love until he is advanced in age he is, by that very fact, guilty of the sin of sloth. It follows, therefore, that if he persists in his quest he must fall into despair; and so to survive he must be dissuaded from the pursuit of his lady and at the same time saved from despair.

References to the connection between sloth ('accidia' or 'acedia') and despair are common in medieval literature: Aquinas discusses 'accidia' as a form of 'spiritual apathy' and finds that it 'is a kind of dispondency' which, although not physical in itself may produce sins of the body (Vol. 35, 35); Langland, in Piers Plowman, has sloth personified in the form of a parish priest who is clearly in a state of despair (V, 392 ff). The differing treatments of sloth which I have suggested Aquinas and Langland provide (one dealing with the spirit, the other the body) has some significance. Siegfried Wenzel, in his book The Sin of Sloth: Acedia, notes a tendency during the medieval period for the sin of 'accidia', which was originally conceived of as a malady of the spirit, to be presented in terms of 'the numerous observable faults which derive from such a state' (88). In discussing Langland, Wenzel argues that the poet's use of 'accidia' is somewhat inconsistent as he uses uses the connection between

sloth and despair (historically validated only for the concept of spiritual despair in which the subject despairs of God's mercy) when describing the physical manifestations of sloth (142-3). He remarks earlier that the emphasis upon the observable symptoms of sloth 'pervades and informs the entire popular image of acedia' (88); consequently, he concludes that Langland 'attempted to use tradition in his own way, adapting it to characteristics of his vision, but that he did not succeed in detaching himself far enough from tradition to create as logically consistent work' (147). In essence, Wenzel is noting how an initially intellectual concept was interpreted outside scholastic circles with varying degrees of consistency. What relevance does this have to the Confessio Amantis? Although Wenzel has little to say about this poem, it seems safe to suggest that he would see much the same process at work within it as he noted in Piers Plowman: Genius blends the essentially spiritual conception of 'accidia' and despair, with a presentation of the physical aspects of sloth. However, in Genius's hands this mix gains an added point because of the overt and covert nature of the priest's activities. In dealing with secular love he describes a malady of the body; but at the end of the shrift he will call on Amans to address a malady of his spirit and turn his mind to God. The plight in which Amans finds himself at the beginning of his shrift has been the product of a kind of spiritual 'accidia': it

is this spiritual sloth which has seen him turn away from God's grace and become distracted by secular concerns. Such an interpretation also has application to the political views expressed in the Prologue and 'Epilogue' where the divisiveness of secular life is shown to have its source in humanity's spiritual division from God.

However, for the moment, I am concerned with the interaction between Genius and Amans, because it is as a result of this dialogue that the broader issues of the poem are made apparent. Sister Marian Hoben comments on book IV that

at this point in their relationship, the confessor has a fairly accurate understanding of his penitent's true character. But this is more than can be said for Amans himself; he is still a long way from that self-knowledge which is requisite for leading the Christian life. (167)

Hoben explores the relationship between Amans and Genius to explain the difficulties offered by book IV because it is only by this method that these can 'be interpreted in their proper thematic and structural relevance' (166). Genius attempts as Amans's confessor to save him from despair; however, the exempla he tells are also intended to discourage the lover from his quest, and so conform to the demands of the poem's overall dramatic requirements. Iphis and Araxarathen serves to illustrate how this process takes place.

### 3.0.1 IPHIS AND ARAXARATHEN (IV, 3515-684)

Genius tells this tale, nominally at least, as an

exemplum against the sin of sloth: Araxarathen is guilty of sloth in love; this causes the death of Iphis (motivated by despair) which in turn causes the despair and death of Araxarathen. In his preamble Genius warns Amans that despair is counter-productive to his cause: 'For thou thin oghne cause empeirest/ What time as thou thiself despeirest' (IV, 3505-6). The situation described is one very similar to that of Amans and his lady: an eager male pursues an unwilling female; Amans is separated from his loved one by age, Iphis by social position. I take this similarity to be more than coincidental as it seems reasonable to claim that there is a degree of identification intended by Genius to be apparent between Iphis and Amans. This much is implied by the instructive nature of the confession; however, some interesting consequences follow from this when we take the parallel of fact and fiction one step further. Is it viable to claim that Genius implies that the object of Amans's desire is herself guilty of sloth in love? If Amans stands in the place of Iphis, does Araxarathen represent his lady? Such an identification seems inviting because it suggests that the meaning of the text is that Amans should not despair at the rejection he experiences at the hands of his beloved, and this appears to be part of Genius's purpose. But this reading offers one significant stumbling block in that it sides Genius with Amans in seeing the lady's

refusal as unreasonable. Within the wider context of the poem it is clear that the lady of Amans's suit has a right to refuse -- and her right is implicitly based (at least in part) on the inappropriate nature of Amans's quest. Araxarathen rejects the approaches of Iphis because of his superior social position; and so both Amans and Iphis follow quests which are socially inappropriate. Genius has also gone to some pains to reverse the social standing of Iphis and Araxarathen as found in Ovid, and this reversal has the effect of further stressing the male role by giving him a position of power. James Foster makes some very interesting observations on the Christian allegorical interpretations of the tale: Araxarathen is 'the human soul and Iphis, Christ hanging himself on the cross for its sake' (182); these 'allegorizations .... give spiritual depth to this portrayal of the despair to which the worship of the lascivious Venus can bring a man' (183). Although I do not see the tale's capacity for spiritual allegory as being the dominant factor in its interpretation, Foster's remarks are a useful reminder of the existence of an undercurrent within this supposedly secular tale that is pointedly opposed to secular values.

Two readings of the text are beginning to emerge: one sees the tale as an exemplum against sloth with Araxarathen as its principal subject; the second reading takes the tale's central theme as being the idea of

appropriate social behaviour and takes Iphis as the main protagonist. The first of these readings belongs to the tale's immediate context; the second obeys the requirements of the overall form of the Confessio Amantis.

In Ovid, the story does not serve as an exemplum against sloth but, somewhat more naturally, as a text illustrating the point that it is wrong to resist the entreaties of a lover. For Ovid, Iphis's actions in paying suit to Araxarathen are clearly socially inappropriate but the over-riding ethic is that Araxarathen is wrong to resist; the characteristics of each protagonist are necessary to the moral of the story which points to the supreme power of secular love. Genius preserves the inappropriate nature of Iphis's quest, although he substantially qualifies the black and white portrayals found in Ovid and provides very little direct censure of Araxarathen (or for that matter of Iphis.) We know that Amans's lady is not slothful and if we consider for a moment that she might be represented by Araxarathen some interesting consequences follow; for example, may it be claimed that Araxarathen is not slothful in love? If it is possible to justify such an assertion, a reading of the tale premised on the idea of sloth would be weakened further and we would also avoid any need to see Genius as supportive of Amans's quest. Genius says of Iphis and Araxarathen:

He was with love unwys constreigned,  
And sche with resoun was restreigned:  
The lustes of his herte he suieth,  
And sche for drede schame eschuieth,  
And as sche scholde, tok good hiede  
To save and kepe hir wommanhiede.

(IV, 3529-34)

By so aligning one character with reason and another with the heart Genius has made it impossible to be entirely negative in our view of either. More than simply representing a division between heart and mind, Iphis and Araxarathen are products of a division within the poem itself. What dominates in the tale is the prevailing ethos of the Confessio Amantis that merit need not find its reward in a hostile secular environment: Iphis and Araxarathen are both worthy in their own way, and Genius's implied criticism of them is skilfully handled and balanced. Iphis's precipitous and thoughtless action tends to cast him in a poor light, although such a view is mitigated by the fact that love has robbed him of his senses -- and consequently a measure of his free will -- and put him 'in such a plit/ That he excedeth the mesure/ Of reson' (IV, 3524-6). In her turn, Araxarathen is technically guilty of sloth, but little more than that: no confrontation between the lovers is presented (which might have been used to show Araxarathen's 'cruelty') and her reaction to the death of Iphis is touching and immediate (IV, 3601-3632). In Ovid's treatment, no opportunity is lost to stress the worthiness of Iphis and the cruelty of Araxarathen; for example, Genius

considerably expands the description of the grief of Araxarathen from the modest statement given by Ovid: 'In spite of her callous nature, she was moved to pity' (331). It is, perhaps, the gods who are on balance portrayed most critically by Genius; Sister Marian Hoben notes that the priest 'casts both Venus and Cupid in unpopular roles: both are deaf recipients of Iphis' impassioned prayer and thus, in a certain way, are responsible for the double tragedy' (189).

The tale Genius presents is not a simple formula of sloth leading to despair; it recognises in a subtle way the competing interests of both parties. By analogy to the situation in which Amans finds himself, Genius allows the right of the lady to protect her presumed chastity and argues not that the lady must yield, but that the lover must not despair when she does not yield. Both Amans and the lady he pursues are treated with understanding by Genius, and his judgement is gently implied. To this end the emphasis is not on the sloth of Araxarathen but on the inappropriate behaviour of Iphis which begins with his suit to a woman beneath his class, continues when he persists after that woman rejects his advances and concludes with the taking of his own life. In admonishing Iphis's excess Genius has acknowledged that secular love is not the beginning and end of all endeavours: it is neither noble nor heroic to die for worldly love. This serves as a gentle

reminder to Amans, who is actively pursuing an inappropriate suit just as Iphis had done, that inappropriate behaviour is just that, inappropriate; and by showing the tragic consequences of Iphis's action it once more takes up the broader theme of the Confessio Amantis of the disorder and injustice of the secular world. Implicit within the text is the suggestion that, if the pursuit of secular love is inappropriate within a chaotic and tragic world, one should turn away from it and to something else. This often repeated implication finds its culmination at the end of the confession when the priest implores Amans to turn his mind to God. The force of this delayed appeal recalls Chaucer's use of a similar technique in Troilus and Criseyde, where only at the end of the poem are secular values explicitly questioned. In both poems readers are left for themselves to decide whether they wish to accept either the implied or explicit statements as expressing the opinions of their authors, or whether they might wish to think that the apposition of such opposites might itself be an expression of an insoluble problem.

3.1 PROCRASTINATION: AENEAS AND DIDO (IV, 77-137);  
DEMPHON AND PHILLIS (IV, 731-878)

Procrastination is another aspect of the sin of sloth, and Genius deals with it substantially in two tales, Aeneas and Dido and Ulysses and Penelope. Amans readily professes his guilt to the sin of procrastination and it remains to ask what kind of

response does Genius offer? Both stories share a common source in Ovid, and the originals have a whimsical quality in that the poet has taken heroic events and characters, placed them within a domestic context and in turn asked of them domestic questions. One normally conceives of Aeneas and Ulysses as beings of god-like stature with destinies shaped by the demands of battles and gods, not as husbands or lovers who are late home. For Ovid, Penelope and Dido are the victims of destinies over which they have no control and the poet explores the pathos of their situation.

Nominally, Genius's story of Dido and Aeneas takes Aeneas as its active agent: he is the subject who is guilty of the sin of procrastination, although not the one who is to carry the consequences of that sin. However, in reality, Dido holds centre stage and action is viewed from her perspective. It is true, of course, that Aeneas is of heroic stature and Genius immediately casts him into a web of great events, familial ties and destiny. He is Aeneas 'Whom Anchises to Sone hadde' (IV, 79) and he is in command of a 'gret navie' (IV, 80) which he is leading 'Fro Troie' (IV, 81). Within the context of the Aeneas myth this is, of course, only the beginning as the hero moves to fulfil his destiny in laying the foundations of what is to become the Roman Empire. In contrast to this destiny, his arrival at Carthage is a minor event -- all that Genius can say for Carthage is that it is a place 'Wher for a while his

herbergage/ He tok' (IV, 82-3). The greater destiny of Aeneas is necessary but his stay at Carthage (and subsequent love affair with the queen) is only contingent. Genius suggests something of this distinction by introducing the initial approach made by Aeneas to Dido with the words 'and it betidde so' (IV, 83) and this hint of lightness and contingency is strengthened by the deliberately understated use of the word 'aqueintance' (IV, 85) to describe the subsequent love affair. It is, after all, to be an 'aqueintance' which will cost the unfortunate Dido her life; but to what extent is Dido the victim of her own folly? Certainly the love affair is described only from the perspective of Dido:

Which loveth Eneas so hote  
Upon the wordes whiche he seide,  
That al hire herte on him sche leide  
And dede al holi what he wolde.  
(IV, 88-91)

These lines are interesting for what they say and for what they omit: they suggest that Dido may be unwise in her obsessive devotion to Aeneas; they also fail to suggest that Aeneas has been particularly active in the affair. He speaks 'wordes' to Dido but there is nothing to say that this entails any deep promise of love; such gaps leave open the suggestion that Dido has distorted the meaning of these 'wordes'. As Charles Runacres notes in a discussion of this exemplum, it is only the queen who 'is shown to be concerned with love' (125-6).

Aeneas has come to Carthage for a specific purpose, 'herbergage'; while he is there a chance affair occurs with Dido. In keeping with this pattern his departure from Carthage is described in terms which render it necessary rather than contingent: 'Bot after that, as it be scholde,/ Fro thenne he goth toward Ytaile/ Be Schipe, and there his arivaile/ Hath take, and schop him forto ryde' (IV, 92-5). Runacres also comments on these lines and their suggestion of the power of Aeneas's 'destiny' (125). The use of 'as it be scholde' is very forceful but even more notable is the use of 'Bot after that' which refers not only to the previous description of Aeneas's stay at Carthage but more pointedly to his relationship with Dido. In describing Dido's grief Genius portrays her as a person who cannot cope with love, one 'which mai nocht longe abide/ The hote peine of loves throwe' (IV, 96-97). Her inadequacy is further demonstrated by the speed with which she pursues her lover with a letter dispatched 'withinne a litel throwe' (IV, 98) of his departure. It is a letter to 'hir kniht' (IV, 99) but there has been nothing to suggest that Aeneas has ever been Dido's 'kniht' in an enduring sense and it comes as little surprise that he fails to respond to her call. Her final words of complaint, bitter at Aeneas's supposed betrayal, lack any real substance in their condemnation of him: 'Ha, who fond evere such a lak/ Of Slowthe in eny worthi kniht?/ Now wot I wel my deth is diht/ Thurgh him which

scholde have be mi lif' (IV, 128-131). In this tale it is not any sense of sloth which seizes the reader's attention but the folly and powerlessness of Dido.

The idea of power is important to the tales considered so far: Genius's stories are about love in that sloth in love is their common subject but beyond this they all serve to show love as a powerful and destructive force. Indeed, these tales contain little of sloth at all but much about power (and even in the tale of Rosiphelee, it is the power of love -- centred around the image of the lady bound by halts -- which will come to the fore, and not the supposed sloth of Rosiphelee.) Dido is powerless in her efforts to make something of nothing and, as Iphis had done, she grasps at a false and self-destructive power when she is denied the ability to control the secular events around her. Her tragedy is that such an ability is never within her reach nor can it be -- her expectation of the world is false. In his turn, Aeneas cannot be said to be a true example of procrastination as he is in fact actively fulfilling his destiny as the perfect pawn of a secular world. Aeneas's 'procrastination' is actually a necessary part of his destiny -- indeed, it may only be said to exist at all within Dido's narrow field of view.

The relationship between power and despair in these tales highlights the competing demands of their broader and their immediate contexts: the latter requires a

text nominally on the subject of sloth and involving an element of free will; the former will follow the needs of the Confessio Amantis as a whole and tend to diminish free will and replace it with a mechanism of cause and effect. In this reading we can see Dido as being somewhat more indicative of the tale's immediate context than Aeneas whose values tend to suggest the wider functions of the poem. However, even within this view we must acknowledge that Dido's freedom is undermined by her lack of control in the face of love, and by the suggestions of determinism within the text. Aeneas is not undermined in the same way: he is purely determined. But in combination the two characters successfully convey a negative impression of secular love, and so it is that apparently opposing paths within the poem work their way to a single conclusion. The existence of such tensions within the text is a dramatic device which serves, as Hoben remarks, 'to arouse Amans' suspicions concerning the dependability and trustworthiness of Venus and her servants' (169).

The meaning of the Aeneas and Dido incident is made clearer by a comparison with a story occurring slightly later in book IV, that of Demophon and Phillis. The two tales are almost identical in form, so much so, in fact, that this in itself invites some further comment. Demophon is on a journey to Troy (whereas Aeneas was returning from Troy); his landing at 'Rodopeie' happens by chance (IV, 734); he stays here

for a brief time and becomes the lover of the queen; shortly afterwards he departs and promises to return if he is able (IV, 771-80); but he fails to return and the unfortunate queen commits suicide (IV, 856-60). Although these similarities might lead one to think that a plot is simply being recycled by Genius in a rather clumsy way, the two stories are distinguished by a notable difference and this lies in the respective characterisations of Aeneas and Demophon. Genius makes Demophon's false intentions quite clear and Phillis is shown to be the victim of deliberate deception on his part; Aeneas sets out to deceive no one and Dido is largely the victim of her own excess. Demophon is active, Aeneas is passive; but in spite of these differences Dido and Phillis are very similar in the way that each reacts to the departure of her lover. What do these points of similarity and difference signify? The significance of Genius's treatment lies in the fact that both Dido and Phillis suffer the same fate. In a sense, this is of course predicted by the placement of the tales within a book which deals with the consequences of sloth -- sloth can be expected to lead only to one thing. However, in his treatment of these tales Genius is also saying that such dire consequences may follow either from the deception of another or from self-deception. Overtly, he has been concerned with different varieties of the sin of sloth; covertly he has

shown that physical love has a multitude of ways which all lead to despair. In essence the difference in motivation between Demophon and Aeneas, as individuals, matters little; the despair of Dido and Phillis is caused by the departure of their loved ones for a distant land, and the heart of the issue is their perception of rejection and the value which they have chosen to attach to the secular rites of love. In this they are in the same plight as Iphis and, ultimately, Amans himself.

### 3.1.1 ULYSSES AND PENELOPE (IV, 147-233)

The idea of physical separation is used by Genius to represent love which is unsatisfied, unrequited or impossible, and we have seen this in the refusal of Araxarathen to see Iphis and in the separations of Aeneas and Dido and of Demophon and Phillis. The purest example of a love of this type is probably that of Narcissus for himself (I, 2275-366): Narcissus's deception is pure self-deception and the distance between himself and the illusion of his beloved is unbridgeable. However, having established this device based on distance, Genius puts it to different purposes depending on the needs of the shrift and he is not shy to twist it to fit his requirements; his treatment of the tale of Ulysses and Penelope is a nice example of this. One might think that of all the classical heroes it would be Ulysses who would be most open to the charge of procrastination in the cause of love -- on the

grounds of his long delay at Troy, his travels and his dalliance with the witch Circe. However, in Genius's hands the reverse is the case: Ulysses is presented as an example of one who escapes 'lachesse' just in time and who 'goth him home in alle hihe/ Wher that he fond tofore his yhe/ His worthi wif in good astat' (IV, 227-9). Charles Runacres suggests that the opposition of the story-line and the 'moralitas' Genius draws from it is deliberate, intended to weaken the 'moralitas' and show 'the inadequacy of such statements for the assessment of the complexity of the particulars of human experience' (126). I agree with Runacres's basic analysis although my own solution introduces an additional factor to his essentially binary view of moral and narrative, and that is the context in which both are placed.

The problem is caused by Genius's ruthless stripping down of the Ulysses story in order to make it fit the immediate demands of his text. To obey the first of its tenets (which is that Ulysses must be viable at least superficially as a counter-example against sloth) Genius suppresses the active role played by the hero: he remains as the nominal focus of the story but as that only; there is no substance and little action attached to him. Overtly, he is an example against sloth but he is stripped of those characteristics which make him most familiar and

forceful (as these would hinder his effectiveness as a counter-example): he ceases to be the wanderer and the man who delayed with Circe, and instead he becomes a loyal husband. However, within this Genius makes some concessions to the wider demands of the text because even here we find some of the familiar mechanism of fate and determinism: although Ulysses is devoted to Penelope and is determined to return, he is able to do so -- as Runacres notes (126) -- only 'what time that he mai' (IV, 219), and it is determined that his journey home may not commence until Troy has fallen ('whan the time is so befalle/ That Troie was destruid and brent' (IV, 224-5)). But in the pursuit of the happy ending demanded by the immediate constraints of his exemplum Genius compresses the story of Ulysses's wanderings beyond all reason as he narrates that Ulysses

made non delaiement,  
 Bot goth him home in alle hihe,  
 Wher that he fond tofore his yhe  
 His worthi wif in good asta  
 And thus was cessed the debat  
 Of love, and Slowthe was excused,  
 Which doth gret harm, where it is used,  
 And hindreth many a cause honeste.  
 (IV, 226-33)

No travels and no suitors! -- because these do not fit the demands of Genius's immediate purpose. Fate holds an uneasy place in this exemplum: its influence is detectable and may be linked to the wider concerns of the poem but it is held in check by the needs of the specific context. These two forces which shape the story's form are directly opposed: the immediate needs

of the text argue for a Ulysses who is free to make moral choices; the overall form of the poem presses to show an impersonal mechanism of determinism which is beyond human control. The latter influence reduces the role played by Ulysses; the former concentrates on the development of Penelope as a potential victim of her husband's procrastination, and she conveniently serves as a victim of the wider uncertainties of secular life. These opposing forces within the text are so extreme that they lead Hoben to remark that she sees the priest as 'mocking the "moral" which he purports to teach' (169). Genius's story indicates the subtle distinctions and interactions which occur as he balances the function of his exempla against those of the particular book in which they are placed and, in turn, against those of the poem as a whole. So it is that Ulysses the wanderer becomes the man who overcomes both distance and 'lachesse'.

### 3.2 PUSILLANIMITY

Pusillanimity is characteristic of one 'that hath litel of corage/ And dar no mannes werk beginne:/ So mai he noght be resoun winne;/ For who that noght dar undertake,/ Be riht he schal no profit take' (IV, 316-20). In the lines which follow this quotation Genius provides further elaboration on the vice of pusillanimity; although the main elements are already plain and present an intriguing ambiguity based on the

idea of 'corage' and its possession. One is pusillanimous if lacking the quality of 'corage' because without it one will not undertake 'mannes werk' -- but is it always possible to acquire 'corage' simply by an effort of will? If the answer to this is no, then there might be no escape from the secular vice of pusillanimity for some of those who are trapped -- for them, life would simply be a lottery in which one is either pusillanimous or not. Indeed, how does Genius define 'mannes werk' even for those for have 'corage'? The form of these problems has already been seen in other parts of the poem and it relates to issues of free will and determinism; what implications do these carry here? Amans cannot deny that he is guilty of the vice of pusillanimity since this fact is manifest by his circumstances; but if we add to this that Amans is also old -- and hence that 'corage' is forever beyond his reach -- his position becomes clear. He is on the wrong side of the 'corage' equation; he may never escape the vice of pusillanimity so long as he chases the goal of secular love because he will be forever unequal to the task.

### 3.2.1 PYGMALION (IV, 371-436); IPHIS (IV,451-505)

Part of the significance of the previous observations is that they might lead us to expect some irony in Genius's treatment of the vice of pusillanimity -- and this is just what we find. For example, to put it simply, Pygmalion is a story of extraordinary sexual

perversion in which inappropriate behaviour is carried to an extreme. Overtly it is Genius's assertion that Pygmalion is a counter example to pusillanimity because he has the courage of his convictions as, in the face of impossible odds, he struggles to success by seeking the aid of the gods. However, such a view seems to strain all credibility, particularly in the face of the somewhat gratuitous description of Pygmalion's bedroom relations with his creation (IV, 403-14), which invites a reading based on irony. This irony is no surprise given that we are once more dealing with a story which has its source in Ovid -- a writer who was quite aware of the comic potential such circumstances might hold. For Ovid, Pygmalion was a misogynist who had been 'revolted by the many faults which nature has implanted in the female sex, and long lived a bachelor existence, without any wife to share his home' (231); the transformation of the misogynist's compliant statue into his wife is an urbane joke. This humour seems to be transferred to Genius's summation of Pygmalion's ultimate good fortune:

Lo, thus he wan a lusti wif,  
 Which obeissant was at his wille;  
 And if he wolde have holde him stille  
 And nothing spoke, he scholde have failed:  
 Bot for he hath his word travailed  
 And dorste speke, his love he spedde,  
 And hadde al that he wolde abedde.

(IV, 424-30)

Christopher Ricks agrees that Ovid's story is one about misogyny (47) but strongly disagrees that Gower follows

this tone. Indeed, he claims that the 'greatness of Gower is his entire freedom from prurience' (45); 'he is magnanimously indifferent to the comedy or the disgust which might attend upon the fondler of statues' (48). If we accept this view we would also be isolating the text from its context and, in effect, accepting that Genius is encouraging Amans in his quest; and I do not think that these propositions are tenable. Suggestions of prurience in the text seem to be inescapable; Genius is in effect saying that the character he discusses is perverse and foolish, and that he succeeds in his otherwise hopelessly impossible task only because of divine intervention. The importance of asking for divine aid is that it stresses that the quest is humanly impossible; it is both an acknowledgement of divine power and of the essentially futile nature of the quest. The meaning to Amans is not that if he asks the gods, they will help, but that his situation is connected to a number of other hopeless situations which, without heavenly help, are beyond all resolution. The point of this is brought home strongly at the end of the poem when the aid of the gods is withdrawn and consequently Amans is forced to abandon his quest.

The theme of impossibility is picked up by the tale of Iphis. The Iphis story seems heavily ironic in that it is, nominally, a counter example to pusillanimity, as had been the case in the tale of

Pygmalion; yet Iphis is quite clearly physically incapable of fulfilling the role of lover -- at least until the help of Venus intervenes! She is the very height of pusillanimity! As in the tale of Pygmalion there are suggestions of sexual perversion and the two stories seem to reinforce one another as they are built around characters who are totally incapable of fulfilling the demands of love. Identification with Amans seems unavoidable and unflattering; however, other more positive readings of these tales have been offered. Patrick Gallacher sees the two exempla as a statement of the power of language, showing how 'Prayer ... can overcome nature in order to effect a more justly natural love' (64). The price of such a reading, although it rightly recognises the power of language in Genius's tales, is that it minimises the capacity for irony of the very language which it praises for its subtle strength. Sister Marian Hoben's response to the irony of these tales, and her comments on the 'prodigies' contained within them, seems nearer to the truth than Gallacher's:

Such prodigies, the priest of Love emphasizes, Venus will effect for those who are truly her servants. On the surface, Genius is praising the goddess for her consideration of lovers; indirectly, he hopes to arouse his penitent's dissatisfaction. (172-3)

I would only add to this view that Genius also seeks to 'arouse his penitent's dissatisfaction' by implicitly identifying Amans with the monsters he describes.

3.3 IDLENESS: ROSIPHELEE (IV, 1245-1446);  
JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER (IV, 1505-95)

What appear to be further identifications with Amans occur in Genius's lead-in to the story of Rosiphelee. In this Genius comments on the wrongs of those who delay in love and adds 'Bot, Sone, thou art non of swiche,/ For love schal the wel excuse:/ Bot otherwise, if thou refuse/ To love, thou miht so per cas/ Ben ydel ...' (IV, 1236-40). At one level Genius may excuse the lover on the grounds of his early confession regarding his devotion to love, but at another level it is easy to see these lines referring to the age of Amans and to the end of the poem -- where love will only 'excuse' him on account of his incapacity. This meaning opens the possibility for another reading of the Rosiphelee story.

One might think that, if Genius were truly in support of Amans's quest, the Tale of Rosiphelee would be an ideal point at which to note the heartlessness of Amans's lady. This, of course, does not occur: there is, in fact, never any suggestion that Amans's beloved has been slothful in love; it is obviously made known that she has chosen to resist Amans's entreaties but even in this she never suffers direct censure from Genius. The ultimate revelation of Amans's age and circumstances make the reason for her reticence clear, and justifies her in the eyes of love. Similar remarks may be made in the context of Rosiphelee's companion

story, the Tale of Jephthah's Daughter; both stories have a common plot in that they deal with characters who have delayed in secular love. Rosiphelee acts in time; Jephthah's daughter does not. However, if we take the subject of the Tale of Rosiphelee as being the lady on the dark horse and not Rosiphelee herself, then the two companion stories have even more in common. Under this reading the function of the Rosiphelee story shifts from a nominally instructive role, showing what is to be avoided, to one which effectively comments on what has already not been avoided; Genius's purpose is not to warn Amans against a certain course of action but to show, by identification with the bridled lady, what has already befallen him. We have only to recall the conclusion of the poem, where Amans is viewed by the companies of lovers and treated as a discussion point for the idea of love in old age (VIII, 2726 ff), to see a similarity between that and the meeting between Rosiphelee and the lady on the dark horse.

There are also two strongly defined alternative readings to the Tale of Jephthah's Daughter, depending on where we choose to place the emphasis of the story's plot. The source for this tale (Judges xi) stresses the obedience of Jephthah to God's will; it laments the childless state of his daughter but only in so far as this shows the strength of Jephthah's obedience in sacrificing secular concerns to divine will. Genius exaggerates the importance of the virginity of Jephthah's

daughter, takes this as the nominal focus of the story, and so emphasises temporal matters over spiritual issues; but the biblical reading of the text still remains to offer another viewpoint. Genius's text responds well to an analysis based on the competing notions of worldly and spiritual concerns: Jephthah is a man who knows secular success and he values victory in battle sufficiently to promise God a sacrifice in return for it (IV, 1512-19); but his lesson is that to value secular matters is also to be vulnerable to them. When confronted with the price for his success he finds that 'al sodeinli' all his 'joie is torned into sorwe' (IV, 1544-5). His daughter is a model of equanimity and tells him to keep the 'covenant which he is holde/ Towards god' (IV, 1554-5) and so displays a correct balance of temporal and spiritual values. In book III Genius had noted that Amans was the slave of his own will and desires (III, 1317-8); Jephthah and his daughter illustrate the correct goals to which human will may be turned. They also suggest that secular and spiritual values are mutually exclusive: one cannot value both. Something of this idea had been suggested earlier by Genius in the Tale of Constantine and Silvester in which God bemoans the worldly wealth of the Church (II, 3482-96). If Jephthah loves God he will kill his daughter; if he loves the world, he will not. Amans must either value the world and pursue his quest, or

value God and abandon it. It is an issue of both will and power.

The reading I have offered for the Tale of Jephthah's Daughter is far removed from the one nominally proposed by Genius. Nevertheless, the two versions are bound together by a common text and provide another instance within the poem of the opposing influences of an immediate and a more extended context. At a localised level Genius proposes an interpretation for his exemplum; but within the exemplum we find material which works in opposition to that reading and which responds instead to the wider needs of the poem.

In this book of the poem power stands not only as a logical opposite to sloth but also as an indication of the rule of love. In the latter role it emerges explicitly as Genius discusses those who are powerful in arms (IV, 1815-2199). The message to Amans is clear. He is reminded of his inadequacy and powerlessness -- not surprisingly it is on this point that Amans launches one of his most vigorous defences. Lovers, he argues, need not prove themselves in arms, and he musters a lengthy collection of arguments to support this claim (IV, 1648-1770). However, there is one counter example he cannot include: he cannot say that although he is inadequate in arms he has succeeded in love.

#### 3.4 ALCHEMY AND LANGUAGE

At the beginning of this chapter I undertook to

consider the problem of Genius's apparently incongruous inclusion of a text on alchemy and language in his treatment of sloth, and much of the grounding for this has now been laid by the previous discussion. Genius has shown that the power of love is real and vested in the persons of Venus and Cupid, and that upon them Amans is dependent for the success of his otherwise hopeless quest. It is the nature of the power of love that it renders the impossible possible: it is godlike and miraculous. Alchemy too deals in transformations -- base metal becomes gold -- and, like love, alchemy is a power which is beyond mortal ability to control consistently. Initially, it owed its origins to the gods but was once mastered by humans long ago; now the old texts are misunderstood and the craft is virtually lost (IV, 2606-25). In this broad summary of Genius's outline of the discovery and loss of alchemy we can readily see a parallel to the treatment of secular and divine love in the Confessio Amantis: the world has moved into disharmony as it has moved away from the purity of divine love and replaced it with secular passion. This recalls the image and symbolism of the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Prol., 585-662). In place of God's love the world has substituted the base metal of secular love, which it vainly attempts to transmute. Genius neatly connects human labour with alchemy, and love with labour, as contraries to sloth.

The narrator says at the beginning of book I that he has chosen to write on the familiar and specific topic of secular love because the larger issues of the world are beyond redress; he is not able to 'setten al in evene/ This world, which evere is in balance' (I, 2-3).

However, it is a feature of Genius's style that secular events are made to carry significance beyond the obvious moral which he draws from them.

What informs Genius of the sad history of human endeavour is the store of written sources upon which he draws: the knowledge is there for all who choose to read (IV, 2606-17). The existence of such a store of knowledge is an implicit feature of Amans's confession as Genius repeats over and over again that the advice he gives to Amans is drawn from the accumulated knowledge of ancient writers. It is also implicit that the sins of humanity which threaten to see it fall further into chaos are its ignorance of, and blindness, to the value of this store of accumulated wisdom. It is part of the function of the priest to direct and instruct the penitent in the merits of the old knowledge. Words have the power to shape the world, or there would be no point in Genius's attempt to instruct Amans. Language represents a form of power and it carries the inherent irony that the content of any given piece of language may be true or false, useful or futile. Amans realises a little of this when he responds to Genius's reference to Ovid and to that writer's advice on how to 'akiele'

love if it 'be to hot' (IV, 2671,2670): 'My fader, if  
thei mihte spede/ Mi love, I wolde his bokes rede;/ And  
if thei techen to restreigne/ Mi love, it were an ydel  
peine/ To lerne a thing which mai noght be' (IV, 2675-  
9). Words alone will of course fail to convince Amans  
that he should abandon his quest, partly because he is  
insensitive to their suggestive power. His reaction in  
the lines quoted above, indicates that he has  
misunderstood the significance of Genius's comment on  
Ovid. The priest's remark comes at the end of a lengthy  
discussion of the uses of labour as a contrary to sloth  
(IV, 2363-674) which includes a history of the discovery  
of letters and language (IV, 2633-74). The conclusion  
of his discussion is in the following lines:

The Latins of hemsself also  
Here studie at thilke time so  
With gret travaile of Scole toke  
In sondri forme forto boke,  
That we mai take here evidences  
Upon the lore of the Sciences,  
Of craftes bothe and of clergie;  
Among the whiche in Poesie  
To the lovers Ovide wrot  
And tawhte, if love be to hot,  
In what manere it scholde akiele.  
(IV, 2661-2671)

The point of all this accumulated knowledge to which  
Genius refers is that it acts as a contrary, not to  
sloth, but to love that is untoward; Amans has admitted  
that he is slothful but Genius hints here that his suit  
is also inappropriate and that remedial action should be  
taken. Amans is, of course, prepared to take whatever  
action is required -- as long as this does not mean the

abandonment of his quest (IV, 2675-79). The lover seeks a kind of metamorphosis and, in the manner of lead becoming gold, the woman he seeks must become his; but the science of alchemy has been lost, the world is in disarray, and it will be Amans who undergoes metamorphosis when he is forcibly removed from the rites of love.

It is appropriate that Somnolence, with its association with dreaming, should follow Language in book IV: one must remember that the Confessio Amantis is almost a dream poem and this gives the added edge that Amans is asleep to the reality of his own position. Genius also reminds the lover of the frequent truth of dreams (IV, 3124-31) and the reading I suggest seems to be reinforced by Genius's reference to the need for wakefulness (IV, 3362-4).

At the end of book IV Genius has led Amans through a discussion nominally on the subject of sloth but in practice relating more to ethical questions of values, free will, fate and power; and intended to direct him away from secular concerns. Genius's method has been characterised by subtleness and indirectness, and culminates in a warning to Amans of the need to avoid despair. Such a warning is vain, Amans is in a state of despair, and he has failed to grasp the earlier premises of Genius's carefully constructed text.

[\*]

## Chapter 4: Book VII -- Education

### 4.0 THE SECULAR ORDER

Book VII of the Confessio Amantis is a puzzle which sits uneasily as the penultimate book of the poem. One feels that there is something wrong with it; but is there more to say about this section of the shrift than that? In general, critics have answered this question by looking to the technical content of the book and especially its discussion of rhetoric which, as J.J. Murphy has noted in his doctoral dissertation and several published articles, is the first reference to the formalities of rhetoric in the English language. However, in this chapter my concern is not with the technical details of rhetoric but the purposes to which that rhetoric is put. The unity of action within the Confessio Amantis is often questioned and this is particularly so with respect to book VII, which Sister Marian Hoben refers to as 'The prime example offered by critics for the alleged disunified structure' of the poem (244). J.F. Fitzpatrick sees this book of the confession as 'not consistent within itself' (189). I certainly agree that book VII is subject to a degree of fragmentation; however, I will argue for a reading which,

although it acknowledges inconsistencies in the narrative, sees these as consistent with the character of the priest and the task that he has set himself.

The 'Education of Alexander' -- described by Genius as a suitable training for a prince and, by implication, as a model for secular education in general -- appears to be just the kind of shrift Amans might have expected in the previous six books of the poem. It is here that Genius gives him advice on how a Christian man should conduct himself in secular matters. Hoben notes that this book presents Amans with 'broader interests' and that, rather than serving Venus, 'Genius is consistently and obviously the true Christian' (246). But all is not as open and clear as one might think: the Christian tone of book VII is yet another aspect of Genius's attempt to control Amans's secular behaviour; and the educational outline he provides is, in practical terms, a code of secular control. Previously, the priest's aims were met by his unfavourable depiction of the chaos of secular life; now, he places a high value on the secular life he had belittled -- if only as a tactic to further pressure Amans to cease the pursuit of his lady. Genius gives particular emphasis to the ideas of chastity and restraint; but his presentation of the ideal secular state, forced upon him in the course of the shrift, is ultimately fractured by inconsistencies as he treads the line between his new needs and his old

practices. In book VII he has openly undertaken an explication of the secular order and he uses this to exploit notions of restraint and secular control (aimed, as always, at the goal of suppressing Amans in his quest); however, we find increasing evidence, as we progress through through the book, that he is also undermining the value of the very order he has set about to define. Genius cannot do both with impunity: he may either be content to allow his model of secular constraints to stand alone; or, he may follow the path he has earlier defined whereby the secular world is held in low regard; it is not possible to do both successfully within the constraints of book VII. Genius fails -- and the fact of this failure is important. In spite of the strength of his rhetoric, he is not omnipotent; he does not succeed at every task he undertakes. At the end of the Confessio Amantis he is unable to discourage Amans from his quest; book VII gives us a suggestion of this capacity for failure, and now it is time to consider the context in which this failure occurs.

The 'Education of Alexander' is more than an outline of an ordered educational program: it is a statement of how the world is ordered and it presupposes a rational basis to secular life. This rationality has its ultimate source in the presence of God 'on above the Sonne,/ Whos time nevere was begonne,/ And endeles schal evere be' (VII, 99-101). The significance of this is

that it reminds the penitent that God is the mover of the secular world and so reinforces the moral tone Genius sets in this section of the shrift. The first part of philosophy is 'Theorique' because it 'is the conserve/ And kepere of the remnant,/ As that which is most sufficant/ And chief of the Philosophie' (VII,54-7); and the first part of 'Theorique' is 'Theologie' because it

is that science  
Which unto man yifth evidence  
Of thing which is nocht bodely,  
Wherof men knowe redely  
The hihe almyhti Trinite,  
Which is o god in unite  
Withouten ende and beginnyng  
And creatour of alle thinge,  
Of hevене, of erthe and ek of helle.  
(VII,73-81)

For virtually the first time, Genius is obliged to place secular activity within an ordered framework; he must show that there is a discernible 'right path' to tread in the secular world. This project is not something which he undertakes willingly, as he implies when he says to Amans that he is 'somedel therof destrauht' at the prospect of discussing the teachings of Aristotle (VII, 6). In the event, we will see that he does not abandon the covert purpose he maintains throughout the shrift.

As Genius moves beyond 'Theologie' in his discussion of the remaining two aspects of 'Theorique' he outlines a beautifully layered conception of secular order. Each parts rests upon the premises preceding it: for example, the 'Creation of the Four Elements' (VII,

203-392) is nicely mirrored by the 'Four Complexions of Man' (VII, 393-489); and, in turn, the world itself is divided into the three principal continental masses with the sea forming a fourth part (VII, 521-620). The effect of this presentation is twofold : it reminds Amans of the ultimate order of God's plan; however, it also echoes the broader theme of division which Genius takes to be the cause of human suffering. And so, even here, his specific and general purpose is apparent.

Although 'Practique' is the last part of the three points of philosophy it is the one which by means of the five points of policy dominates the book. It is, perhaps, only natural that we should accept that this part of the confession will have as its primary concern the presentaion of proper secular values -- and especially ones which have an association with kingship. Nevertheless, there are always dangers in making judgements concerning what a story is 'about'

For what a story is 'about' can be a complex matter. The mere fact that a king happens to be the principal character tells us next to nothing. 'Once upon a time there was a great king (emperor, prince, ruler, etc.) who ....' It is one of the oldest narrative formulas in the world and one much beloved of Gower's sources.  
(Fitzpatrick, 194)

In addition, much of the point of Genius's discussion prior to the five points of policy is that it places human activity within a divine plan (even if it does so by noting the division between humanity and God.) I do not claim that book VII has the idea of kingship as its



primary focus because I believe that Genius is more concerned to continue his covert approach to the 'shrift. However, the specific role of kingship is significant because the essence of virtue for the monarch lies in self-denial: from his position of power the king may do what he wills, and not to do so demands special self-control. The notion of personal restraint is, of course, directly relevant to Genius's 'education' of Amans, and it is to that 'education' (expressed by the five points of policy) which I now turn.

#### **4.0.1 THE ORDER OF THE EXEMPLA**

I take the exempla of book VII as falling into three parts: the first is the initial exemplum, The King, Wine, Woman and Truth; then follow the exempla which deal with the middle three points of policy; and, finally, there are the tales on chastity. My argument is that the first exemplum defines a basic ethic of self-denial as a gateway to truth, which is presented as the ideal of secular behaviour: worldly activity is shown to be at its best when it denies itself. In presenting this ideal of self-sacrifice Genius also heralds the emphasis he will give to chastity, as self-denial may readily be seen as an adjunct to chastity in the light of Genius's discussion of the topic (VII, 4215-56). Such a presentation on the priest's part is consistent with his desire to discourage Amans from indulging his passion.

In the middle exempla, those between the first exemplum and the concluding exempla which are exclusively devoted to the idea of chastity, Genius extends his presentation of the ideal of chastity through the now familiar technique of overt purpose and concealed intent. He claims to explicate three points of policy but, in practice, his stories (although very brief) tend to revolve around variations on the theme of self-denial and truth.

Finally, in the long exempla on the topic of chastity at the end of the book, Genius finds himself in real difficulty: he has covertly extolled the virtues of self-denial as he has overtly preached policy; suddenly, he must show that his world can protect chastity -- the epitome of self-denial -- and punish those who violate it; and the continuity of his narrative finally fractures. Genius's problems are self-inflicted by the disproportionate weight he chooses to give to chastity among the points of policy; he attaches great importance to truth, liberality, justice and pity but the longest and most complex exempla are given to chastity. Chastity returns us to the concerns of the shrift as a whole and has little relevance to the priest's ideal secular order. The topic owes its inclusion to Genius's office as priest to Venus, but more than that, it also reflects the idea of self-denial; and, by the violation of chastity, Genius once more is able to show the brutality of secular life.

Whatever Genius may say is the specific function of some part of the confession, we are never far from his covert intent.

4.1 TRUTH: KING, WINE, WOMAN AND TRUTH (VII, 1783-1984)

Truth is the first of the five points of policy and, supposedly, the most important virtue of a ruler, at least by its position and the conclusion of the exemplum given on it. But is this the case?

Genius attaches great importance to the virtue of truth and he makes it quite clear, even before he has begun his exemplum, that he considers truth to be the greatest of the kingly virtues: 'Among the vertus on is chief,/ And that is trouthe, which is lief/ To god and ek to man also' (VII, 1723-5). Indeed, Genius speaks at some length on the great importance of truth and of its almost divine status (VII, 1723-82); given such an introduction one might think that the issue of his exemplum would be cut and dry. Surprisingly, however, this is not the case.

The king begins the contest between his advisors in a conventional way: the question is posed, which is the greatest -- wine, woman or the king? The cases put for wine and the king are brief and conventional, and this is as the reader might expect knowing that it is truth which is to be the ultimate winner of the contest. But it is the argument put for woman that contains the surprise of the tale: it becomes, by virtue of its

persuasive force, a minor exemplum in its own right. The Tale of Alcestis (VII, 1917-49) is a moving story in which loyalty and fidelity are expressed (apparently with divine approval) by self-sacrifice and self-denial. The virtue of chastity is heralded by this transformation of virtues which tells us that secular love is at its best when it sacrifices itself. (By analogy, the king is also at his best when he resists the urgings of self-interest -- and so we have another convenient link between the public and private aspects of the lover's shrift.) In this way chastity becomes emblematic of a form of truth and it is this which becomes the logical bridge to the exemplum's conclusion. For his part, James Foster concludes that 'conjugal fidelity' is the dominant theme of the tale (162) and, thereby, he combines the values of truth and chastity which the tale portrays. Certainly, the position of truth as the sole and dominant motif of the tale is somewhat undermined by the abrupt transition from woman to truth -- a transition that can be localised to a few lines:

Lo, thus Zorobabel hath told  
The tale of his opinion:  
Bot for final conclusion  
What strengest is of erthli thinges,  
The wyn, the wommen or the kinges,  
He seith that trouthe above hem alle  
Is myhtiest, hou evere it falle.

(VII, 1950-6)

Foster's condensation of truth and chastity into the notion of 'conjugal fidelity' is a compromise and one

with which, in outline, I agree. However, I see a positive purpose behind Genius's activity and this leads me to question the values expressed by the priest's narrative more closely.

'Conjugal fidelity' is defined in this exemplum by its self-denying characteristics; it is a virtue that exists only in terms of denying itself. In any event woman could not, of course, win the contest proposed in the exemplum because Genius is not about to glorify the position of secular love. Truth is heralded by an act of self-denial and so, in a sense, the two become synonymous. What we have here is Genius's familiar pattern of qualifying the value of secular activity unless it is directed towards higher, ethereal goals; he is constructing a system of values which will serve to stand in opposition to the secular concerns of his text. But there is a risk associated with Genius's method. The emblematic role fulfilled by Alcestis may not be understood by his listener who may perversely conclude that the exemplum, in fact, extols secular love irrespective of its conclusion; if Amans does not understand the emblematic role played by Alcestis, he will miss that the essence of Alcestis's love lies in its self-denial. This view is unfortunately precisely counter to Genius's general plan and to his particular needs at this point. He has placed himself in this predicament by his attempt to neatly show the

superiority of truth over secular concerns on the one hand and, on the other, that the highest expression of secular love is revealed when it sacrifices itself. These notions are ideally suited to the purposes of Genius's covert confession, but in taking this approach he is playing with dangerous ambiguities. Consider the following lines which are part of Zorobabel's summation of his case:

So mai a man be reson taste,  
Hou next after the god above  
The trouthe of wommen and the love,  
In whom that alle grace is founde,  
Is myhtiest upon this grounde  
And most behovely manyfold.

(VII, 1944-49)

Is this the view of the priest of Venus, or of his Christian manifestation? Is it the Genius of the poem's beginning or of its ending? Zorobabel seems to suggest that the spirit is superior to worldly concerns although he still affirms the value of secular love. This ambiguity represents a definite weakness in Genius's case and yet it is also a perfectly consistent expression of a very familiar dichotomy within the text. The division between the secular and the divine is never resolved within the Confessio Amantis; and what we find in book VII is simply an expression of that irresolution. It is because of the special nature of book VII that we are able to see the priest's method beginning to slip. The problem is reasonably contained at this point; as we move further into the book it grows, and when we come to the long exempla on chastity,

I will argue that the problem is far from contained. For the moment, Genius has successfully heralded the ideas of truth and self-denial which are to be so important to his method and we have seen something of the dangers which are inherent within it.

#### 4.2 C.S. LEWIS AND THE TWO LOVES

There is a symmetry within the Confessio Amantis which revolves around the ideas of divine and secular love. C.S. Lewis defines the relationship between these two parallel medieval conceptions which

are so completely two that analogies naturally arise between them: hence comes a strange reduplication of experience. It is a kind of proportion sum. Love is, in saeculo, as God is, in eternity. Cordis affectio is to the acts of love as charity is to good works. (42)

Although Lewis is not specifically referring to the Confessio Amantis at this point in his work, he has much to say that is directly applicable to it:

When Frauendienst succeeds in fusing with religion, as in Dante, unity is restored to the mind, and love can be treated with a solemnity that is whole-hearted. But where it is not so fused, it can never, under the shadow of its tremendous rival, be more than a temporary truancy. It may be solemn, but its solemnity is only for the moment. It may be touching, but it never forgets that there are sorrows and dangers before which those of love must be ready, when the moment comes, to give way. (42-3)

The union which Lewis describes never successfully takes place in the Confessio Amantis. Perhaps, in any case, we are less willing to accept the purity of the division that Lewis suggests; we may be more inclined to see medieval writers exploiting a deliberate ambiguity in

their portrayal of the values of the two loves. We accept the division between the depiction of divine and secular love, in which one is valued and the other (ultimately) denigrated, but we see this as a polite fiction which the artist exploits, and so we read closely for evidence of irony. The beautiful irony of Confessio Amantis is that Amans will ultimately be pushed from one love to the other by force and not by revelation. Amans hopes to sanctify his love by the process of the confession but he fails to achieve the union of 'Frauendienst' and religion, just as Genius fails to exploit successfully the division between them for his own ends. The substance of the Confessio Amantis is the record of their mutual failure.

The force of Amans's transition at the end of the poem is possibly intended to mirror the gulf between the values of the two loves; this may suggest something of the problem which lies in Genius's effort in book VII to blend secular and divine values, although it is only in the first and final exempla of the book that the stress of this undertaking becomes particularly manifest. Genius's consideration of the three points of policy which stand between truth and chastity is, on the whole, clear and explicit; however, even here he pursues his goal of dissuading Amans from his quest.

#### 4.3 LIBERALITY: JULIUS AND THE POOR KNIGHT (VII, 2061-114)

The virtue of liberality concerns, as its name implies, the proper measure a ruler should regard in the giving and taking of worldly benefits. Genius tells Amans that this is why the world has kings, because the people could not decide amongst themselves the distribution of property (VII, 1991-2013). Genius is a hard master in his description of the proper role of a secular leader, seeing it as almost god-like (VII, 2039-57). The term 'god-like' may sound like a borrowing from moral philosophy but it matches the tone of Genius's narrative which, in describing the duties of a king, refers to more than a little moral philosophy. Genius describes the development of kingship as an antidote to the loss of 'comun profit' (VII, 1993) which was brought about by the workings of human nature. However, the office of king, as he defines it, is in danger of being an almost impossible secular ideal -- a dream beyond any hope of realisation -- and something of this is evident in his schematic and paradigmatic exemplum, Julius and the Poor Knight. The tale describes a world in which not only is the letter of justice met -- which is that Julius should offer to give the knight an advocate -- but where the spirit of justice is also satisfied by Julius offering himself to the knight's defence. In doing this, Julius acts 'as it were of goddes sonde' (VII, 2104) and gives to the

knight 'good ynouh to spende/ For evere into his lives ende' (VII, 2105-6); and so the fairy-tale is complete. Julius has seen the truth of the knight's claim and, as it should be in the ideal state, acted upon it. To realise the fictional quality of what Genius has done one needs only to recall an earlier tale on a similar topic, that of The Two Coffers (V, 2273-390). In this story the king has quite a different way to deal with his disgruntled retainers: they are offered a choice of two closed coffers, one 'fulfild with straw and stones' (V, 2377), the other containing 'gret richesse' (V, 2381). By the process of chance the retainers choose the chest of straw and stones. The king's response could not be more removed from the attitude taken by Julius:

'Lo,' seith the king, 'nou mai ye se  
That ther is no defalte in me;  
Forthi miself I wol aquyte,  
And bereth ye youre oghne wyte  
Of that fortune hath you refused'  
(V, 2383-7)

There is no acknowledgement of truth here, nor any sense of restraint or self-denial. Perhaps, we might think that the king's retainers do not merit the same reward as Julius's knight, but -- with respect to their service to the king -- Genius says of at least a number of them that they 'long time him hadden served' (V, 2277). In addition, Genius's point in this exemplum seems consistent with the position he adopts so often in the Confessio Amantis (that secular advancement is a matter

of luck and is always subject to the rise and fall of fortune) and so we have little reason to question his intent at this point. What we encounter in book VII is the anomalous view that justice is not only possible but necessary in the secular political state; and that it may be achieved by adherence to a simple policy formula.

The early tales of book VII are extremely brief -- too brief for much emphasis to be placed on them in isolation -- but the example of Julius is particularly indicative of the moral tone Genius attempts to take. When we come to examine the final exempla of book VII we will see how difficult it is for Genius to maintain the tone he adopts in this tale! Even before we come to the final exempla, we find persistent traces of the methodology he developed in the previous books of the poem entering into his discussion at a place where they are no longer strictly sustainable.

#### 4.4 FLATTERY (LARGESS): DIOGENES AND ARISTIPPUS (VII, 2217-317)

The king as arbiter of secular disputes must be detached from them, hence the stress which Genius lays on the dangers of flattery; but, on the other hand, Genius seems to undermine the idea of liberality by removing the justification for worldly possessions. Nominally, Diogenes and Aristippus is a story told against flattery and flatterers; such people are dangerous because 'of fals thei maken soth,/ So that here kinges yhe is blent/ And wot not hou the world is

went' (VII, 2196-8) and the 'trouthe is torned to  
lesinge' (VII, 2214) which is 'ayein kinde' (VII, 2215).  
But the effective emphasis of the tale itself is  
somewhat different. Aristippus does use flattery for  
advancement; however, this is the symptom and not the  
cause of his disease. The reason behind his actions is  
his desire for secular success and it is this which  
holds prominence: 'So that Philosophie he lefte/ And to  
richesse himself uplefte:/ Lo, thus hadde Arisippe his  
wille' (VII, 2263-5). Diogenes has made a conscious  
rejection of worldly goods; it is not that he has sought  
them by another path, he has chosen to ignore them  
altogether -- and with them the king:

So as it thoghte him for the beste,  
To studie in his Philosophie,  
As he which wolde so defie  
The worldes pompe on every syde.  
(VII, 2244-7)

And so, for this reason, he has no need to pursue the  
device of flattery. Diogenes exercises self-restraint  
and is content with what he has, and this is nicely  
shown in the tale's conclusion, when Diogenes says to  
Aristippus:

'If that thou couthist, so as I,  
Thi wortes pyke, trewely  
It were als litel nede or lasse,  
That thou so worldly wolt compasse  
With flaterie forto serve,  
Wherof thou thenkest to deserve  
Thi princes thonk, and to pourchace  
Hou thou myht stonden in his grace,  
For getinge of a litel good.'  
(VII, 2301-9)

The process which we have now seen begun is also traceable as we progress through the exempla relating to the middle three points of policy. The tale of the Roman Triumph, in spite of its stated function, is an example of momento mori (to the extent that it warns of human vulnerability and frailty in the face of fortune.) Ostensibly, it is told as an exemplum against flattery, but there can be little doubt as to where its emphasis falls in the light of such lines as:

Thogh thou victoیره have nou on honde,  
Fortune mai noght stonde alway;  
The whiel per chance an other day  
Mai torne, and thou myht overthrowe;  
Ther lasteth nothing bot a throwe.  
(VII, 2392-6)

Similar remarks may apply to the tale of the Emperor and His Masons (VII, 2412-48). The secular world that Genius constructs is framed in terms of death and misfortune and the accompanying spiritual values which humans use to make these thoughts bearable; and so, Genius seems to undermine the secular order that he has been at such pains to create.

Flattery is a long subsection to the virtue of liberality and supposedly qualifies what is to be the proper measure of giving for a king. In practice, it serves to weaken the notion of secular possessions either by denying the value of those possessions, or effectively making their proper division impossible.

The use of flattery is simply a feint to express the ideas Genius has surreptitiously advanced elsewhere

in the poem. The nominal theme for Ahab and Micaiah (VII, 2527-694) is the need to avoid flattery, and in this reading it takes Ahab as its focus; however, it is not difficult to propose an alternate reading which takes as its subject the figure of Micaiah and his rejection of worldly values. It is true that he has elected not to flatter his king; however, the emphasis of the tale lies on the consequences which that choice carries for him -- the loss of worldly goods and benefits. In accepting this fate Micaiah is following the will of God, and so once more the denial of self is portrayed as a step towards spiritual salvation. It can be seen that the form of the tale has much in common with that of Diogenes and Aristippus. Many of the tales of the middle section of book VII respond to this style of analysis: Gaius Fabricius is the model of the impartial judge ( VII, 2783-832), in the section dealing with the virtue of justice, and his impartiality is achieved by self-restraint. Further examples easily extend to the tale of the Consul Carmidotius (VII, 2845-88) and Lycurgus and his Laws (VII, 2917-3028). These are stories of self-denial and of the vanity of human wishes, irrespective of their nominal purpose.

#### 4.5 CHASTITY

In dealing with the fifth point of policy, chastity, Genius must show that an unchaste ruler is guilty of bad policy -- that is, that secular misfortune must follow a moral lapse. To do this

Genius must admit a moral order that is generally lacking in the rest of the poem. Even in the Prologue, Gower tells us that the order of secular life has broken down, and Genius's exempla are more usually concerned with sin and not the operation of social justice.

To Genius's credit he achieves considerable success with the shorter exempla on chastity, such as the Evil Example of Sardanapaulus (VII, 4313-43), David (VII, 4344-60) and Cyrus and the Lydians (VII, 4361-405), in which a secular fall follows a moral lapse. In his prefatory remarks, Genius makes it clear that to pursue women to excess is 'unkindely':

It sit a man be weie of kinde  
To love, bot it is noght kinde  
A man for love his wit to lese.  
(VII, 4297-99)

Such remarks have obvious relevance for Amans who is as clear an example of obsessive love as one could wish to find. But Genius's success is short-lived.

#### 4.6.1 THE TALE OF TEREUS (V, 5551-6047)

Before considering several of the chastity exempla of book VII I would like to recall, for the purposes of comparison, an exemplum from book V, the Tale of Tereus. This story has some resemblances to The Rape of Lucrece (VII, 4754-5130) and the Tale of Virginia (VII, 5131-306) but, more importantly, some significant differences. Book V deals with the sin of Avarice and in particular the Tale of Tereus falls under the sub-heading of Ravine. In the terms of book VII, Tereus is

an 'unchaste' ruler if ever there was one -- guilty of the brutal rape of his wife's sister and of her subsequent imprisonment. Philomene survives; Procne discovers her husband's crime and exacts a terrible revenge by feeding Tereus the flesh of his own son; and at the final moment of crisis the gods intervene and all the protagonists are turned into birds! It would, I argue, be a mistake to see any sense of social justice at work in this tale. It is true that Tereus falls from power because of his attack on Philomene, but his punishment occurs more through a process of chance than through any system of social order. Philomene appeals to Jupiter for aid (V, 5741-52); however, there is no indication of direct divine intervention at that point -- Philomene is left to her own devices and her prayer itself acknowledges that divine intervention in secular affairs is not expected: 'O thou, almyhty Jupiter,/ That hihe sist and lokest fer,/ Thou soffrest many a wrong doinge,/ And yit it is nocht thi willinge' (VII, 5741-4). Once Procne is aware of her husband's crime it becomes impossible to maintain any sense of consistent social justice: her cries for revenge simply increase the moral chaos of the scene and none of the protagonists is left free from blame (a pattern which strongly recalls that of Jason and Medea (V, 3247-4229)). When the gods finally intervene to prevent further slaughter they do so with the unpredictability that is

typical of dei ex machina; their intervention resolves the scene and returns order but there is little sense of an abiding justice. Genius's nominal task is to illustrate the consequences of a particular sin against love, and there is no conflict between this and his covert intent to show the base nature of secular life -- in fact, they are complimentary. However, the needs imposed by book VII upon its exempla are quite different as we will now see.

#### 4.5.2 TARQUIN AND HIS SON ARUNS (VII, 4593-753)

As I have previously indicated, in book VII Genius is effectively trying to serve two masters which are the particular and the general constraints of his narrative frame. He has created the assumption in book VII of an ordered world in which secular success follows by obedience to particular points of policy. In the previous books of the poem if a given character suffered misfortune this would be ascribed to fate; within book VII Genius is committed to showing that a system of temporal justice is possible and that one may be protected by the twin virtues of truth and chastity (and, conversely, punished for failing to adhere to these values.) However, what we in fact now find is a return to the jungle law of the previous books of the poem. My claim is that it is easier for Genius to show the fall of an individual through a random political error than to attempt to show that fall is the product of a consistent system of moral justice. Tarquin and his son Aruns

provides a useful illustration.

The most immediate point to note is that this tale forms a set with the one following, The Rape of Lucrece, and this invites the question, why? The first exemplum acts as an introduction to the second and sets the scene for the action to follow; however, at the same time, it strangely predicts the conclusion of that action -- the fall of Tarquin and his son from power -- and relates this not to the moral sin of Aruns but to the political errors made by them. Genius begins his tale by telling us that Tarquin had already done 'many a wrongful thing' during his reign (VII, 4596) and then proceeds to list the political sins of Tarquin and his son Aruns who is 'Lich to his fader of maneres' (VII, 4599). Through their false dealing the two bring sufficient shame upon their state to warrant the intervention of the gods; and Brutus -- as the first man to kiss his 'mother', the earth -- is nominated by the gods as the man who is to 'take wrieche' (VII, 4731) for the sins of the Tarquins. This situation poses some problems. Why has Genius adopted this approach when it seems to undermine the entire moral frame of the following exemplum by linking the fall of the Tarquins to a cause other than Aruns's breach of chastity? In any case, why is such an introduction needed at all when it does little to advance the action of The Rape of Lucrece which supposedly contains the heart of the moral

which Genius wishes to present?

In Genius's defence the first point to note is that Tarquin and his son Aruns stops short at fixing the cause of the fall of the Tarquins on their previous political sins: it merely points to the selection of Brutus as the person who will bring about the fall of the Tarquins. Nevertheless, even if we admit this, the question still remains, what is the function of the tale? I suggest that its primary function is to establish the figure of Brutus as the person who will carry out the social duty of removing the Tarquins from power: he is part of a self-regulating society in which a divinely sanctioned moral code is in operation that will punish moral transgressions. This is not the chaotic world of Tereus and Procne but a society where punishment -- supposedly -- follows crime and restores order. This is just the tone Genius needs to satisfy the nominal purpose of book VII and it is this point which he labours to establish in the tale of Tarquin and his son Aruns. But it is made at a cost, which is that the mechanisms for illustrating the workings of social justice come dangerously close to detracting from the chastity exemplum which it is Genius's primary goal to illustrate: it is not clear whether the Tarquins are defeated because of Aruns's breach of chastity or because they are overtaken by the accumulated results of their past political lapses. There is a particular danger of the latter interpretation because the previous

indiscretions of the Tarquins function according to the same rules of determinism which Genius has implicitly followed elsewhere in the Confessio Amantis: it is very easy to judge that the father and son are destroyed by the mechanistic, although random, workings of cause and effect -- rather than by their own moral failures -- when the text of the Confessio Amantis provides so many examples of the former.

#### 4.5.3 THE RAPE OF LUCRECE (VII, 4754-5130)

Genius is guilty of mixing his techniques, as we can see in the opening lines of The Rape of Lucrece: 'Bot every time hath his certein,/ So moste it nedes thanne abide,/ Til afterward upon a tyde/ Tarquinius made unskilfully/ A werre' (VII, 4754-8). Here Genius recalls the familiar notes of determinism which are so evident elsewhere in his poem; one could interpret his lines as indicating that Tarquin falls simply because his time is up. Instead, I think he is pointing to a more subtle distinction: he is noting that the processes of social justice cannot be delayed indefinitely -- in time secular judgement must be faced. He can be confident of such judgement because, as we have seen from the way book VII is structured, secular justice has standing behind it a divine presence. He has used an old technique -- the mechanism of determinism -- at a new task. However, the distinction between the two approaches is hard to draw and suggests

an ambiguity which could divide the shrift.

It is not always possible to justify easily Genius's use of fate and determinism. In The Rape of Lucrece: he seems to be drawn into the use of such devices as the general constraints of his text impose upon his specific needs. For example, the contest between Aruns and Collatin arises as if by chance -- 'So it befell upon a nyht', (VII, 4763) -- and thereby takes its place in a long chain of cause and effect. Eventually, it could be argued, Lucrece will be raped and commit suicide not simply because Aruns violates the rule of chastity but because he had previously 'wroghte many a wrongful thing'(VII, 4596), fought 'A werre, which was noght achieved' (VII, 4609), violated the trust of the Gabiens, subsequently fought another unsuccessful war against a town called Ardea and incidentally, during the conduct of this fight, chanced to engage Collatin in a contest as to who had 'the beste wif' (VII, 4771). The longer this chain becomes the more difficult it is for Genius to ascribe the fall of Aruns to a single moral lapse. Indeed, the whole issue of Aruns's personal culpability may be called into question when we read Genius's description of Aruns's first observation of Lucrece:

The kinges Sone, which was nyh,  
And of this lady herde and syh  
The thinges as thei ben befalle,  
The resoun of hise wittes alle  
Hath lost; for love upon his part  
Cam thanne, and of his fyri dart  
With such a wounde him hath thurghsmite,

That he mot nedes fiele and wite  
Of thilke blinde maladie,  
To which no cure of Surgerie  
Can helpe.

(VII, 4847-57)

This language is by now well familiar to us from the other books of the Confessio Amantis: it removes human passion from the world of rational and proper conduct, and its use of the word 'love' in such a context is highly pejorative. Genius's approach may be appropriate to his needs elsewhere in the poem, but it is not appropriate here because without a system of free will and social responsibility the full force of his exemplum will be lost. Aruns will become no different from any of the other blind victims of secular passion described elsewhere in the poem; and he will not be brought to justice by the workings of an ordered and theistic state but by the hit and miss law of the jungle. Genius does little to relieve this problem with Aruns's chilling use of the moral 'Fortune unto the bold/ Is favorable forto helpe' (VII, 4902-3) as he plots the rape of Lucrece. Aruns becomes a symbol, by Genius's presentation, of a man possessed by obsessive love: he is 'wo besein/ With thoghtes whiche upon him runne' (VII, 4868-9) and his actions and thoughts are a cruel parody of a sonneteer's lover:

he al be the brode Sunne  
To bedde goth, noght forto reste,  
Bot forto thenke upon the beste  
And the faireste forth withal,  
That evere he syh or evere schal,  
So as him thoghte in his corage,  
Where he pourtreieth hire ymage:

Ferst the fetures of hir face,  
 In which nature hadde alle grace  
 Of wommanly beaute beset,  
 So that it myhte noght be bet;  
 And hou hir yelwe her was tresced  
 And hire atir so wel adresced,  
 And hou sche spak, and hou sche wroghte,  
 And hou sche wepte, al this he thoghte,  
 That he foryeten hath no del,  
 Bot al it liketh him so wel,  
 That in the word nor in the dede  
 Hire lacketh noght of wommanhiede.

(VII, 4870-88).

What darkens these lines is not so much their suggestion that one of the best of secular emotions can produce the worst of results -- although this in itself is bad enough -- but their emphasis on the way in which the beauty of Lucrece draws destruction to it. Lucrece's beauty and goodness become further links in the causal chain; they are the quarry which attract the hopeful hunter. Genius presents something of a hunting image in his description of Aruns's departure from Rome to pursue Lucrece, and combines this with suggestions of stealth and good fortune:

it was somdiel late,  
 Riht evene upon the Sonne set,  
 As he which hadde schape his net  
 Hire innocence to betrappe.  
 And as it scholde tho mishappe,  
 Als priveliche as evere he myhte  
 He rod.

(VII, 4912-18).

The allegory of hunting is continued throughout the passage: Aruns stalks his victim, 'as the Tigre his time awaiteth/ In hope forto cacche his preie' (VII, 4944-5); and when he attacks, Lucrece is 'lich a Lomb whanne it is sesed/ In wolves mouth' (VII, 4983-4). At

one level such imagery serves Genius's immediate purposes well, as it firmly condemns Aruns's actions -- he is shown to act like an animal. However, at another level it invites further difficulties because it tends to decrease the importance of human choice -- it returns one to the values of the jungle. Such imagery illustrates the fine line that Genius treads in this section of the shrift.

If the moral of Genius's exemplum is to be salvaged, he must be able to show that the secular state is a balanced and self-regulating world -- it must possess a real sense of moral justice. However, it seems that this is just what the final denouement fails to do. The Tarquins have been cruel and corrupt rulers; Aruns in particular has committed a crime which has had tragic consequences; and yet their punishment of exile does not seem to reflect correctly the severity of their crimes. Is this the worst that the criminal can expect in Genius's ordered state? In the other books of the Confessio Amantis a much more severe fate might have been expected. Acteon was dismembered for merely looking at a goddess and Tereus turned into a bird for a crime not unlike Aruns's. The punishment related by Genius is a political one in response to a moral crime: he has attempted to show that princes are morally accountable for their sins in this world -- and by implication that the world is a morally ordered place -- but at this key point in his exemplum he has resorted to a purely

political solution based upon expediency rather than moral rightness.

#### 4.5.4 VIRGINIA (VII, 5131-5306)

The difficulties of the Tarquin stories are repeated in Genius's treatment of the Tale of Virginia. The king and his brother are political figures guilty of a moral crime based upon an abuse of their power; their sin belongs to the same genus as that of the Tarquins. Virginia herself, like Lucrece before her, is a picture of beauty: 'Men seiden that so fair a lif/ As sche was nocht in al th toun' (VII, 5138-9). But Virginia seems to fulfil a passive symbolic function to an even greater degree than Lucrece had done -- she is not even allowed by Genius to speak during the course of her exemplum. She is there, she is beautiful and she dies -- that is the extent of her activity. The emphasis of Genius's tale is on the criminals and not on their victim. This is not surprising as Genius's abiding concern in this section of his work is the presentation of secular order and how society deals with breaches of that order; such a priority places greater stress upon the position and power of the criminal and his eventual punishment than on the unfortunate lot of the victim. If my suggestion is correct one would expect to find, in the sections of the shrift outside of the bounds of book VII, a heightened concern with the victim of the crime and the particular circumstances of

their suffering -- and, I believe, this is indeed the case. Time and again in the other books of the poem we find an almost morbid concentration on the details of individual crimes: the rape committed by Tereus and Genius's general treatment of the incest theme are simply two of the better known instances. In such contexts Genius's technique is appropriate to his purpose because his concern is to show not the ordered side of social existence but its disorder -- the victim and the crime, instead of the criminal and the context of his actions.

What we find in book VII, therefore, are lengthy descriptions of social mechanisms. Genius leads us carefully through the steps constituting the king's crime. The king and his brother, we are told, plot to take Virginia by an abuse of law and the courts (VII, 5170-84) and the defence made by her supporters is likewise based on legal argument and 'the comun lawe' (VII, 5188). Significantly, the processes of the law do offer some check to the king's power as he is forced to yield 'daies tuo/ Of respit' (VII, 5199-5200). However, Genius's presentation at this point takes a very strange turn. He has previously been at pains to imply the presence of an ordered social network -- even if this has only been made evident by the anti-social excesses of the king and his brother. But then he seems to tear at the structure of that order when he has Virginia killed, not by the king or his brother, but by her own

father. One might claim that her father has saved her from a 'fate worse than death' and he claims something of this in his cry:

'Lo, take hire ther, thou wrongfull king,  
For me is levere upon this thing  
To be the fader of a Maide,  
Thogh sche be ded, than if men saide  
That in hir lif sche were schamed  
And I therof were evele named.'  
(VII, 5247-52).

Indeed, 'Give me liberty or give me death!' but in this case it is Virginia who dies while the punishment given to the king and his brother remains non-specific. Like The Rape of Lucrece this tale has had more to do with the destruction of beauty than with the punishment of evil. Genius has tried to strike a balance between the social disorder demanded elsewhere in his text and the neat social order required by the nature of book VII, and he has failed. What he has produced instead is an uneasy hybrid.

[\*]

## Chapter 5: Incest

### 5.0 PREFATORY REMARKS

There is nothing more apparently lurid and inappropriate in the Confessio Amantis -- or so the Man of Law thinks in his Introduction (77-89) -- than the priest's treatment of the incest theme in the two tales Canace and Machaire and Apollonius of Tyre. In the former story, Genius appears strangely sympathetic to the incestuous love between Canace and Machaire; in the latter tale there is no trace of sympathy but the narrative seems to meander away from the issue which gave it rise. And so it seems that we are left with two outcomes: either we find Genius's treatment of the subject simply odd; or, we question his reasons for bothering at all to include it in his work. It follows that our perception of Genius's approach to the topic of incest is directly related to whether or not we see the Confessio Amantis as a purposeful work. In spite of what may be our first impression, Genius does display moral judgement in the tale of Canace and Machaire and a concern for the structure of his narrative in Apollonius of Tyre; both stories are purposeful in terms

of the overall function of the shrift. What differences there are between them (and the two do differ) are largely a result of the two principal methodologies Genius follows in the shrift. In Canace and Machaire his method is to subtly denigrate the character of 'natural' love; he suggests that when we are left to the devices of 'kinde' we become like animals. On the other hand, in Apollonius of Tyre, he identifies incest with a whole genus of 'unkindely', meaning unnatural, love which includes the love of the aged Amans. Genius exploits the ambiguity inherent in the notion of 'kinde' which allows it to refer to both the animal and higher functions of human nature. The relationship of 'kinde' and 'natura' is considered at length by David Hiscoe who concludes that

The ubiquitous treatment of 'kynde' in late medieval literature is surely not surprising since the emblem of equivocation revealed in the word natura touches at the center of medieval Christianity's conception of man's paradoxical nature while simultaneously suggesting literary techniques to body forth the tensions built into that conception. ('Equivocations of kynde', 225-6)

In the preface to his thesis Hiscoe argues that the word 'natura' (and consequently the term 'kinde' to which it is related)

balances two conceptions of nature under one term to reveal man's essential condition as a creature caught between the nature inherited from his creation in God's image and the nature inherited from the fall. (iii)

This division is part of the basic mechanism Genius uses in his efforts to deter Amans from his obsession. The

idea of 'kinde' is tainted by Genius -- the urges of nature are blackened -- but the priest also (almost paradoxically) criticises Amans's love as 'unkindely'. At one moment the lover's urges are 'natural' and, consequently -- by implication of the exempla -- corrupt; at the next, these same impulses are, in themselves, 'unnatural'. As readers of the poem we are given no right or wrong answer, the poem remains ambiguous, and we are left to acknowledge that Gower is one of those 'Medieval writers' who

persistently create works that challenge their audience's ability to make proper distinctions, usually by creating characters who reduce the equivocation properly inherent in the term [natura] into only an evasive attempt to separate the world of nature from the divine. ('Equivocations of Kynde', 225)

At turns, the unhappy lover finds that his desires are either 'unkindely' or in time with 'kinde', and yet (in whichever eventuality) he is wrong!

### 5.1 A SYMPATHETIC VIEW OF INCEST?

Some readers have held that Gower has a sympathetic view of incest. In the notes to his edition of the Confessio Amantis, G.C. Macaulay expresses such an opinion: 'Gower's view is that there is nothing naturally immoral about an incestuous marriage, but that it is made wrong by the "lex positiva" of the Church' (Vol. I, 493). But is this Gower's view? or is it Genius's? Benson warns that 'the teachings of Genius need not always be accepted as Gower's final opinion, though this has often been the critical practice' (102).

In the preliminary stories of book VIII Genius gives a brief historical background to the sinfulness of incest, showing that it only became sinful when it stood in defiance of God's will. In the time of Adam and Eve, 'it was no Sinne/ The Soster forto take hire brother,/ Whan that ther was of chois non other' (VIII, 68-70); now, the times have changed. With the exception of this historical perspective and the purpose it fulfils in the shrift, what Gower's personal view of incest may be is not important; indeed, incest itself is effectively stripped of its particular characteristics -- it exists only as an emblem of human defiance and 'unkindely' love. Confirmation of this identification is provided at the end of Apollonius of Tyre when Genius generalises the idea of incest to represent love which is 'unkindely':

Forthi, my Sone, I wolde rede  
 To lete al other love aweie,  
 Bot if it be thurgh such a weie  
 As love and reson wolde acorde.  
 For elles, if that thou descorde,  
 And take lust as doth a beste,  
 Thi love mai nocht ben honeste;  
 For be no skile that I finde  
 Such lust is nocht of loves kinde.  
(VIII, 2020-28)

Amans is 'incestuous' to the extent that his own quest is in opposition to the intent of a divinely ordered nature: the sin of incest may have little apparent relevance for the lover but its genus is of the same type as his own 'unkindely' love. Benson observes that the incestuous relationship of Canace and Machaire

recalls that of Venus and Jupiter which yielded 'the dishonorable birth of Cupid': 'Thus the incestuous relationship of Canace and Machaire is not a wild aberration of sexual love, but its essential image' (105). It is a mistake to conclude that Genius is sympathetic to the sin of incest. On a closer inspection of the shrift we find that incest is at the heart of the priest's critique of love; it is part of a covert strategy to discredit secularism and, as such, it is subject to persistent judgement. In addressing incest Genius is attacking the issue of Amans's 'illicit' love in a much more direct way than he does elsewhere: incest foregrounds the whole genus of love which is 'unkindely', and so prepares the way for the direct accusation that Amans's 'love' is but 'lust' and 'noght of loves kinde' (VIII, 2028).

## **5.2 THE TALE OF CANACE AND MACHAIRE: EOLUS**

Notwithstanding the title of this exemplum, it is Eolus who is the nominal subject of the story: the king is guilty of 'malencolie' and for Genius's moral to be sustained he must be judged accordingly. Certainly, Eolus is a callous and brutal man, and the consequences of his brutality for his children are severe; but, for all that, Genius gives little explicit condemnation of the king which could serve to highlight his moral on the dangers and evils of melancholy; and his conclusion to the tale is remarkable for its understated summation of

Eolus as a man who knew 'of love bot a lite' (III, 333). What is Genius trying to express in the character of the king? The lines which first introduce Eolus and his children have a detached and passive tone:

Ther was a king which Eolus  
Was hote, and it befell him thus,  
That he tuo children hadde faire,  
The Sone cleped was Machaire,  
The dowhter ek Canace hihte.  
Be daie bothe and ek be nyhte,  
Whil thei be yonge, of comun wone  
In chambre thei togedre wone.  
(III, 143-50)

This calmness allows Genius to further emphasise the high drama of the tale's denouement. However, it also contributes to a general air of determinism within the text, and this raises interesting questions relating to the moral responsibility of the characters concerned.

Eolus is defined, by the words 'it befell him thus', as an individual who experiences more than he acts; this seems to be a strangely inappropriate introduction to a man who brings about the death of his daughter and grandchild! However, our surprise at this may lead us to consider how we can differentiate between what Eolus does and what is done to him -- between the active and passive components of his action. In the lines just quoted we are presented with the context in which Eolus exists, and it is the influence of this context which makes the determination of his individual responsibility difficult. We are told, for example, that Canace and Machaire 'of comun wone/ In chambre thei togedre wone' (III, 149-50), and the fact of their

accommodation may be seen as the principal cause of the tragedy that overtakes them; but with whom does the responsibility for their domestic situation rest? Is it Eolus? Genius seems to dissipate blame with the remark 'of comun wone' and, if we accept this, we would conclude that there is none to be held responsible and that blame must lie with the chance secular situation of the siblings. This would be generally in keeping with the deterministic position the priest takes elsewhere in the shrift and C. David Benson seems to agree:

Although only Eolus is directly blamed by Genius, there are suggestions that his 'frenesie' (210) of anger is not only the result but also the equivalent of his children's frenzy of love: he, too, lacks reason (245) and is described as falling into his passion (211). (104-5)

Nevertheless, there are also reasons for doubting that Eolus is exonerated from blame. Genius's remark on the cohabitation of the lovers is qualified by the clause 'Whil thei be yonge' (III, 149). This implies that society cannot be held responsible for the common quarters of Canace and Machaire once the pair are past childhood, because it is only during infancy that such arrangements are common practice. Both brother and sister have reached sexual maturity at the beginning of the narrative, and so it follows that we cannot blame social custom for their plight. Once more, the text seems to provide only one other possibility: Eolus himself. He is responsible for his children as their father, and as a king he is especially responsible for

the order of his household.

In considering the characterisation of Eolus, I have attempted to resolve what, on the face of it, is a fairly simple question: who is responsible for the domestic situation of Canace and Machaire? By two different approaches I have arrived at the conclusion that it is Eolus -- and in doing this I have overlooked at least three relevant issues. The first of these is the very fact that Canace and Machaire are past childhood (a point I made in condemning Eolus) because this implies that they have reached an age when they must carry some responsibility for their actions: all cannot be blamed on their father. (I am aware that Genius treats the pair as the passive victims of nature but I will address this when I come to consider their characterisation in detail.) The second relevant issue is the genre of the story. Most readers would agree that it has the form of a tragedy, and in tragedy our sympathy is evoked because the players suffer more than they deserve: we admit that there is no simple correspondence between action and reaction, and so we cannot talk simply of blame and responsibility. In tragedy, even the heroes are at fault. Lastly, in considering the issue of Eolus's responsibility, we need to give more thought to the generally deterministic context in which the king is situated, the effect of which seems to be a diminution of his personal

responsibility. With respect to this last point, there is little doubt that Genius sets the king within a mechanistic framework and we can sense something of this in the following lines which describe his incipient rage:

The sothe, which mai nocht ben hid,  
Was ate laste knowe and kid  
Unto the king, how that it stod.  
And whan that he it understod,  
Anon into Malencolie,  
As thogh it were a frenesie,  
He fell, as he which nothing cowthe  
How maistrefull love is in yowthe.

(III, 205-12)

The 'sothe' of the above lines emerges, according to Genius, simply because it must, it is a law of nature that it 'mai nocht ben hid'; 'ate laste' is another sign of the text's inevitable flow of action; 'And' followed by 'Anon', each at the first foot of their respective lines, also serves to stress the march-like progress of cause and effect. In the verb 'He fell' (III, 211) the stress on 'fell', preceded by the unstressed 'He', reinforces the literal meaning of the phrase; meaning and sound, taken together, seem to suggest that the king's fall into blind passion is inevitable. However, if we argue from these characteristics that Eolus is not, in any degree, responsible for his actions, we have gone too far. Genius's description makes it clear that the king is a man 'which nothing cowthe/ How maistrefull love is in yowth' and by doing this the cause of Eolus's actions is placed within his own personality. It is true that the incestuous relationship between his

children is a fact of his circumstances but his reaction to it is a characteristic of his own nature. If this is so, Eolus is culpable for his actions because these are the product of his character and not his context. Although this may well be an over-simplification of the notoriously complex problem of free will and determinism, it is at least consistent with the moral position that goodness requires a positive effort: a bad man will surrender to his circumstances; a good man will not. (I will look at this proposition more closely when I consider Apollonius of Tyre.) Genius gives another insight into the king's personality, that further tends to suggest his culpability, with the description of his departure from Canace's chamber:

Bot his horrible crualte  
Ther mihte attempre no pite:  
Out of hire chambre forth he wente  
Al ful of wraththe in his entente,  
And tok the conseil in his herte  
That sche schal noght the deth asterte,  
As he which Malencolien  
Of pacience hath no lien,  
Wherof his wraththe he mai restreigne.  
(III, 235-43)

In these lines Genius describes Eolus as a man who contains within him a 'horrible crualte'; he is not merely led by events to perform cruel acts; he is essentially cruel. His context does not create his cruelty but merely allows it to emerge.

Nevertheless, the broader issue of responsibility in the tale remains a complex matter, and we can see something of this when we consider the 'causes' leading

to the death of Canace. The list includes the shared accommodation of Canace and her brother; the rage of the king (his 'malenholie'); the knight who acts for the king and, hence, who also bears some blame; and the desertion of Machaire. It must also be remembered that Canace commits suicide and so she is technically the cause of her own death. Although, the neatness of this last point is unsettled by the recollection that Eolus himself is the subject of an exemplum against melancholy and, as such, plays the part of a victim; and so even he suffers under the influence of his situation.

The motivation behind Genius's complex use of fate and free will is an attempt to force Amans into a pejorative view of the tendencies of human free will and secular circumstance. Genius shows the results of a corrupt nature at work in a corrupt context. Eolus is the slave of his situation, or he is a conscious monster, or he is somewhere between the two; in whichever event Amans, and we, are repelled by him.

#### 5.2.1 THE CHARACTERISATION OF CANACE AND MACHAIRE

When I was discussing the extent of Eolus's personal responsibility I quoted the following lines -- that deal with the living arrangements of his children -- but which now be considered in a different light:

Be daie bothe and ek be nyhte,  
Whil thei be yonge, of comun wone  
In chambre thei togedre wone,  
And as thei scholden pleide hem ofte.  
(III, 148-51)

On the surface there is nothing to disturb the listener here; there is no obvious judgement expressed by Genius. Nevertheless, when we look more closely, we realise that the phrase 'and ek be nyhte' is loaded with a sexual connotation; and the concluding line, although superficially reassuring, is darkened both by its delayed position in the text and by the words 'as thei scholden pleid' which stand in opposition to the forbidden play which is to come. The expression 'of comun wone' is radically incongruous to the further events of the story and strikes a disturbing note; and Genius's use of the words 'In chambre' marks an early division between the open world outside the lovers' chamber and the closed world within. Lines which appear to offer simple reportage of events also serve to evaluate the action described; and so, once more, Genius has given an indication of his ability to darken the overt meaning of his text by a subtle ambiguity of language.

We are told of the lovers that 'Whan thei were in a prive place,/ Cupide bad hem ferst to kesse' (III, 168-9). At a literal level this presents the lovers as passive victims who are led to act by their situation and the prompting of Cupid; but the use of the phrase 'in a prive place' at least hints at a degree of choice, -- Benson appears to agree (103) -- and it is not at all clear that the line 'Cupid bad hem ferst to kesse' deprives the lovers of all free will. It does not

matter in this reading that Canace and Machaire might not have an appreciation of the consequences of their actions; what is significant is that they act by an exercise of their will, as Genius implies in the following lines:

And as the blinde an other ledeth  
And til thei falle nothing dredeth,  
Riht so thei hadde non insihte;  
Bot as the bridd which wole alihte  
And seth the mete and noght the net,  
Which in deceipte of him is set,  
This yonge folk no peril sihe,  
Bot that was likinge in here yhe,  
So that thei felle upon the chance  
Where witt hath lore his remembrance.  
(III, 179-88)

Genius does not deny that the lovers are responsible for their actions, even though these actions might be the product of their unwitting obedience to their own desires:

Although in one sense Canacee and Machaire are victims, like all sinners, Gower's language suggests that they also bear responsibility for their fate because they have chosen pleasure over reason. (Benson, 104)

Further incidents bring the issue of the lovers' culpability into sharp focus. The first of these is the desertion of Machaire, related by Genius with the greatest brevity: 'Machaire goth, Canace abit' (III, 201). Typically, Genius offers no overt comment but the starkness of his report invites a negative listener response. There is no Cupid to take the blame now for Machaire and he is shown for what he is, a culpable coward. His action, for which he alone can take

responsibility, displays a freely chosen self-interest. Are we to assume that this is a characteristic which has only now emerged within his personality? Such a view seems improbable.

Canace's words in response to Eolus's plans (III, 225-31, 262-7) and her letter to Machaire (III, 279-306) appear to be evidence of her heroic stature, but there are worrying flaws in Canace's self-presentation. She is now articulate and rational in the defence of her self-interest and, apparently, no longer under the power of blind Cupid. This is a transformation which has taken place as quickly for her as it did for Machaire when he chose to flee for his own protection. Canace presents herself to her father as a passive victim of 'yowthe' (III, 225-31) and this does not sit well with her new-found rationality. Her plea for mercy is motivated by self-interest; at no stage does she repent and this is particularly evident in her letter to her brother where, for all the poignancy of her expression, it is clear that she holds him to be responsible for her fall. She has blamed 'yowthe', she has blamed Machaire, but she never blames herself and accepts her guilt.

It is notable that it is not Genius but Canace herself who portrays her as a victim and heroine; and so Genius distances himself from her claims. Benson remarks that 'Genius's failure to condemn Canacee does not necessarily force the reader to do likewise' (102), and neither need we rush to her defence when Genius

himself has failed to do so. It might be thought that Canace is, nevertheless, treated sympathetically within the text and that this must tend to influence the listener. We have already seen that secular error and temptation are often given an attractive veneer by Genius -- it is central to his method to suggest the corruption beneath the glittering surface. However, dissenting opinions have been expressed. Klauser firmly takes the opposite view that the siblings are

completely innocent, childlike in their naivete - love catches them totally unawares; it comes through kinde and not through knowledge. Cupid may shoot the first arrow, but, more importantly, their act is in cooperation with nature. (150)

Following this logic through it is not surprising that she should conclude that the king 'in his excessive wrath ... violated the law of nature' and so is to blame for the tragedy of the tale (154). I see some unintended irony in Klauser's claim that in Canace and Machaire 'Gower exonerates the lovers because they acted in accordance with kinde, whose impulses they were unable to resist' (153-4). Genius does suggest the influence of nature, but it is a nature which is subtly corrupt and which, in any event, leaves room for the action of an even more corrupt human will. In Canace and Machaire, Genius has defined the lower bound of that love which is in tune with 'kinde'; in Apollonius of Tyre, he will move to a consideration of a love which is itself 'unkindely'.

### 5.3 APOLLONIUS OF TYRE: A SECULAR QUEST

Genius ends book VII with the rather general remark that 'Ther is yit more forto sein/ Of love which is unavised' (VII, 5432-3). Book VIII does not begin with the specific topic of incest but allows it to emerge as one act among a genus of like acts outlawed by the development of the laws of marriage; the sinfulness of incest -- like the other sins to which it is related -- lies in its rejection of order:

For love, which is unbesein  
Of alle reson, as men sein,  
Thurgh sotie and thurgh nycete,  
Of his voluptuosite  
He spareth no condicion  
Of ken ne yit religion,  
Bot as a cock among the Hennes,  
Or as a Stalon in the Fennes,  
Which goth amonges al the Stod,  
Riht so can he nomore good,  
Bot takth what thing comth next to honde.  
(VIII, 153-63)

Incest is a form of inappropriate behaviour; Amans is obviously not guilty of incest as such, but he is certainly guilty of an inappropriate desire. And so, Apollonius of Tyre

leads naturally to the final court of love in which love 'ayein kinde' is rejected in favor of heavenly love, love which seeks harmony and peace in one's own kingdom as well as in the realm. (Grellner, 262-3)

Nevertheless, this still does not explain why the story of Apollonius seems to 'forget' the issue of incest, which is supposed to be the point of its moral lesson, once Apollonius has left the court of Antiochus at about line 452. I suggest that the text has the form of a

quest; it is a quest in which the hero confronts his enemy, shows his worthiness and finally reaches his goal. It is in this role of 'quest' that

The story of Apollonius, the virtuous lover and wise ruler, serves as antidote to the tales of infidelity and tyranny that have gone before and provides a kind of thematic and structural focus for all the stories. (Grellner, 225)

The hero is Apollonius; his enemy comprises a mass of secular temptations effectively symbolised by the sin of incest; and his ultimate goal is to free himself from these sins and find an untainted love (both as father and husband); and so the tale chronicles a journey from that which is 'unkindely' to that which is truly in keeping with the higher functions of 'kinde'. Incest and what it represents is central to this reading; although Apollonius is no more guilty of incest than Amans, both men are touched by the secular evil incest epitomises; and Apollonius is an ideal which Genius uses as the last measure by which Amans may see the unworthiness of his own quest.

### 5.3.1 THE SIN

Genius introduces the kingdom of Antiochus as being almost a land derived from a fairy-tale: it has a strong king, 'grete Antiochus' (VIII, 274) and a 'noble queene' (VIII, 277), and the ruling couple have a daughter. These are classic secular blessings which Genius almost immediately undermines by the workings of fate:

Bot such fortune cam to honde,

That deth, which no king mai withstonde,  
Bot every lif it mot obeie,  
This worthi queene tok aweie.

(VIII, 279-82)

Dramatically, these lines are most effective in the way they delay the revelation that it is the queen who dies and not the king who had been mentioned at line 280, and this exemplifies how the text challenges and unsettles the expectations of its listener. It is also yet another example of how Genius will often relate the whole tragic action of an exemplum to a single chance event, in this case the death of the queen: if the queen had not died the tragedy which the tale relates would not have ensued. Similarly, If Acteon had not entered the forrest, he would not have died. Disaster follows chance because without the positive exercise of human will to the good -- as a counter to animal desire (the dark side of 'kinde') -- it is inevitable that fate and circumstance should combine to bring about catastrophe. In the following lines Genius exploits something of this by creating a new expectation in his audience:

The king, which made mochel mone,  
Tho stod, as who seith, al him one  
Withoute wif, bot natheles  
His doghter, which was piereles  
Of beaute, duelte about him stille.

(VIII, 283-7)

One would be forgiven for thinking at this point that the king's daughter would be a source of spiritual comfort to him, and such a reading would be in keeping with the tale's fairy-tale ethos. However, Genius has

already introduced death and chance into the kingdom of Antiochus, and he now brings the corruption of secular desire and challenges Amans's expectation with an adversative 'Bot':

Bot whanne a man hath welthe at wille,  
The fleissh is frele and falleth ofte,  
And that this maide tendre and softe,  
Which in hire fadres chambres duelte,  
Withinne a time wiste and felte.  
(VIII, 288-92)

In these lines secular reality challenges the more ethereal expectations of the listener's mind, and Genius neatly reinforces the content of his lines by the characteristics of his language. An example is given by his use of alliteration on the letter 'f': 'fleish'; 'frele'; 'falleth'; 'fadres' and 'felte'. This group of words carries a meaning which is almost independent of the text around them, and the easy flow of the verse reflects the ease of the king's fall into vice. But what is the 'meaning' of the text: are we to see Antiochus as a 'victim' in the same way that Eolus may be seen as a 'victim' of his circumstances? It seems unlikely that such a claim could be accepted without qualification; nevertheless, it is significant that these suggestions can be found in the text because they act as further evidence to support the claim that Genius's method is to decry both the criminal and his context.

Genius presents the king as brutally reacting to the demands of his situation, and his brutality

recalls that of the father of Canace and Machaire. Antiochus is described as being 'Withoute insihte of conscience' (VIII, 294) -- he is not a thinking man -- and this had also been implied in the characterisation of Eolus; but the princess is also a victim of her circumstances because 'Sche couthe noght hir Maidenhede/ Defende' (VIII, 302-3), and this use of the word 'couthe' echoes Genius's description of Eolus as a man 'which nothing cowthe/ How maistrefull love is in yowthe' (III, 211-12). Genius neatly summarises the position of father and daughter:

Him thoghte that it was no Sinne;  
And sche dorste him nothing withseie.  
(VIII, 346-7)

Just as in Canace and Machaire, this tale offers a complex interplay of fate and free will, and the priest's summary above seems a little too pat to be accepted at face value: Antiochus is aware, at least by the time of the suitors' arrival, that he has sinned; the position with respect to the king's daughter is less clear, but it may be significant -- as Peter Goodall notes (244) -- that the divine retribution which overtakes Antiochus also takes her. Once more we are asking the question, 'who is to blame?', and we are finding answers which blur the line between individual and context.

Antiochus's palace is a place of corruption; and still the beauty of the king's daughter draws

men to the kingdom. Secular evils are concealed by a pleasing display in a pattern which we have already noted in the tales of the Sirens and the Trojan Horse and at many other points. In the lines 'Bot fame, which goth every weie,/ To sundry regnes al aboute' (VIII, 348-9), Genius creates an expectation that the rumour conveyed by fame will be concerning the incestuous relationship between the king and his daughter. Amans might legitimately expect that the truth will out, but his expectation is disappointed and it is only the beauty of the princess which is spread by rumour: Genius does not allow secular evils to be so easily revealed and resolved. The princes who respond to rumour know nothing of the reality behind it; they come simply 'for love of mariage' (VIII, 352). Their motivation hints that they may be somewhat superficial in their blind acceptance of hollow and deceptive secular display. Antiochus, too, is mocked by Genius in the description of his initial reaction to the approach of the suitor princes:

The fader, whanne he understod,  
That thei his dowhter thus besoghte,  
With al his wit he caste and thoghte  
Hou that he myhte finde a lette.  
(VIII, 356-9)

Antiochus is cast in the role of 'The fader' and in another context it may have been his daughter's virtue that he was concerned to protect; instead, he struggles 'With al his wit' to conceal his dark secret. The riddle which the king employs is a representation of

secular temptation: it has a superficial cleverness and attraction; it promises reward; but it is actually deadly and deceptive. The heads of the dead princes are a warning to those that remain and 'weren wise' to forego the quest (VIII, 372). It is a warning which specifically applies to the goal of marriage to the king's daughter; more generally, it may be seen as referring to the genus of secular activity in which the princes are employed.

There is nothing particularly heroic in Apollonius's approach to the court of Antiochus: he is one of a number of young men drawn by a deadly illusion, and who have been well advised to the contrary. Apollonius, at this point, is on the wrong quest. Genius conveys an impression of the suitor's dilettante attitude to the art of love:

it befell upon a day  
Appolinus the Prince of Tyr,  
Which hath to love a gret desir,  
As he which in his hihe mod  
Was likende of his hote blod,  
A yong, a freissh, a lusti knynt,  
As he lai musende on a nyht  
Of the tidinges which he herde,  
He thoghte assaie hou that it ferde.  
(VIII, 374-82)

One might also infer from Genius's lines that Apollonius is a very foolish 'knynt', a boy 'which hath to love a gret desir' -- a boy in love with the idea of love. It is true that he has a worthy character and many fine qualities but, for the moment at least, these are hopelessly misdirected.

Apollonius confronts what can be thought of as the 'heart of darkness' at the court of Antiochus; however, it is a vision which is not entirely alien to him. He finds that he is readily able to see the solution to the riddle posed by the king, and he displays no sense of shock or moral outrage in saying to Antiochus:

'The question which thou hast spoke,  
If thou wolt that it be unloke,  
It toucheth al the privete  
Betwen thin oghne child and thee,  
And stant al hol upon you tuo.'  
(VIII, 423-7)

Apollonius has sought out Antiochus and, having found him, understands him: whether he wishes it or not he is part of the darkness he finds.

### 5.3.2 PENANCE

In the remainder of the tale, Apollonius will prove that he is better than the evil Antiochus by overcoming secular ills and temptations until, at last, he is able to achieve an unqualified state of secular happiness. Antiochus is the starting point of his quest and the low-water mark of 'kinde'; and, as I will later show, Apollonius will symbolically confront the sin of Antiochus at the end of his travels.

After the horrors of Antiochus's court have touched him, Apollonius begins a kind of pilgrimage -- a process of atonement and re-education -- and the first step of this takes him to the city of Tharse. This city has some importance for the development of Apollonius's character because it is here that he gives an early

indication of his worthiness. In response to the need of the city's starving people, he freely donates his supply of wheat; and Genius's narrative is somewhat different from the version given in the priest's source for the tale. G.C. Macaulay points out that in the original form of the story Apollonius gives his wheat to the townspeople in exchange for sanctuary (Vol. II, 539). Genius omits this business transaction, and Apollonius is the better man for the omission. Excluding the fact that Apollonius has already lost a measure of his freedom, his gift of wheat is the first of a series of secular losses he incurs; the list will grow to include wife, daughter and all his possessions. Such losses are in keeping with the vicissitudes of Fortune to which Genius refers at this point (VIII, 585-92). Apollonius will overcome Fortune only when he has been deprived of all natural comfort and proven that, in such a desperate state, he can still rise to the higher form of 'kinde'. The deprivations he experiences are consistent with the pilgrimage-like nature of his journey, a characteristic which is reinforced by Genius's use of implication and symbolism. For example, Apollonius's ship is lost at sea -- an event brought about by the workings of the pagan Neptune (VIII, 623) -- as he travels from Tharse (where he made the redeeming gift of wheat) and as a consequence he suffers a further loss of material goods. He is immersed in

water but brought safely to the land by the power of him 'that alle thing mai kepe' (VIII, 628). He is 'Al' naked in a povere plit' (VIII, 635) and it is in this symbolic state of renewel that he is met by a 'Fisshere' who gives to him 'suche clothes as he hadde' (VIII, 651). The fisherman, having comforted the prince, 'preide god with good entente/ To sende him joie after his sorwe' (VIII, 664-5). Is it too extreme to see the symbolism of baptism and the promise of renewal in these events? Especially when we recall Genius's preamble to the tale where he discusses the redeeming flood of Noah (VIII, 78ff)? Such an identification is made particularly tempting by the fact that Genius repeats the fisherman device in the character of 'Cerymon who restores life to his [Apollonius's] wife when she is washed ashore at Ephesim' (Grellner, 241). I am not arguing for an extended allegorical reading of the tale, but I do make the observation that such devices as I have noted are used by Genius and that they are in keeping with what I see as the general thrust of his intent.

Apollonius's approach to Pentapolim is a mirror image of his experience at the court of Antiochus. He had travelled to Antiochus in the knowledge that he was to play the part of a suitor; in going to Pentapolim he has no such intention, yet he will become the suitor to the princess. He was a contestant for the hand of Antiochus's daughter by virtue of his possessions and social position (although he solved the riddle by his

inate wit, his solution only opened the way for further corruption and was, in itself, a reflection of the darker aspect of 'kinde'.) At Pentapolim he stands on his intrinsic merits, and the relationship between Apollonius, Antiochus and his daughter is antithetical to the familial relationships of Pentapolim.

Pentapolim is filled with music: the king, his daughter and court are sensitive to it; Apollonius excels at it. When Apollonius plays and sings for the royal court of Pentapolim, Genius suggests that the performance is an expression of the prince's divine grace:

He takth the Harpe and in his wise  
He tempreth, and of such assise  
Singende he harpeth forth withal,  
That as a vois celestial  
Hem thoghte it souneth in here Ere,  
As thogh that he an Angel were.  
(VIII, 777-82)

This is an atmosphere clearly lacking at the Antiochus's court. Peter Goodall also notes differences between the two kingdoms in terms of the father and daughter relationships at each:

Unlike Antiochus' daughter -- who is raped into submission, Antiochus having everything he wants, and she herself unable to do anything about it (342-43, 347) -- Arestrathes' daughter makes all the running, takes all the initiatives, demands the man she wants, and issues ultimatums in the starkest terms. (244)

The two courts show the opposing aspects of natural and unnatural love; differences between the two kingdoms abound, but one should also note that even Pentapolim is

not entirely free from darkness. This idealistic land is still part of the secular world, and even if it is not directly touched by sin it still contains the shadows of human failings, as can be seen in Genius's description of the princess's growing love for Apollonius:

Bot as men sein that frele is youthe,  
With leisir and continuance  
This Mayde fell upon a chance,  
That love hath mad him a querele  
Ayein hire youthe freissh and frele,  
That malgre wher sche wole or noght,  
Sche mot with al hire hertes thoght  
To love and to his lawe obeie;  
And that sche schal ful sore abeie.  
(VIII, 834-42)

Genius has used the adversative 'Bot' to unsettle listener expectations: he does not present a rosy scene of anticipated bliss but creates instead a picture filled with ominous forebodings. The alliteration of 'frele', 'fell' and 'freissh and frele' is very reminiscent of devices I noted earlier in his introduction to Antiochus. Love remains a trap into which one may fall and so suffer dire consequences: this is because the bodily nature of love renders the lover dependent on the world for what happiness it may provide. However, it must also be acknowledged that Genius is elsewhere careful to show that the romance between Apollonius and his princess is conducted under the most idealistic circumstances imaginable. We can see this idealism in the approach of the suitor princes to Pentapolim (VIII, 866-88) and the king's

concern that his daughter's choice should be freely made. Why does Genius use such parallels which seem to cancel and reinforce themselves at turns? The events at Antiochus's court darken and shape all the action which follows, and these events are recalled to memory by deliberate echoes within the text. We might conclude that Genius is merely showing Amans what to avoid and what to embrace, and this is, in part, true. However, the inclusion of these dark echoes within the narrative also tends to qualify the secular bliss which is presented, and this process continues until very nearly the end of the tale. The product of this constant qualification is the lesson that secular happiness must not be valued without qualification; secular comfort is obviously important, and love that is not 'unkindely' is of value; but such a pure love is difficult to obtain in a world which seems to offer opposition at every turn.

The lesson that one should not over-value secular possessions is also effectively learnt by Apollonius's wife and child who both largely renounce worldly concerns once they are separated from him, and in austerity they find a measure of happiness. Their attitude becomes one of strength in adversity and their behaviour is a model for Amans to follow. The loss of his wife and daughter are the two most severe blows which the Apollonius has to bear, and it is useful to consider the nature of his reaction on each occasion; first, at the loss of his wife:

Ha wif,  
Mi lust, mi joie, my desir,  
Mi welthe and my recoverir,  
Why schal I live, and thou schalt dye?  
Ha, thou fortune, I thee deffie,  
Nou hast thou do to me thi werste.

(VIII, 1062-7)

Fortune is not finished with Apollonius yet; and he is foolish to think that there may not be worse to come. His bitterness and despair proves that he is still dependent on the world for his comfort, although he has moved further along a path which will lead him to greater resilience. He displays some of this new-found strength at the 'death' of his daughter:

He curseth and seith al the worste  
Unto fortune, as to the blinde,  
Which can no seker weie finde;  
For sche him neweth evere among,  
And medleth sorwe with his song.  
Bot sithe it mai no betre be,  
He thonketh god and forth goth he  
Seilende toward Tyr ayein.

(VIII, 1584-91)

Apollonius still curses the evils of fortune and, hence, secular life (the world is always a bad place in Genius's text); however, he now accepts his position and is able to thank God for what he has. (Grellner makes the observation at this point that 'Generally, adversity appears to be attributed to fortune and prosperity to a god dimly analogous to the Christian God' (245-6).) Apollonius's penance is nearly over, he is moving from one aspect of 'kinde' to another -- from the gods to God -- and only one test remains before he can take his reward.

### 5.3.3 TEST AND REWARD.

Apollonius's final challenge takes him back, spiritually and intellectually if not physically, to the palace of Antiochus: he must resist the temptation to which Antiochus surrendered. At his lowest emotional ebb we find Apollonius within the dark recesses of his ship; he has retreated from the world having 'lost' his wife and daughter. He believes himself to be a widower (just as the now dead Antiochus had been); and he does not know that the beautiful young woman who comes to him and sings 'lich an Angel' (VIII, 1671) is actually his daughter. The use of music also recalls Pentapolim where Apollonius demonstrated his talent at that art, and so we have at this moment the elements of good and evil struggling for supremacy. It is now far from out of the question that he could unwittingly commit the sin of incest; but, as a good man, he escapes what could have become his destiny, just as Antiochus, as a bad man, embraced his fate. In this final scene between father and daughter, Genius preserves a complex set of parallels between the actions of Apollonius and those of Antiochus. For example, we are told that Thraise reaches out to her father by the quality of her mind,

For in proverbe and in probleme  
Sche spak, and bad he scholde deme  
In many soubtil question.

(VIII, 1681-3)

This echoes the riddle posed by Antiochus, with the exception that it is now an example of intellect which

is turned to the good -- as an expression of the mind's superiority over the body. Thraise's particular interest might be called moral philosophy, and the comfort she offers is more than a little Boethian. Apollonius's first reaction to the presence of his daughter is physical; he attempts to send her away

Bot yit sche wolde nocht do so,  
And in the derke forth sche goth,  
Til sche him toucheth, and he wroth,  
And after hire with his hond  
He smot.

(VIII, 1690-4)

There is a deep sensuality in these lines which could easily describe a quarrel between two lovers, and the use of violence again recalls Antiochus. Apollonius's meeting with Thraise awakens a love within him which is truly 'kindely' (VIII, 1707). Once he becomes aware of his real relation to Thraise, Apollonius's fortunes are shown to have turned for the better; however, it would be an error to conclude from this that he returns to the old uncertainties of secular life. Apollonius is now better than he was:

Fro this day forth fortune hath sworn  
To sette him upward on the whiel;  
So goth the world, now wo, now wel:  
This king hath founde newe grace,  
So that out of his derke place  
He goth him up into the liht.

(VIII, 1736-41)

Genius's description has a metaphysical quality: it is not simply the case that Apollonius's fortunes have improved; Apollonius himself has improved and with him, his fortune; and the daughter he struck he now embraces

(VIII, 1732).

The palace of Antiochus showed Apollonius not only what to avoid but also the latent sin that lay within him; at Pentapolim he saw the virtues to embrace; now he himself is a model of that virtue. This pattern is almost complete when Apollonius allows his daughter to freely choose her own husband (VIII, 1748-76), and so he is now able and fit to become the king of Pentapolim in his own right (VIII, 1963ff).

Apollonius is almost unique in the Confessio Amantis: he is a man who shows that he is able to achieve a balanced secular existence apparently free from sin. But I suspect that Amans can take little comfort from this. Apollonius succeeds only because he achieves a state of grace and he does this through tremendous struggle and self-sacrifice; in comparison with him, Amans can only suffer. However, more particularly, the whole point of the Apollonius exemplum is that the king triumphs over love which is 'unkindely', represented in this instance by incest. For Amans to do the same he would have to defeat his own variety of 'unkindely' love, and -- because all of Amans's efforts at secular love must be deemed 'unkindely' -- this could be only be done by the abandonment of his quest. It is precisely this conclusion which Genius now draws as the end of his last exemplum mends into the finale of the confession:

Lo thus, mi Sone, myht thou liere

What is to love in good manere,  
And what to love in other wise:  
The mede arist of the servise;  
Fortune, thogh sche be noght stable,  
Yit at som time is favorable  
To hem that ben of love trewe.  
Bot certes it is forto rewe  
To se love ayein kinde falle,  
For that makth sore a man to falle,  
As thou myht of tofore rede.

(VIII, 2009-2019)

Here Genius has side by side the two equally negative views of secular love which he has explored through hundreds of exempla: the first is of a love which is, although 'kindely' in essence, prone to the corrupting influence of the world; the second is of a the love which is, in itself, 'ayein kinde'.

Genius admits that he has been circuitous in his approach and justifies this on the grounds that 'The more that the nede is hyh,/ The more it nedeth to be slyh/ To him which hath the nede on honde' (VIII, 2063-5). In particular, Genius explains his use of kingship and the sea in a way which informs the Tale of Apollonius as well as the rest of the shrift:

And every man for his partie  
A kingdom hath to justefie,  
That is to sein his oghne dom.  
If he misreule that kingdom,  
He lest himself, and that is more  
Than if he loste Schip and Ore  
And al the worldes good withal:  
For what man that in special  
Hath noght himself, he hath noght elles,  
Nomor the perles than the schelles;  
Al is to him of o value.

(VIII, 2111-21)

Genius has as allegorical turn of mind and this has been part of a deliberate process of deception within the

shrift; the world is mirrored in his exempla but the mirror is distorted. The purpose of that distortion has been for the 'education' of Amans, but what is its purpose and meaning for us, as the readers of the poem? To attempt to answer this question we need to step away from the Amans/Genius dialogue and consider the relevance of the Prologue and 'Epilogue' to the remainder of the Confessio Amantis.

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## Chapter 6: Prologue and Epilogue

### 6.0 WHO IS SPEAKING?

The idea of Genius's intent is an interesting and useful device by which to analyse the Confessio Amantis but it has obvious limitations, not the least of which is that it is unable to deal with those parts of the poem which fall outside the dialogue between priest and lover. The extremities of the text generally attract little critical comment (perhaps, because they seem exterior to the action of the poem); yet, what can be said for the relevance of the Prologue and Gower's brief concluding address -- which effectively acts as an epilogue -- to the rest of the work?

The question which must be first settled is who speaks at the beginning and end of the poem? Is it Amans, or Gower, or someone else? The character of Amans is a persona which belongs firmly to the dialogue between the priest and lover. We can see that the Prologue ends on a note which clearly divides it from the previous text as the writer abandons his talk of the world and politics with the words 'And now nomore,/ As forto speke of this matiere,/ Which non bot only god may stiere' (Prol., 1086-8). Book I reinforces this sense

of division by its opening:

I may nocht strecche up to the hevene  
Min hand, ne setten al in evene  
This world, which evere is in balance:  
It stant nocht in my sufficance  
So grete thinges to compasse,  
Bot I mot lete it overpasse  
And treten upon othre thinges.  
Forthi the Stile of my writinges  
Fro this day forth I thenke change.  
(I, 1-9)

The lines which follow the introduction bring a greater note of lightness and fiction to the text as the author proceeds to talk of his adventure with love and begins to use the familiar language of love fiction:

Now herkne, who that wol it hiere,  
Of my fortune how that it ferde.  
This enderday, as I forthferde  
To walke, as I yow telle may,-  
And that was in the Monthe of Maii,  
Whan every brid hath chose his make  
And thenkth his merthes forto make  
Of love that he hath achieved;  
Bot so was I nothing relieved,  
For I was further fro my love  
Than Erthe is fro the hevene above,  
As forto speke of eny sped.  
(I, 96-107)

We hardly need the marginal Latin note at line 59 of book I to be told that the author now speaks 'as if in the person of another': the characterisation of Amans has begun. This situation is mirrored at the end of the text where, at the conclusion of his adventure, Amans tells us that

Homward a softe pas y wente,  
Wher that with al myn hol entente  
Uppon the point that y am schryve  
I thenke bidde whil y live.  
(VIII, 2967-70)

Gower then follows these lines with a prayer for England

which recalls, at least in part, the tone of the Prologue -- and so the characterisation of Amans ends. I just used the word 'Gower' and for convenience I will call the speaker of the Prologue and Epilogue, John Gower. It is, of course, impossible to say to what extent the views which we find there expressed reflect those of the historical figure of John Gower -- and there are good reasons for hesitating before making that identification too readily. For one thing, there are subtle distinctions of tone between the speaking voice of the Prologue and that of the Epilogue, and this should alert us to look at both more closely.

#### 6.1 THE PROLOGUE

The Prologue, Gower tells us, 'is so assised/ That it to wisdom al belongeth' and is written for the benefit of every 'wysman' (Prol., 66ff). One would have to admit that what results is a rather pessimistic document. Gower considers the division of the world between the temporal rulers, the Church and the common people, and he finds that each has fallen away from the ideal model of a previous age:

Now stant the crop under the rote,  
The world is changed overal,  
And therof most in special  
That love is falle into discord.  
(Prol., 118-21)

From its context we may clearly see that the 'love' referred to here is the love of the spirit and of God -- the idea of a brotherly love which formerly bound humanity together. Gower sees the world as being

divided, 'thurgh lacke of love' (Prol., 892), by the forces of individual self-interest: 'The man is cause of alle wo,/ Why this world is divided so' (Prol., 965-6). This division infects the natural world itself so that the cycles of growth and decay are taken to be expressions of the flawed state of humanity: 'Al stant aliche in this matiere:/ .../ After the disposicioun/ Of man and his condicioun' (Prol., 931-44). Gower here offers no hope or remedy for the situation he describes; he follows the model suggested by the statue of Nebuchadnezzar and simply makes the observation that the world has moved to a sorry state. His conception has at its base the notion that none can love both God and the world (Prol., 861-4). However, Gower does repeat a prayer at several points which invites God to intervene in the injustices of the world. We find this first at the end of the section dealing with temporal rulers ('Bot thilke lord which al may kepe,/.../ And his godhede also be plesed' (Prol., 180-92)); a similar prayer is made with respect to the Church ('Touchende of this, how evere it stonde,/ ... / If ther be cause, he it redresce' (Prol., 481-6); and a somewhat curtailed version is given at the end of the Prologue itself:

And now nomore,  
 As forto speke of this matiere,  
 Which non bot only god may stiere.  
(Prol., 1086-8)

These lines express a deeply pessimistic view of humanities ability to redress its own predicament --

they are a cry of despair -- and this pessimism is reproduced in the tone of Genius's tales which are to follow. Gower strongly implies that the only remedy available to him is a retreat from the world and its problems into the land of fiction, and it is this implication which he takes up at the beginning of book I:

I may noght strecche up to the hevене  
Min hand, ne setten al in evene  
This world, which evere is in balance:  
It stant noght in my sufficance  
So grete thinges to compasse,  
Bot I mot lete it overpasse  
And tretten upon othre thinges.  
(I, 1-7)

I have briefly summarised the 'wisdom' of the Prologue and I have suggested that the ideas expressed there lead easily into the body of the text. But is the matter as simple as that? The fatalism of the tales is a product of the fictional context in which it is placed, and its presentation by Genius is riddled with irony; should we question the overt meaning of the Prologue? To answer these points it is necessary to compare the values we find in the Prologue with those of Epilogue.

## 6.2 THE EPILOGUE

Gower's Prologue fails to make any substantial reference to the place of the king in society; the office of king is more or less subsumed within his discussion of temporal rulers and the generally woeful state of the world. I would like to use this point

to mark the difference in tone between the Prologue and the Epilogue because the latter refers quite specifically to the king and the role he plays in the state of England. The king, Gower says, has it in his power 'forto spille or forto save' (VIII, 3062-3) and he 'hath the lond in his balance' (VIII, 3057); it is on him that all the other estates of society depend (VIII, 3058-9). The office of king, in fact, represents the hope of the land because:

what kyng that with humble chere  
Aftir the lawe of god eschuieth  
The vices, and the vertus suieth,  
His grace schal be suffisant  
To governe al the remenant  
Which longith to his duite;  
So that in his prosperite  
The poeple schal nought ben oppressid,  
Wherof his name schal be blessid,  
For evere and be memorial.  
(VIII, 3096-105)

Prior to these lines Gower reiterates the evil state of the divided land of England and again refers to the problems of clergy, nobility and commons; but now, contrary to the tone of the Prologue, he actively offers at least a note of hope. What has happened?

When Amans turns his back on the selfishness of his own futile desire he does not remain exterior to the world but returns to live within it (perhaps, as a parody of Apollonius, Amans confronts the darkness of his own heart and having confronted is fit and ready to live within the world.) Amans returns to secular life and does so in the guise of John Gower 'a sadder

and a wiser man' who, like Gulliver, has been changed by his travels. The text is, in this way, specific because it deals with an individual man called Amans who must, for specific reasons, abandon secular love; the text, is not, therefore, a general argument that all men should do the same. (Although the way is open for the assumption that all may learn something from Amans.) Standing behind Amans we have John Gower who, for reasons of infirmity, cannot take an active part in the world (VIII, 3127-8); but Gower does not argue that all men are similarly prohibited. Indeed, he appeals to each of the estates to amend their divisiveness:

So were it good to ben al on,  
For mehil grace ther uppon  
Unto the Citees schulde falle,  
Which myghte availle to ous alle,  
If these astatz amendid were,  
So that the vertus stodyn there  
And that the vices were aweie:  
Me thenkth y dorste thanne seie,  
This londis grace schulde arise.  
(VIII, 3045-53)

In the Epilogue Gower calls the estates to action and his method is to appeal for unity; the unity to which he refers is a function of both the individual and his class, as we can see in Gower's analysis of kingship:

For if a kyng wol justifie  
His lond and hem that beth withynne,  
First at hym self he mot begynne,  
To kepe and reule his owne astat,  
That in hym self be no debat  
Toward his god: for othre wise  
Ther may non erthly kyng suffise  
Of his kyngdom the folk to lede,  
Bot he the kyng of hevene drede.  
For what kyng sett hym uppon pride  
And takth his lust on every side  
And wil nought go the righte weie,

Though god his grace caste aweie,  
No wondir is, for ate laste  
He schal wel wite it mai nought laste,  
The pompe which he secheth here.

(VIII, 3080-95)

A king at 'debat' with his God is a danger to himself and to his kingdom; in the same way divisiveness within lesser individuals is dangerous to themselves and those around them.

The difference between the tone of the Prologue and that of the Epilogue is essentially the same as the difference between the character of Amans at the poem's beginning and at its conclusion: there is a movement from divisiveness to, if not unity, at least an awareness of the possibilities of unity. The unity of the State is seen as lying in the hands of its people, and it is this thought which, in turn, unites the Prologue and Epilogue to the remainder of the poem. The dilemma of Amans is the dilemma of every individual -- a choice between self and selflessness -- and it is a divisiveness which Gower sees as the ultimate cause of the political problems of the land.

In the Epilogue Gower gives his final farewell to secular love (VIII, 3138-61) and he does so without any bitterness; there is almost a note of whimsy in his description 'Of love and of his dedly hele,/ Which no phisicien can hele' (VIII, 3155-6). Should we be surprised by the mildness of this tone? I do not think so. Gower appeals for a unity of body and spirit; his artistic method is to portray the extreme positions of

both; but the resolution he seeks lies between the two and the irony he elsewhere uses emphasises the 'middel weie' (Prol., 17) both of his proposed solution and of the human state. For Gower, a human being is, at the same time, body and spirit; and for that duality there is no easy solution. The mechanisms of Genius's intent are, therefore, a part of Gower's method and also an expression of the problem which he considers.

[\*]

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