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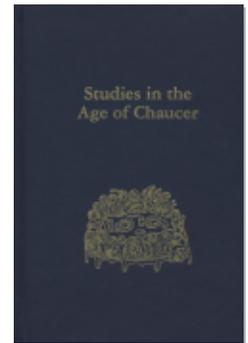
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## Newfangled Readers in Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre"

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**J**OHN GOWER'S TALE OF "APOLLONIUS OF TYRE" begins with a strikingly explicit act of father-daughter incest perpetrated by a king. For Gower, however, "Apollonius" thematizes incest in order to meditate on audience reception: incestuous desire, repeatedly encountered and avoided throughout the narrative, necessitates a series of interpretive acts that figure the relation between king and subject as a relation of mutual audience. The interpretive effort that bolsters monarchy while attending to the needs of its subjects requires imagination on the part of both monarch and subjects. I argue in this essay that incest in "Apollonius" stages an exploration of such imaginative activity: a series of kings' daughters are figured as new audiences who reinterpret in order to reaffirm monarchical power. Far from the injunctive exemplary moralism with which Gower used to be associated, the interpretive process hypothesized in "Apollonius of Tyre" urges that readers invent, not just imitate, virtuous conduct. At the same time, moreover, Amans's reception in the framework of the *Confessio* complicates Gower's otherwise affirmative picture of active new audiences because he misunderstands the ways in which the story could apply to his life. Thus despite Book 8's embrace of imaginative fiction, in particular romance, the final action of the poem also points to severe constraints upon narrative's real-world applicability, as Amans is reconciled to John Gower and finally renounces love, "mak[ing] an ende" (8.2902) of stories. For what purposes does a poem that concludes with such renunciation generate eight books' worth of examples, in all their copiousness, applicability, and narrative variety? For what purposes does this poem end with the most frankly fictive of stories, the "Tale of Apollonius"? How does Gower

make this tale, and narrative generally, morally applicable?<sup>1</sup> Despite the accomplishments of recent scholarship, the poem's construction of moral influence remains problematic because, to my mind, our most recent and searching accounts of the poem's moral complexity tend to underplay the *Confessio's* methods of anticipating, and even setting free, its own audience.

The *Confessio's* conclusion seems particularly perverse because Book 8 already announces an explicit generic shift from exemplum to romance, as though abandoning the former and authorizing the latter. Exemplarity relies on a basic analogy between character and reader that, at its extreme, generates a fantasy of exact repetition: the ideal patient Griselda, for instance, should be possible for wives to imitate. Many readers have seen that Chaucer's Griselda may not, in fact, be imitable because of the resistance of real-world women, the imperfection of Walter's judgment, and the unbearable brutality of such suffering.<sup>2</sup> For Gower, as for Chaucer, the extreme version of exemplary repetition constitutes not a communicative ideal but a potential trap. Throughout the *Confessio*, in fact, Amans's responses generate discussion between himself and Genius about the applicability of stories to his own love affair.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The tag "moral Gower," which Chaucer bestowed on his contemporary, has been complicated by many critics since the work of John Fisher in *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964). For classic explorations of the connection between morality and poetics in Gower, see Charles Runcres, "Art and Ethics in the Exempla of the Confessio Amantis," in *Gower's "Confessio Amantis": Responses and Reassessments*, ed. Alastair J. Minnis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 106–34; and R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990). On the morally formative powers of art in Gower, see James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alain of Lille's "Anticlaudianus" and John Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 136–38. For recent treatments of the ways in which literary effects complicate clear moral truths and demand practical wisdom, see, for example, Patricia Batchelor, "Feigned Truth and Exemplary Method in the *Confessio Amantis*," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville, N.C.: Pegasus Press, 1998), pp. 1–16; J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplarity in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); and Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Particularly on the brutality of making an example of Griselda's suffering, see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 261–98.

<sup>3</sup>Application is my term more than Gower's: it is the folding of a narrative toward or into one's experience (Latin *ad + plicare*, to fold). In Book 1, Gower' "information" is related to application: "Mi Sone, as I thee schal enforce, / Ther ben yet of an other forme / Of dedly vices sevene applied, / Wherof the herte is ofte plied / To thing which after schal him grieve" (575–79). Here, application means naming, attaching a sign to, and thereby enabling comprehension of each deadly sin. In Chaucer, the word "applien"

Generally Amans embraces Genius's lessons most wholeheartedly when he can identify with a character—such as Canacee's enraged father, Aeolus, whose brutality against weaker members of the household Amans finds in himself as well (3.396ff.). Although moral application does not necessarily depend upon the affective dimension of such responses, identification is the emotional register in which Amans typically recognizes examples as analogous, hence relevant, to his own situation. When Genius turns to romance in Book 8, though, he leaves Amans's kind of exemplarity behind, in favor of an antique incest narrative with no direct correspondence to Amans's lovelorn condition.

Yet Gower has foregrounded Amans's vocabulary of correspondence throughout the *Confessio*. Amans, like the Host in the *Canterbury Tales*, consistently articulates a range of readings based on matching the story to his own life. To be sure, his methods make him a foil for the more sophisticated extratextual audience and, in that sense, a straw man with respect to actual habits of reading. Yet the exchange between Amans and Genius repeatedly stages exemplary morality in such a way as to make simple correspondence look initially attractive, summary morals seem incisive, and narratives themselves appear efficiently demonstrative of general truth. But both priest and lover repeatedly complicate the act of application, partly because Amans's emotional dissatisfaction contains him in a holding pattern throughout the book. His identification with moral narratives, moreover, can never be complete or exact, partly because it coexists with other effects of reading, like disapprobation or desire. In the "Tale of Virginia" near the end of Book 7, for instance, Genius's disapproval of Virginius calls into question the very value of storytelling itself. Earlier, at the conclusion of Book 6, Amans begs to hear the tales of kings—in particular, the tales used to educate Alexander—precisely as a distraction from his own amatory woes. Clearly this request inverts the usual relationship between recreational poetry and politics (poetry is usually an escape from politics, not vice versa), but Book 7's mirror for princes also emphasizes the distance between story and application, since Amans is not himself a prince. The Book relies upon but rarely states its implicit analogy between self-governance and kingship, leaving much to the reader's powers of analysis.

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is used to mean combine (MED, s.v. "applien"). In demanding application, Gower's Genius suggests that narratives are not instrumental but constitutive of moral experience—that is, they work by activating readers, encouraging them, we might say, to "combine" the text with their own mental structures.

When toward the end of Book 7 the “Tale of Virginia” offers no clear monarchical ideal, the book lurches toward the conclusion that the meaning of power depends on those subject to it. Analogously, the meaning of authority depends on the reader.<sup>4</sup> In Book 8, we might expect Genius to reassert moral authority, providing a bulwark against utter relativism; we might expect him to announce Amans’s resemblance to fictional characters, since the topic is now desire, the defining feature of Amans’s predicament. But when Genius instead shifts from compressed exempla to dilated romance, spending almost the whole narrative energy of Book 8 on one story, he conclusively frustrates Amans’s poetics of correspondence: the *Confessio*’s inscribed reader cannot create analogy between “Apollonius” and his own experience, fails to identify emotionally with the character, and therefore dismisses the whole narrative as irrelevant.

Book 8’s expansion beyond the usual form of the exemplum, however, does not simply undo “the very analogical premises of exemplary reasoning.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, Book 8 shows that Amans has fundamentally misapprehended the exemplary education that comprises the *Confessio*. Indeed, it is the task of the present essay to argue that Gower chooses father-daughter incest as the thematic focus of the book precisely because incest provides a figure for the coercive extreme in which stories demand a too-close alignment between moralist and audience: a figure, that is, for a poetics of correspondence. Indeed, Gower’s final book dissuades readers from sheer imitation by examining the ways in which analogies created through literary repetition can, by virtue of their very analogical structure, negotiate moral transformation.<sup>6</sup> “Apollonius of

<sup>4</sup>I draw here on my account of the Virginia story in *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), chap. 3.

<sup>5</sup>William Robins, “Romance, Exemplum, and the Subject of the *Confessio Amantis*,” SAC 19 (1997): 157–81 (165). Robins finds that Amans refuses analogy *tout court*, whereas I would say that Amans actually expects stories to provide too close an analogy to his own life, and fails to accept the exemplary potential of romance. Larry Scanlon draws the opposition when he asserts that the tale is an exemplum, not a romance, as though the two necessarily ruled each other out. See “The Riddle of Incest: John Gower and the Problem of Medieval Sexuality,” in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville, N.C.: Pegasus Press, 1998), pp. 93–128 (112, 124).

<sup>6</sup>Analogy, for Aristotle a type of metaphor, implies proportional association: as *a* is to *b*, so *c* is to *d*. Analogies create associative, not causal structures: “When they tried to force his son who was under age to perform public services because he was tall, Iphicrates said that if they deem large boys men, they should vote that small men are boys” (*Rhetoric* 1399a). In Gower, the analogy between incest and political power (as fathers are to daughters, so kings are to their subjects) exposes the coercive potential of kingship. When a power relation resembling incest *doesn’t* result in the sin, the analogy has succeeded in transforming a potential likeness into a differentiation. The analogy

Tyre" culminates the *Confessio's* resistance to authoritative command—that of both kings and narrators—by emphasizing the changing stakes of narrator, characters, and audience in serial revisions of the incest act.<sup>7</sup> By stressing the increasingly willful separation of daughters from their fathers, Genius calls for a similar interpretive autonomy on the part of Amans and any audience. Far from a static alignment between characters and audiences, moreover, Book 8 insistently represents any interpreter's moral choice as an unpredictable and idiosyncratic process, a creative invention based on revising the past—a process that partakes in the imaginative dynamism of plot itself.<sup>8</sup>

### Gower's Audiences: Women, Innovation, and Variety

Even at the beginning of the *Confessio*, in the outermost framework of quasi-dream vision, Gower depicts exemplarity as fundamentally dependent upon variety in audience response. Gower chose to write the poem in English, as opposed to Latin or French, to encode his text as a more accessible, contemporary, and "comun" one.<sup>9</sup> The *Confessio's* "Prologue"

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contained within "Apollonius" enters the framework of the poem when Amans denies his own likeness to the incestuous father, and readers are left to ask how incest (a relation between authority and subject) might be analogous to reading (a relation between author and audience). On analogy, see Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. and ed. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2:17, 3:10:4. The classic investigation of the analogy between self and king in Gower is Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup>On incest as the plot that "keeps hanging over the story as a possibility . . . until nearly the end" (44), see Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 44–48, 52.

<sup>8</sup>Helen Cooper has recently argued that Shakespeare's *Pericles*, among other Gower reflexes that appear in the Early Modern period, helps construct Gower not as a moralist but as a generator of "willed imaginative magic" (113). See "'This worthy olde writer': *Pericles* and Other Gowers, 1592–1640," *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 99–113.

<sup>9</sup>Although critics vary in the kind of authority they ascribe to the Latin apparatus of the *Confessio*, the poem's moral equivocations have often been located in the relation between Latin and English, a question that I leave aside here in part because the Latin glosses are comparatively quite thin in the story of "Apollonius." For an argument that the two languages problematize the very notion of authority itself, see Batcheler, "Feigned Truth and Exemplary Method," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, and on Gower's multivalent latinity, see the work of Siân Echard, especially "With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*," *SP* 95 (1998): 1–40. For the view that Latin and vernacular authority continually conflict in the poem, see the seminal essay by Winthrop Wetherbee, "Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer and the Boethian Tradition," in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, 1991), pp. 36–74.

suggests that the whole poem refers directly to the social and political world of England. Book 1 then enters the oblique world of fiction, where Amans encounters Venus and the angry Cupid, and Venus sends him her priest. Genius launches his eight books of stories, throughout which Genius and Amans discuss successive acts of application to his particular situation. By the time readers reach the eighth book of the poem, the notion of application itself has come under serious scrutiny. Instead of systematic, authoritative moral direction, the *Confessio* offers a series of seductively transparent narratives that pull readers up short; an ostensibly authoritative guide, Genius, whose injunctions frequently fail to match his stories; and an embedded audience, Amans, who often points out that narratives with Genius's morals have only unpredictable relevance to his own love affair.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, however, the fantasy of correspondence is continually activated, because Gower's purpose remains the creation of analogies between story and audience. This purpose is served by a rhetoric of plain-style accessibility.<sup>11</sup> Book 1 presents the *Confessio* as a new genre in a new language, intended to reach an audience Gower has not yet addressed:

[T]he Stile of my writings  
 Fro this day forth I thenke change  
 And speke of thing is noght so strange,  
 Which every kinde hath upon honde, . . .  
 And that is love.

(1.8–11, 15)

<sup>10</sup>The diffuse authority of the *Confessio* has been remarked by many recent critics; for example, María Bullón-Fernández writes, "The *Confessio Amantis* has no single authoritative voice, but many different voices. Gower is more interested in the contrast among these voices than in the hegemony of one over the others," in *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio Amantis: Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 38. The critical tendency to privilege Gower's indeterminacy can sometimes lead to a celebration of copiousness that, in turn, raises the question of what moral determinations are in fact available in the text. Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, puts his finger on this problem: "Gower can be seen sorting out the benefits and liabilities of the case-ethics he employs to educate Amans, at the same time as he leaves it to Amans to make the best of . . . diverse moral examples" (p. 6). The aspiration toward moral directiveness remains a powerful impulse throughout the poem, expressed in claims of plainness and ethical certainty even as Bullón-Fernández's multiplicity of voices also emerges.

<sup>11</sup>For a suggestive account of the functions of the plain style in Gower, see John Burrow, "Gower's Poetic Styles," in *A Companion to Gower*, pp. 239–50. Burrow notes that "Stile" as used here refers to content, not just manner of writing (245).

The *Confessio* is designed, Gower claims, to be familiar and accessible; he chooses the discourse of love because it can include everyone, being less "strange," implicitly because of its association with vernacular poetry.<sup>12</sup> But in establishing the familiarity of his topic, he calls for readerly application: examples are designed to typify and affirm the shared—that is, the conventional—aspects of emotional experience, the repeatability of a familiar tale, and the modern relevance of past events. The new "Stile" is linked explicitly to a new theme, but both are designed to achieve legibility to "every kinde." Finally, the self-conscious change from strange to plain language suggests the potential for this poem to connect past and present, "Fro this day forth," in a narrative that will make stories of past virtue amenable to present-day experience.

It is well established that in his explicitly new literary language, Gower imagines an interpretive variety and multiplicity beyond what was possible in his French and Latin works.<sup>13</sup> Thus he opens the poem to "every kinde," a "comun" audience in the sense developed by Anne Middleton.<sup>14</sup> By embracing plural audiences, Gower acknowledges that he lives in a world full of "divisioun" for which he seeks order or coherence through writing; if his poem can reach many different audiences, then perhaps too it can make social differences cohere. Less well established is Gower's use of women to figure the remedial effects of such variety. Throughout the *Confessio*, in fact, division frequently arises from male anger and excess; and anger is either provoked or healed by female audiences, from the doomed Canacee to Florent's hag to Constance, and most explicitly Apollonius's daughter Thaise. For Gower, then, female audiences—those who hear, recognize, and redirect male aggression—do not just challenge norms but can represent the potential for

<sup>12</sup>"Strange" suggests not only foreignness or unfamiliarity but elaboration or ingenuity, and obscurity in language (MED, s.v. "straunge," 2[d]). Gower sets up the expectation that audiences will be able to find the familiar and, implicitly, the applicable in his poem.

<sup>13</sup>The contingencies of Gower's use of English are emphasized by Tim William Machan, "Medieval Multilingualism and Gower's Literary Practice," *Studies in Philology* 103 (2006): 1–25. Siân Echard complicates this view by reminding us that Gower's choice of English does not effect "a discarding of outdated languages or modes," but rather "an accumulation" of different voices, in "Gower's 'bokes of Latin': Language, Politics, and Poetry," *SAC* 25 (2003): 123–56 (156).

<sup>14</sup>Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94–114.

mending or healing social divisions.<sup>15</sup> As members of Gower's plural, "comun" audience, women become available as figures for new readership in general. Certainly not every female character throughout the *Confessio* thematizes innovative reception; in "Albinus and Rosemund," the lady offers no remedial counsel but simply takes her revenge upon the husband who has made her drink from a cup carved out of her father's skull; in "Constance," the lady's passive suffering eventually reveals, and remedies, masculine violence against her. But in "Apollonius," when female characters respond to faulty masculine aggression, they are figured as interpreters of men, and their role is both to identify violence and provide a new alternative to it.<sup>16</sup>

Women were, of course, vital members of fourteenth-century English vernacular literary culture. Jennifer Summit writes that "women became the privileged addressees of vernacular writing" and, indeed, that their roles as patrons and letter-writers call into question modern assumptions about book consumption as "passive and secondary."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the fact that women partook in literate culture in various ways suggests the degree to which different levels of interpretive activity defined Gower's

<sup>15</sup> On women's rhetorical regulation of male anger, see David Wallace, "Household Rhetoric: Violence and Eloquence in the Tale of Melibee," in *Chaucerian Polity Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 212–46. Because of their conventional capacity to encourage mercy and restraint, women's presence can paradoxically encourage extremes of male violence, as when Florent's hag first prompts and then checks the hero's resentment about marrying her. The potential for women to challenge and (therefore) regulate excesses of male violence—and the ritualized way in which female counsel can be displayed so as to enhance male power even as a particular woman seems to hold it in check—is elucidated by Paul Strohm in "Queens As Intercessors," in *Hocbon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95–120.

<sup>16</sup> Karma Lochrie, in *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 205–27, has argued that Gower's stance is consistently antifeminist. Diane Watt, however, insists on the sheer variety and contingency of Gower's moral judgments with respect to women. In "Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*," *A Companion to Gower*, pp. 197–213, Watt also provocatively suggests that "sexual relationships also function in Gower's writing to articulate the writer's own language politics," including the tension between Latin authority and "vernacular, feminine" translation (211). This concern with gender as a figure for the power relations inherent in writing and reading can be understood still more broadly, as I hope to show.

<sup>17</sup> For a convenient brief discussion of the "authorship" of women, broadly construed, see Summit, "Women and Authorship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 91–108 (104). As she points out, women participated in a range of ways in the English literary system, not for the most part as authors but as readers and patronesses. See also Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

actual audience, female and male.<sup>18</sup> We can see both in his claim for a common "new stile" and in his version of "Apollonius" that he registered this variety and multiplicity. The fact that new audiences might include concrete female readers, however, is less important to my argument here than that the female figures within "Apollonius" signal variety among all new readers. The increase in historical female literacy lends Gower's female characters resonance; but he encodes their literacy as meaningful not on the basis of their sex per se but on the basis of their difference from scholarly and clerical male audiences. The female audiences in Gower's romance explicitly figure the good influence of audiences upon authority, ultimately allowing Gower to reimagine contemporary, variable, even unpredictable readers as forces of social and political coherence. "Apollonius" foregrounds female characters' engagement in interpretive activity of all kinds, not just textual but aural, physical and broadly artistic—Thaise can listen, speak, play instruments, set riddles, and "read" her father's countenance—in every case bringing about mutual recognition between author (or monarchical authority) and audience (or subject).

These developments reflect upon the developing self-awareness of the poem's central embedded audience, Amans. When Gower chooses love as his topic, he does more than choose an experience common to "every kinde": he implicitly engages the world of gendered discourse. Inasmuch as Amans's desire is defined by the stereotypical resistant lady, the poem itself aspires to be accepted by a woman. From this perspective, the *Confessio* explores the problem of how to call up a specific female audience, Amans's beloved. But that female audience is an imagined presence, whose recalcitrant actuality (in the form of her erotic refusal) Gower eventually has to acknowledge. When, at the end, the poem is revealed as applying to John Gower's life, we see, retrospectively, that the *Confessio*'s work lay in making Amans see not only himself but his lady clearly; the poem's tensions resolve as he accepts, regretfully, that his lady's reciprocal desire was only ever imagined.<sup>19</sup> Only then does

<sup>18</sup>The variety of women's "literate practice" is suggested by Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). On the variety of general literate practices Gower anticipates, see Joyce Coleman, "Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower May Have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to Be Read," *SAC* 24 (2002): 209–36.

<sup>19</sup>I differ from Kurt Olsson, who finds that the conclusion shows us an Amans/Gower who has a full capacity for intimacy; see "Love, Intimacy, and Gower," *ChauR* 30 (1995): 71–100.

Gower collapse his fictive will (Amans) and the figure of imaginative exploration (Genius) into a nonfictional author (John Gower) who closes the book.<sup>20</sup> When he relinquishes the fantasy that his lady's desire matches his own, John Gower becomes reintegrated, recognizes himself, realigns his character with his author; in temporal terms, he brings himself up to date, enacting psychologically the "change" he has already anticipated in his choice of plain, up-to-date English. Like any retraction, the moment expresses a profound ambivalence about storytelling that undergirds much of the *Confessio*, relegating the whole text to a potentially nugatory past, the realm of love fantasy, from which the reality of old age is utterly separate.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, by the end of the Book, even "Apollonius of Tyre"'s optimistic portrayal of idiosyncratic feminine audience has been set aside, since Amans's own feminine "audience" (the beloved) simply evaporates.

Yet "Apollonius" prepares and makes significant her disappearance. In response to the threat of incest—the merging of patriarch with subject—the tale shows how the education of women figures the liberation of audiences from authority, detaching Thaise from Apollonius, the beloved from Amans, exempla from Genius, and, ironically, Gower from the *Confessio* itself. Perhaps strangely for so traditional a poem—a poem designed to draw exempla from the memory into the present day (Prol. 51–60)—the conclusion frees the poet's present from its governing love story, and indeed from narratives imposed by the past. Gower's early assertion of a change "Fro this day forth" turns out to herald not so much an integrated narrative of poetic development as a narrative of

<sup>20</sup> Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, glosses the *Confessio*'s characters in this helpful way. He argues that Genius is mistaken in his advice during the early parts of the *Confessio*, but that, "as Amans' own genius, [he] gradually moves Amans towards a reintegrated, rational self" (183). While I do not find this coherent steady progress in the *Confessio*, Genius's role as representative of Amans's imaginative capacity helps explain their different attitudes toward moral interpretation, which Amans views as so much more closed—and more constraining—than does Genius.

<sup>21</sup> There are certainly more sanguine readings of the poem's ending than this. Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the "Confessio Amantis"* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), finds that the fragmentation of the *Confessio* prepares readers for Amans/Gower's final self-recognition, itself one in a long line of "repeated conversions" (248). Simpson, too, characterizes the *Confessio* as a "narrative of the integration of the soul" (10), in particular the integration between reason and imagination. Ardis Butterfield's analysis in "Confessio Amantis and the French Tradition," *A Companion to Gower*, 165–80, which identifies a "mood of shame balanced against relief" and concludes that Amans and Gower have both "indulged in forgivable fantasies" (180), comes closer to my own insistence on taking the retraction at face value.

rupture. In retrospect, then, the puzzle of Book 8 is how the overintimacy of incest produces differentiation and detachment, preparing and indeed enabling the whole work to come to an end.

### Incest as Past

Until its ending, the *Confessio* centrally concerns the past, and in Book 8, Gower turns back to the Fall for an explanation of the social meaning of incest. He lays out a historical genealogy of incest prohibition, beginning with Lucifer's destruction and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Since there were no exogamous options after the Fall, incestuous procreation was fundamental to human origins: "Forthi that time it was no Sinne / The Soster forto take hire brother, / Whan that ther was of chois no other" (68–70). Later, in the time of Abraham, the practice of incest gave way to lawful endogamous relations within the tribe of Israel. Incest was never fully prohibited until after Christ, "For of the lawe canonized / The Pope hath bedde to the men, / That non schal wedden of his ken / Ne the seconde ne the thridde" (144–47). This historical toleration, however, contrasts markedly with the vehemence of Genius's judgment against contemporary incest: in the present day, incest is "loves Rage" (150); incestuous men lack reason or discernment, behaving like animals:

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.  
(159–63)

Incest is no longer the beneficial procreative relationship it once was, but has become an act of male domination committed by "a cock among the Hennes." As Thomas Aquinas claims, "incest" is derived from the Latin "in-castus": "For incest takes its name from defiling chastity."<sup>22</sup> Genius approaches incest as originally natural, but now fundamentally

<sup>22</sup>*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.154.9, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby, vol. 43 (London: Blackfriars, 1968), pp. 236–41. Based on this etymology, a number of critics argue that incest is a "blueprint" for love in the *Confessio*, most notably Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies 56, 1993).

unchaste, unnatural and inhuman—a sin that, like the rage of Virginius or the fury of Aeolus, denigrates man to the level of beast.

The introduction to Book 8 distills a medieval discourse that associates incest with not just moral or psychological but social problems of isolation and dominion.<sup>23</sup> Augustine discusses it in the context of the city as human community, where he concentrates on exogamy as a socially useful practice: “When, therefore, a man has one person for his father, another for his father-in-law, friendship extends itself to a larger number.”<sup>24</sup> Aquinas’s concern is more privately located and more graphic: he worries about the physical proximity of blood relations who grow up in the same “chambre.” Nevertheless, he also argues that “incest would prevent people widening their circle of friends.”<sup>25</sup> Incest, then, destroys social bonds; its implications are not primarily psychological but political, and its prohibition enables social organization. In father-daughter incest, the daughter is essentially kept in her chamber, an overclose sharing of physical space that suggests the collapse of distinctions among familial and dynastic roles.<sup>26</sup> As Larry Scanlon points out in his cogent exploration of the relationship between psychoanalytic and medieval discourses of incest, the law of exogamy (which prohibits incest) authorizes and upholds the patriarchal family.<sup>27</sup> Medieval discourse emphasizes the sociopolitical ramifications of incest, the way in which its fundamental misunderstanding of domestic authority affects

<sup>23</sup> On incest in medieval narrative, including a full account of the classical and medieval construction of incest, see especially Elizabeth Archibald, “Incest in Medieval Literature and Society,” *FMLS* 25 (1989): 1–15, and *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Archibald emphasizes ways in which incest can be viewed as either natural or culturally constructed, and even morally remediable in some circumstances. Although, as Bullón-Fernández details, Freud and Lévi-Strauss influentially maintained that incest-avoidance is a basis of human community, other contemporary scholars from anthropologists to psychologists have tended to emphasize the destructiveness (and pervasiveness) of incest acts within social networks. See, for example, contemporary anthropologist W. Arens’s insistence that contemporary father-daughter incest is an expression of dominion in *The Original Sin: Incest and Its Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); as an example of modern clinical discourse in which incest is seen as a particularly gendered violation, see Judith Lewis Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> *The City of God* 15.16, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 500.

<sup>25</sup> *ST* 2a2ae.154.9.

<sup>26</sup> Father-daughter incest, specifically, prevents the conventional exchange of women; see Pierre Roussel, “Aspects du père incestueux dans la littérature médiévale,” in *Amour, Mariage et Transgressions au Moyen Âge*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and André Crépin (Göppingen: Kimmerle Verlag, 1984), pp. 47–62.

<sup>27</sup> Scanlon, “The Riddle of Incest,” p. 107.

the nature of a community. Incestuous kingship like that in "Apollonius of Tyre" figures a possessive and tyrannical failure of self-governance that shapes the king's entire realm.<sup>28</sup> Yet it grows out of his role as singular ruler of the realm as well. Historicizing incest, as Gower and his sources do, makes sense in this context because, far from providing a transhistorical structure, the practice emerges as deeply, even destructively, circumstantial. In the Middle Ages, incest is more than simply unchaste. It becomes a peculiarly monarchical failure of community, an expression of the extreme isolation of one ungoverned patriarchal will.

The historical account of incest, however, poses a conceptual problem for Genius and Amans precisely because of its basis in isolation. Genius enjoins Amans to confess if he has committed any such sin, but Amans denies any connection to incest, claiming he was never yet "So wyld a man" (171); his love is directed only to his lady. Amans in fact is impatient with Genius: "Ye mai wel axe of this and that, / Bot . . . / In al this world ther is bot on / The which myn herte hath overgon" (179–82). Amans wants applicable stories, and his experience does not resemble incest in any literal way. This desire for application raises a crucial problem of didactic narrative: How is the reader to "enfold" or combine his present experience with narrative? How does the present world find a "fit" with the past, and to what extent is that "fit" always metaphorical? The vocabulary of correspondence comes up against its limits here. Yet Mary Carruthers has shown how application can work even when the narrative seems distant from the recipient's experience: Heloise, in the act of taking religious orders on Abelard's wishes, cites Pompey's wife, Cornelia, as a "commonplace" character from the past whose words give the present meaning. She quotes Cornelia's greeting to her husband in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, when, after his shameful defeat in battle, Cornelia offers to commit suicide on his behalf. Carruthers writes that "what is so striking, or strikingly medieval, in Heloise's action is her articulation of her own present dilemma and decision by means of her memory of a text" (181).<sup>29</sup> Amans entertains the fantasy that he can

<sup>28</sup>Elizabeth Archibald notes the popularity of father-daughter incest romances in the Middle Ages, which tend to explore the link between incestuous fatherhood and kingship; see *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, pp. 145–82.

<sup>29</sup>*The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Carruthers writes that such memorial activity shapes the self, who might be better construed as the "subject-who-remembers" (182). The interchange between Amans and Genius deeply troubles this notion of memorial activity because the "commonplaces" Genius offers are not always easily appropriated to Amans's memorial activity. In this sense, Amans does not measure up to the ethical self-awareness—or the opportunism—of Heloise.

trace just such analogies between his problem and those of characters Genius invokes from the past. Yet his skepticism about the relevance of Genius's characters exposes a kind of inflexibility—he is concerned with “bot on,” and wants stories that correspond exactly to his erotic obsession. Carruthers's Heloise has a looser and more rhetorical idea of analogy. Despite her differences from Cornelia (Cornelia does not enter a convent; Heloise does not offer suicide), Heloise actively reinvents Lucan in order to contextualize her own action publicly, before an audience, as a sacrifice. Heloise appropriates and redirects her memory-text, an opportunistic act of reception that Amans refuses.

Genius responds to his interlocutor's skepticism by giving Amans an exaggerated version of what he appears to want: three compressed exempla, those of Caligula, Amnon, and Lot, in which concision encourages immediate outrage against incest. These exempla leave little room for narrative desire of any kind, especially sympathy. Caligula, after committing incest with his three sisters and exiling them, is summarily punished by God, “For evere his lust . . . overthrowe” (212). Amnon commits incest with his sister, and is killed in revenge by his own brother Absalom; the story accentuates both Amnon's violence and the symmetry of Absalom's vengeance in a brief and riddle-like ending that enwraps nature and kinship bonds, and the overcloseness of incest, into one highly charged pun: “thunkinde unkinde fond.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, Lot's incest gives rise to the “ungoode” tribes of Israel. These three stories form a mini-compilation of exempla whose message about the incestuous abuse of intimacy is ostensibly transparent.

The compression of these exempla sets incest off from the ordinary and makes it almost inapplicable. Precisely because of their moral clarity, they form self-enclosed nuggets of past transgression; they close off

<sup>30</sup>These brother-sister acts are clearly figured as acts of domination, unlike the brother-sister incest in “Canacee and Machaire” (3.142–395), on the moral indeterminacy of which see C. David Benson, “Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *ChauR* 19 (1984): 100–109. Winthrop Wetherbee suggests the tale exhibits a kind of amorality in “Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower,” *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 65–93. Diane Watt argues provocatively against such indeterminacy in “Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*,” *Companion to Gower*, 197–213 (198–203). Maura Nolan suggests that Lydgate dismantles the logic by which Gower portrays incest as motivated by human agency in “Lydgate's Literary History: Chaucer, Gower, and Canacee,” *SAC* 27 (2005): 59–92. She links incest to problems of literary art and reception, finding in Lydgate an aesthetic “uselessness” (92) that reacts against both stringent moralism and radical contingency. For her, the Canacee story provides the occasion for searching questions about the sedimentation of literary forms and lessons.

narration. Correctively, Genius turns to a discussion of exemplary discourse generally, and incest now takes on the status of a kind of exemplary example:

And every man is othres lore;  
Of that befell in time er this  
The present time which now is  
May ben enformed hou it stod,  
And take that him thenketh good,  
And leve that which is noght so.

(256–61)

Genius reminds his audience that customs change over time, and that the past cannot be taken at face value; his audience can be “enformed” or given shape by the past, but must also contribute judgments of its own. He suggests audiences should act not according to given moral rules, but according to their own discretion, by deciding how other men’s pasts might “give form to” their present lives. The content of the past matters less than what audiences will do with it, for “every man is othres lore”—anyone’s experience has the potential to be read and learned by others. On one level, this theorizing disavows the rule-based content of the tales Genius has just related. As when Chaucer’s narrator tells readers of the *Canterbury Tales* that if *The Miller’s Tale* offends them they can “Turne over the leef and chese another tale” (I.3177), Genius here asserts that is up to readers to “take that him thenketh good, / And leve that which is noght so.” On another level, though, Gower points out that his intent is less important than the effect of the “enformacioun” upon responsible audiences. Rather than relying on resemblance between a story’s content and its readers’ needs, Genius demands application in an extended sense, more than what can be contained in the frame of a story—perhaps more than “information” would suggest, even in Simpson’s greatly expanded definition of the term. The “exemplary encapsulation[s]”<sup>31</sup> of Caligula, Amnon, and Lot are what we might call “devil’s advocate” exempla: they encourage precisely the sort

<sup>31</sup>Robins, “The Subject of the *Confessio Amantis*,” p. 159. Robins argues that exemplarity entails moral causality and fundamentally relies on the analogy between story and reader, whereas Gower “finds in romance an emplotment that leans toward a temporality of contingency” (162). Here, Robins’s contrast between exemplum and romance is appropriate, because Gower sets up the contrast—but he does so precisely in order to blur any easy distinction between moral and imaginative storytelling.

of general, categorical condemnation of an aberrant act that fails to make incest available for use. The sin becomes an originary horror, like the rape of the Sabine women that established Rome—constitutive of modern society, yet ideally unrepeatable, a thing *only* of the past.<sup>32</sup> History itself looks like a kind of unbreachable alterity. The result, narratologically, is a need for more dilated plot in which to implicate the *Confessio's* audience.

### Repetition and the Wandering Cure

Before “Apollonius,” then, Genius categorizes incest as historically past, static, and hence virtually inapplicable. When he turns to romance, he works against this impulse to relegate incest to the past, choosing a final narrative based on its continual repetition. The notion that repetition constitutes plot underpins narrative theory and genre theory alike, especially with respect to romance, that mode which Northrop Frye identifies as “the structural core of all fiction.”<sup>33</sup> “Apollonius” consists of a succession of scenes that abstract from incest a set of associated problems: the father-monarch’s isolation, singular will, and misapprehension of his subjects. Narratologically, the plot demonstrates the way in which incest applies to relationships of social and political power. Each new error stages the sin’s continuing relevance, so that when the hero secretly absents himself from his kingdom, for example, or when he sends away his daughter, the text echoes the tensions between incestuous “private” and feminine autonomy. Repetition works in retrospect, each new instance clarifying previous acts: Frye writes, “The beginning is a demonic parody of the end.”<sup>34</sup> Seen in this light, “Apollonius” typifies

<sup>32</sup> For the rape of the Sabine women, see Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, ed. and trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1922), 1.9.

<sup>33</sup> Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49. In romance, retrospective structural logic is very often expressed in a lack of apparent motivation or causal connection between events. Arthur Heiserman remarks in the context of late Greek romance that “the meaning of the plot emerges from the intrinsic plot”; see *The Novel Before the Novel: Essays and Discussions about the Beginnings of Prose Fiction in the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 202. On “backwards” motivation, see Morton W. Bloomfield, “Episodic Motivation and Marvels in Epic and Romance,” in *Essays and Explorations: Studies in Ideas, Language, and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 97–128 (108–10). Frye calls attention to the impulse toward change embedded in this retrospective structure, which is “a spiral form, an open circle where the end is the beginning transformed and renewed by the heroic quest” (174); the plot’s meaning hinges upon “creative repetition” (174–75).

romance in general, which continually and symbolically repeats an initial problem until it can be resolved through a sort of "wandering cure."

Several recent investigations of "Apollonius," however, raise questions about the degree to which these repetitions eventually resolve the problem of incest. María Bullón-Fernández has a relatively sanguine view: she examines the way in which the incest taboo, a fundamentally discursive construct, is ultimately reasserted in the tale, even as Apollonius enters a nonverbal world and then emerges from it to reinhabit his royal role. Bullón-Fernández points out the public discursive power achieved by Apollonius's wife and daughter Thaise—a power over language that enables Thaise to coax her father away from incest in the climactic recognition scene.<sup>35</sup> Larry Scanlon finds, in contrast, a precarious distinction between fatherly assertion and abject desire for the daughter, and for him the resolution emphasizes "the contingent nature of the [paternal] identity Apollonius recovers."<sup>36</sup> In Scanlon's analysis, the tale suggests that incestuous desire cannot fully be eradicated from familial or political power, and in fact, that incest underpins patriarchy; indeed, when Thaise helps Apollonius "into the liht" after the recognition scene, her quasi-parental role has a basic incestuous structure. These two analyses are closer than they first appear: Bullón-Fernández notes that even as the recognition scene displaces the possibility of incest, "it also creates the possibility of transgression."<sup>37</sup> What both scholars see is the peculiarly medieval way in which language not only creates the prohibition against incest but also expresses incestuous desire itself, in an uncanny return of something that modern psychoanalysis has repressed.<sup>38</sup> Incest, however awkwardly, provides both the basic framework for political power *and* the foil against which power (re)establishes itself.

In narratological terms, we might say that repetitions of incest serve successively to "romance" the act—turning from Frye's "demonic parody" toward well-regulated kinship, mutating the horror of the literal event into a fictionally resonant social metaphor. The plot enacts a process by which one tyrant's exemplary sin produces new fictions of change brought about by autonomous audiences, specifically the educated daughters who avert their fathers' tyrannical violence. A daughter,

<sup>35</sup> Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, chap. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest," p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> *Fathers and Daughters*, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest," pp. 125–26.

this text asserts, cannot be wholly subsumed into her father's will any more than a subject can be wholly subsumed into the will of a king; the effective governor of self, household, and state will be the one who makes himself susceptible to the influence of his inferiors.<sup>39</sup> Diane Watt, though particularly attuned to the limitations of feminine will in the story, nevertheless argues that “[t]he resurrections of Thaise and her mother mark the posthumous redemption of Antiochus’s [violated] daughter” and contribute to the renewal of Apollonius’s power.<sup>40</sup> Watt views the restored Apollonius as far from an ideal king, and certainly the romance points as much to his flaws as to his ideality: as Scanlon also sees, romance mystifies, but also exposes, the incest-threat at the heart of monarchical power. But pragmatically, when women exert influence upon Apollonius, his very status as a moral and political ideal becomes itself susceptible to change: paradoxically the monarch best fulfills his role when he can change most drastically, indicating his constitutive imperfection. By emphasizing female influence over such change, Gower calls attention to the necessary flexibility of the patriarch. In this way, further, he makes the plot repetitions of “Apollonius” a structure for imagining the social and political benefits of idiosyncratic, unpredictable audiences.

This unpredictability emerges with particular symbolic suggestiveness in romance. It has long been recognized that, through its use of an Otherworld, romance throws into relief the question of how fantasy applies to real life. Romance stages an oblique relationship between fiction

<sup>39</sup> Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, provides both a good survey of the crucial analogy between familial and political authority in the fourteenth-century context and a sensitive assessment of Gower's use of father-daughter incest as a political metaphor, pp. 17–33. The analogy between individual moral governance and communal peace is a commonplace of medieval political theory in general, of course, and of Gower criticism in particular; besides Peck, cited in n. 6 above, see A. J. Minnis, “John Gower, Sapiens in Ethics and Politics,” *MÆ* 49 (1980): 207–29; Elizabeth Porter, “Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm,” in *Responses and Reassessments*, pp. 135–62; for a skeptical reassessment of the analogy between ethics and politics in Gower, see David Aers, “Reflections on Gower as Sapiens in Ethics and Politics,” in *Re-Visioning Gower*, pp. 185–201. The importance of counsel (the advice of inferiors) has been stressed in recent treatments of other authors as well; see, for example, Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve's Regiment of Princes: Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Watt, *Amoral Gower*, pp. 140–45, 147–48. Watt astutely observes that the role of women in “Apollonius” poses a challenge to oedipal interpretation in chapter 6, revised from “Oedipus, Apollonius, and Richard II: Sex and Politics in Book VIII of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *SAC* 24 (2002): 181–208. For her, Freud's analysis of “ruler taboos” in *Totem and Taboo* proves locally fruitful in analyzing the father-son dynamic between Antiochus and Apollonius (136), but she dodges the psychoanalytic account of incest as a foundation of human social organization.

and the lived reality inhabited by readers; it typically begins in an "actual" world from which the hero wanders into an "other" world—for Frye, this Otherworld is both a representation of the archetypal human unconscious and, at the same time, a realm of socially ritualized action.<sup>41</sup> Since any ritual relies on repetition for its meaning, the Otherworld repeats, in an explicitly fantastic register, ordinary action that has socially-charged meaning. To put this more dynamically, we might say that romance depicts ritualized action which could *apply* to the "actual" or "ordinary" world of the heroic individual, and, from there, the world of the reader. The adventures of the Otherworld echo and revise the initial status of the hero, and the Otherworld's relation to the ordinary within the romance implies an analogous relationship between the romance and the "actual" world of readers.<sup>42</sup> But even more than the conflicting moral impulses of exemplary narrative, the symbolic abstraction of romance foils any notion of exact correspondence. So how might we understand the "relevance" of incest in the narrative terms offered by Gower in Book 8?

Psychoanalysis provides one of the richest modern explorations of incestuous desire per se, and Bullón-Fernández, Scanlon, Watt and others have put it to work productively with respect to "Apollonius." I raid it here with a different purpose in mind, following Frye and more explicitly Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, for whom psychoanalysis provides a model for plot itself. In the process of psychoanalysis, when the patient narrates his or her life story, he or she repeatedly formulates the process of separation from the parents, a process, for Freud, fundamentally structured by the avoidance of incest.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, the fantasy of incest begins all family romance: it is the inception of the analytic plot. For Brooks, incest provides "the exemplary version of a temptation of short-circuit from which the protagonist and the text must be led away, into detour, into the cure that prolongs narrative."<sup>44</sup> However, my interest lies less in the psychological progress of Apollonius's desire than

<sup>41</sup>Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, pp. 56–58.

<sup>42</sup>A particularly rich account of this layering of analogy in the structure of romance is Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup>Freud, "Family Romances," in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 9:237–41.

<sup>44</sup>Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 109.

in Gower's deployment of the incest plot as a figure for narrative dynamics. As Brooks points out, plot shapes the relationship between narrative and audience. He writes that psychoanalytic transference provides a model for understanding the way plot *works* for readers.<sup>45</sup> Transference provides, in this case, a therapeutic model for the effects of the incest plot upon the Genius-Amans framework and the (anticipated) reception of the *Confessio* as a whole.

Transference, of course, is a particular kind of repetition based on a particular analogy. It occurs when the analysand's current situation merges with his story such that he essentially mistakes, or substitutes, the analyst for a figure from his past, reenacting with the analyst his past trauma and thereby revealing his own unconscious. When the analysand tells his story to the analyst, both content and style of telling are symptomatic: the analysand's retrospection, like romance plot, corresponds inexactly to the actual events of the past, so that "links are missing, chronologies are twisted, the objects of desire are misnamed."<sup>46</sup> The projection of familiar roles onto the therapist provides what Freud calls an "intermediate region" (between neurotic repression and healthy awareness) in which the analysand can move toward new understanding, a new ordering of past trauma.<sup>47</sup> This region resembles what Elizabeth Fowler calls romance's "stark landscape of 'suppose,'" where normal rules of time and place are temporarily suspended and characters become abstract actors in experimental vignettes.<sup>48</sup> The projected world of romance exists, as L. O. Aranye Fradenburg writes, "on the edge

<sup>45</sup> In Brooks's formulation, plot replays and reworks trauma, imposing new order upon it by means of "the productive encounter of teller and listener, text and reader" (p. 234). On transference generally as a model for the work of plot, see esp. pp. 216–37.

<sup>46</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 227.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through," in the *Standard Edition*, 12:154, qtd. in Brooks, 228.

<sup>48</sup> In her brilliant essay, "Lordship and Saracens in *Sir Isumbras*," in *The Medieval Spirit of Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000), pp. 97–121, Elizabeth Fowler writes that romances share with legal and philosophical discourse two features, generality and indefiniteness, which render their characters and events abstract. In her view, romances are "complex thought experiments" that take readers along a path of conceptual exploration about "crucial social formations such as lordship, marriage, and governance by setting such formations moving in a stark landscape of 'suppose'" (98–99). What Frye refers to as "socially ritualized action" Fowler sees as essentially theoretical: in romances, hypothetical or frankly fictive actions can be abstracted or isolated from their actual social content—we might say theorized—in order to examine their structural consequences. "Apollonius of Tyre" then becomes not simply an incest story but an exploration of the isolated will that both constitutes and threatens any monarch.

of the known and the unknown," "oscillat[ing] between archaism and 'novelrie.'"<sup>49</sup> For Fradenburg, this realm of innovation and suggestion calls attention to the creative potential of both writer and reader. Brooks writes that the text becomes a site of transference created "in the knowledge that the persons and relations involved are surrogates and mummies."<sup>50</sup> Especially in framed narratives, both author and reader become aware that the plot is substitutive, fictive, obliquely related to the "actual" just as the fantasy-exploration of an analytic session is only obliquely related to lived life.<sup>51</sup> Even in romance, the Otherworld is only provisional, and eventually the plot sends readers back "out" of its fantasy world into the world of application. But the work of plot lies in the reordering of events, so that instead of compulsive reenactment, the character (analysand) can come to understand the past intellectually, as past, and return both himself and his audience, as Brooks writes, "to a changed reality."<sup>52</sup>

Taking my cue from psychoanalytically-informed accounts of "Apollonius," then, I am interested in how incest provides a model for desire in Gower; but veering away from other examinations of the tale, I emphasize the ways in which the story's plot, and its reception by Amans, demand the therapeutic work of readers. Amans's resistance signals the power of the story's call to application, but it also signals the transference, that highly charged affective bond between patient and doctor that is at once a barrier to and an instrument of cure. Moreover, the fact

<sup>49</sup>In another remarkable recent essay, "Simply Marvelous," *SAC* 26 (2004): 1–27, qtd. at pp. 6–7, Fradenburg argues that romance's approach to history is bound up with the unnecessary and frivolous, and urges scholars to place value on the seemingly outmoded, wacky, or wondrous in that genre.

<sup>50</sup>Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, pp. 234–35.

<sup>51</sup>Brooks explores the model of transference with regard to Balzac's *Le Colonel Chabert*, where he investigates the relationship between narrator (analysand) and narratee (analyst) and implies that the reader of the text takes the role of analyst. There is some slippage here in Brooks's analogy, as when he writes, "Disciplined and subjugated, the transference delivers one back to a changed reality. And so does any text fully engaged by the reader" (235). Here the reader is implicitly more analysand, the subject of change, than analyst. This slippage actually somewhat leaves aside questions of authority and coercion that concern Gower in Book 8. When Gower calls for the reader's participation in plot, an engagement in transference, he too undermines the opposition between authority and audience that Amans, especially, finds so tempting. The psychoanalytic analogy, for Brooks, is most productive when least fixed; transference's work lies in the mutual engagement of character and narrator, narrator and narratee, so that the responsibility for the text's meaning lies in the dynamic transaction, not in one role or the other.

<sup>52</sup>Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 235.

that one very careful reader, Gower's editor G. C. Macaulay, finds incest an embarrassing subject suggests the extent to which Genius's approach to the sin implicates his readers in the effort of confronting and reworking it.<sup>53</sup> The problem that Amans and Macaulay implicitly point out is that readers are not simply forces of "exogamy" here. Instead, every repetition of incest requires audience recognition and heightens audience desire. Even as Apollonius seeks to avoid incest—and thus loses kingdom, then wife, then daughter—every instance in which he seeks repair *resembles* incest. Both impulses of his plot (loss and repetition) continually attenuate human community within the story. Brooks remarks that compulsive repetition provides a bulwark against loss.<sup>54</sup> Certainly within the plot, Apollonius registers his deepest losses by seeking to repeat acts of secrecy, willfulness, and tyranny. Meanwhile readers, too, experience an ongoing equivocation. Despite readerly sympathy for the violated daughter of Antiochus, the initial transgression produces a readerly desire to see incest recuperated and even repeated; indeed, Scanlon ascribes to the "narrative itself" a "guilty pleasure" in imagining the violation of Thaise.<sup>55</sup> This guilty pleasure coincides uncomfortably with the arousal and sustaining of desire that defines any extended narrative.<sup>56</sup> In Gower, however, the continual presence of incest puts audience response under special scrutiny throughout the tale.

Desire for the plot, in fact, is constituted at least in part by the reader's heightened anticipation of repetitions, and the recognition of the dynamic between repetition and change. Such desire is a basis of audience involvement, and therefore of the kind of education that "Apollonius of Tyre" seeks to advance.<sup>57</sup> Book 8 enlists involvement to the point

<sup>53</sup> Scanlon, "Riddle of Incest," sees Macaulay's embarrassment manifested in critical attempts to understand incest figuratively, "as a typification or epitome of something else" (99). But surely the narrative everywhere accrues symbolic, not just literal, meanings around incest. Embarrassment, it seems to me, does not simply indicate modesty about sexual desire so much as register a call to audience activity, a kind of exposure of audiences to consciousness of their own judgment.

<sup>54</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 111.

<sup>55</sup> Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest," p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Brooks's central notion of "narrative desire" seeks to link content ("the narrative of desire") with structure ("the desire of narrative") in order to understand "the notion of desire as that which is initiatory of narrative, motivates and energizes its reading, and animates the combinatory play of sense-making" (48). In this model, the desire of characters puts in motion the desire of readers. Through Amans and through other framing techniques, Gower's "Apollonius" highlights in particular the morally equivocal role of its audience's desire.

<sup>57</sup> For Simpson, the *Confessio's* structural incoherence calls for audiences to "participate in the construction of meaning" (*Sciences and the Self*, p. 14). Incoherence and elusiveness certainly do call upon readers' mental faculties throughout the poem; here,

of making readers anticipate incest—and even tempting them, figuratively, to submit to it themselves. Through calls for sympathy and moments of problematic stasis, Genius subjects readers to the incest act; through interruptions, narrative blanks or gaps, and other local formal effects, he makes incest both reprehensible and typical, both foreign and endemic to the civilized present. Moreover, incest becomes for Gower a figure for the errors of authority and identification to which any moralizing fiction can fall prey. The sin figures Amans's own fantasy of analogy, which confines literary authority to didactic message-making and subordinates readers to an author's command.

The "Apollonius" plot, then, becomes an instrument of conceptual shifts that implicate narrator, embedded audience, and readers in the problems associated with incest. Through repetition, the plot bridges narrative levels, because solitude and coercion implicitly define not just the plot's content, incest, but also the structure of the relationship between authority and audience. Amans, like an angry analysand, both disavows incest itself and rebels against the moral authority of his interlocutor. This rebellion, in turn, restructures the transaction between Gower and extratextual audiences. Readers are made aware of Genius's power to "enform" Amans and Gower's power to tell us what to think, and they are also made aware that Genius's story is available for some other use than Amans's strict imitation. Amans's resistance demands that the poem's extratextual readers engage in analysis, or what we normally call interpretation. Freud writes in "The Dynamics of Transference" that resistance challenges the analyst to recognize the unconscious urges that are made manifest.<sup>58</sup> Surprisingly, we are asked to take incest *more* seriously than does Amans, albeit in a figurative mode: like analysts, readers are to identify the resemblance between the therapeutic present and the traumatic past. Yet they are also partially responsible for making the distinction and providing an alternative to repetition, through awareness. Readers are asked to be authors of misprision; they are set up to be the provocation against the idealistic (or destructive) fantasy that stories should correspond precisely to their origins, or that

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however, I find that a certain moral bossiness is both Gower's theme and Genius's method for demanding our engagement.

<sup>58</sup>Although transference presents the analyst with the "greatest difficulties," it does him the "inestimable service" of making the "hidden and forgotten erotic impulses immediate and manifest" ("The Dynamics of Transference," in the *Standard Edition*, 12:107–8).

lived existence should imitate stories exactly.<sup>59</sup> As we shall see, when Gower stages such provocation through women in “Apollonius,” he makes female characters into analysts, heralds of general interpretive change. Thus, Book 8 brings to a head the argument that I take to be the basis of the whole of the *Confessio*: that exemplarity imposed by injunctive analogy rather than discovered through the transferential experience of interpretation constitutes a profound, even incestuous, abuse of authority.

### Antiochus’s Daughter

In contrast to the tales of Caligula, Amnon, and Lot, “Apollonius of Tyre” emphasizes the consequences of incest for daughters, thereby immediately involving audiences in the affective and moral process by which incest achieves meaning.<sup>60</sup> But the story opens with the perpetrator, Antiochus, king of Antioch. His queen has just died:

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 aboute him stille.  
 (283–87)

The loss of the queen debilitates the king, making him a victim of fortune and leaving him alone, a solitude that suggests that royal power needs affirmative and restraining company.<sup>61</sup> His daughter substitutes for the wife by living with him “still”: her consistent presence formally resolves the disordered enjambments of the previous few lines. But still-

<sup>59</sup> “Misprision” is the term Harold Bloom uses in *Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) to describe the productive deviations from his predecessors made by the “strong” poet.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Archibald surveys various versions of the Apollonius story in her edition and translation of the Latin *Historia Appolonii*, likely a close cousin of Gower’s story, if not his direct source. In her review of the literature, Archibald finds that most scholars have viewed the initial incest act as peripheral to the Apollonius story; she argues cogently for the integral role of incest in all versions of the tale. See *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 15–18 and 98–100. The same narrative provides the basis of Frye’s theory of romance in *The Secular Scripture*.

<sup>61</sup> In this Antiochus resembles the incestuous fathers described by W. Arens: in the face of social failure and isolation, “incest implies a sad and futile attempt to reconstruct a personal universe” (*The Original Sin*, p. 141).

ness also suggests a passivity or quietude that will subject her to her father's will. The daughter's stillness here indicates a plot defined by domestic and political "temptation to over-sameness," a resistance to progress through differentiation between king and subject toward the exogamous marriage that would widen Antiochus's circle of friends and produce a "cure."<sup>62</sup> Because the character seeks to stop historical change, the plot itself verges on the static encapsulation of Genius's earlier exempla.

Because politically Antiochus's incestuous desire is bound up with his patriarchal power, wealth, and leisure, Genius places blame squarely on the father:

His doghter . . . duelte aboute him stille.  
 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:  
 . . . he caste al his hole entente  
 His oghne doghter forto spille.  
 This king hath leisir at his wille  
 With strengthe, and whanne he time sih,  
 This yonge maiden he forlih.

(286–92, 296–300)

As in early Latin versions of the story, Antiochus is so blinded by desire that his entire will focuses on his daughter.<sup>63</sup> Quite explicitly here, his status as king actually engenders his frailty: incest arises from his embat-

<sup>62</sup>Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup>In the *Historia Apollonii* (HA), the father fights against his passion (*miratur scelestis patris impietatem*, 1.16–17). In both Godfrey of Viterbo and the *Gesta Romanorum* (GR), he burns with love and she weeps in agony. Gower's couplets expand and emphasize the deliberate violation of the father and the inner resistance of the daughter, arguably pointing already toward the enhanced problem of feminine will that defines his version. All quotations from HA are taken from the first recension (RA) in the edition by G. A. A. Kortekaas, *The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), cited by paragraph and Kortekaas's line numbers; for translations I have also consulted Elizabeth Archibald's *Apollonius of Tyre*. Quotations from Godfrey are from S. Singer, *Apollonius von Tyrus: Untersuchungen über das Fortleben de antiken Romans in spätern Zeiten* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1895), pp. 150–76, my translations. Quotations from the *Gesta Romanorum* are taken from the translation by Charles Swan, rev. Wynnard Hooper (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905).

tled self-elevation, an attention to his individual power at the expense of his closest community, his daughter.<sup>64</sup> He seizes the goods of his subjects or, in Gower's words, enhances his "singulier beyete" (individual possession, 7.1996), in the form of his daughter's maidenhood. The "stille" / "wille" pair, echoed so soon in "spille" / "wille," emphasizes the degree to which he transgresses the consistent loyalty of his closest subject.

The daughter's stillness changes register as she responds to her predicament, seeking a cure that, immediately foiled, abandons the audience to an ineffectual sympathy for her entrapment. Throughout the passage, Genius encourages outrage against Antiochus through this sympathy:

And thus this maiden goth to manne,  
 The wylde fader thus devoureth  
 His oghne fleissh, which non socoureth,  
 And that was cause of mochel care.  
 Bot after this unkinde fare  
 Out of the chambre goth the king,  
 And sche lay stille, and of this thing,  
 Withinne herself such sorghe made,  
 Ther was no wiht that mihte hir glade,  
 For feere of thilke horrible vice.

(8.308–17)

The conventional expectation that every maid will "go to manne" highlights the perversity of the unnatural father: he acculturates her to wildness, a failure of both exogamous custom and natural law (kinde). The audience is shown what Antiochus does not recognize: that his daughter suffers, independent of him and his will. Her stillness, now embedded in the line ("and sche lay stille"), signals her inconsolability: it is "withinne herself" that his violation has caused its ruin, precisely because her will has been negated, stilled. Stillness now suggests a failure of transformation through meaninglessly reiterated violation. She is victim of a sin for which she cannot be "wreke," avenged (323). The daughter's desire for

<sup>64</sup> According to many medieval formulations, tyranny comes about when a king fulfills his singular, idiosyncratic desires at the expense of the common profit rather than for its benefit. For a classic articulation of this structure, see Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's Doctrine of Kings and Tyrants," *Speculum* 20 (1945): 133–56.

"cure"—a desire engaged also by the sympathetic audience—will be met only through narrative displacement, since the incest itself is encoded as utter destruction, making a future impossible. In psychoanalytic terms, the tale's opening action establishes the traumatic foundation of the plot's symbolic development. In literary terms, the transference will take place with the "transfer" or doubling of the incestuous pair in the figures of Apollonius and Thaise.

Antiochus's transgression is no isolated act but an ongoing relation, and in contrast to Gower's sources, a political configuration to which the daughter must submit even as the situation resists narrative progress.<sup>65</sup> The permanence of the daughter's situation is confirmed when her nurse, startlingly, advises that she continue to submit to her father's will:

Whan thing is do, ther is no bote,  
So suffren thei that suffre mote;  
Ther was non other which it wiste.  
(339–41)

By reiterating the daughter's helplessness, the nurse's proverbial language reveals the reductive, even recursive character of moral generalization itself.<sup>66</sup> The nurse's inadequate moral, however, solicits audience sympathy. Unlike the exempla of Caligula, Amnon, and Lot, this narrative encourages affective awareness of loss. By the time the nameless daughter speaks in direct discourse, she has been destroyed, so the story's audience is subject to a kind of narrative helplessness that mirrors hers. Having introduced the story in clear moral terms, Gower now stretches those terms—not by calling into question the sinfulness of the deed, but by suggesting we might sympathize with the experience of irremediable sin. The nurse's proverb, like analytic resistance, asks for complicity. Similarly Freud describes the angry analysand—or the one in love with the analyst—drawing the analyst into the structures of her

<sup>65</sup>In HA, the daughter has a horror that this disgrace might become public (2.8). Godfrey's extremely compressed version emphasizes the secrecy and hiddenness of the crime, omitting the nurse entirely (1–3). In GR, the horror is all internal: "I have no father; in me that sacred name has perished" (259). Gower highlights political nature of the transgression.

<sup>66</sup>In HA, she does "encourage . . . the reluctant girl to satisfy her father's desire" (2.12–15); in GR, she only begs the girl not to kill herself.

childhood.<sup>67</sup> Sympathetic response provides the initial step in creating a dynamic of transference, but risks an ambiguity in the daughter's moral status. She will later die with her father at the hand of God, as if to provide a retrospective moral clarity.

But this affective pressure amounts to a narrative method with Gower. On the one hand, the clear moral evil of incest engages a hermeneutics in which the father's transgression can be identified, recognized, and confirmed. Sympathy with the daughter serves to bolster this judgment. A certain moral clarity is also encouraged by style: Gower's octosyllabic rhymes and often repetitive, lengthy sentences encourage readerly assent, in contrast to Chaucer's remarkable disjunctions.<sup>68</sup> But Gower uses both stylistic shifts and moments of sympathy to call readers' attention to the problematic terms of their involvement. The nurse's proverbial language ("So suffren thei that suffe mote") sounds like acceptable social truth, but applied to incest, her language is revealed as smoothing over a horror. The nurse enhances the experience of loss and helplessness that the audience is encouraged to share with the daughter, even as the nurse's ineffectuality prompts us to seek a better cure—that is, produces a desire for the plot. Yet again, sympathy for the daughter becomes attenuated as the incest continues indefinitely, the suitors multiply, and finally the daughter is struck down by God along with her father. Sympathy is rendered temporary precisely because it initiates the desire to progress away from the violated daughter. In this way, Gower complicates any interpretation based on simply affirming moral wrongs, or even based solely on sympathy for the violated woman, instead issuing a challenge to readers' interpretive faculties, which can be employed to invent a cure. From within the narrative, that challenge is answered

<sup>67</sup> Freud writes of the temptation to requite or reject the love of the analysand, and advocates both sympathy and immunity from involvement. He concludes that "[the analyst] must keep firm hold of the transference-love, but treat it as something unreal, as a situation which has to be gone through in the treatment and traced back to its unconscious origins and which must assist in bringing all that is most deeply hidden in the patient's erotic life into her consciousness and therefore under her control. The more plainly the analyst lets it be seen that he is proof against every temptation, the more readily will he be able to extract from the situation its analytic content" ("Observations on Transference-Love," *Standard Edition*, 12:159–71 [166]). A narrative, like a patient, nevertheless demands something more than this ideal "immunity": and Freud's essay, directed against the temptations of patients, seems designed to register just how strong the demand for complicity must be.

<sup>68</sup> Kate Harris, "John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: The Virtues of Bad Texts," in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 27–40.

by Apollonius of Tyre, both analyst and patient, who explodes the Antiochan incest narrative only to become implicated in it himself. As Apollonius goes through his peregrinations, however, the story's audience is continually made aware of the ways in which his progress implicates ourselves, as well, in the problems of secrecy, recursion, and stasis that keep us seeking acts of incest.

### "Privete" and Public Ritual

The world of public life encroaches upon the incestuous household in the form of Apollonius of Tyre, whose youthful energy drives through the careful rhetorical, social, and political barriers Antiochus has constructed around his act of domestic tyranny. Apollonius approaches the king full of passion—full of "mod" and "hote blod." When he gets to the court, Antiochus poses him the archetypal riddle, whose solution will win Apollonius his daughter's hand:

"With felonie I am upbore,  
I ete and have it noght forbore  
Mi modres fleissh, whos housebonde  
Mi fader forto seche I fonde,  
Which is the Sone ek of my wif.  
Hierof I am inquisitif;  
And who that can mi tale save,  
Al quyt he schal mi doghter have;  
Of his ansuere and if he faile,  
He schal be ded withoute faile."

(405–14)

Antiochus's sense of power depends on the nourishment of his daughter, by whom he is "upbore," even as the blurring of generational and gender lines characteristic of such incest enigmas confuses the direction of the violence he commits against her.<sup>69</sup> She is reduced to a vessel that contains his mother's flesh, his father, his wife's "Sone." Although the narrative earlier claimed that Antiochus "thoghte that it was no Sinne" (346), his own language marks his behavior as felonious and cannibalistic. But the riddle veils both act and morality by presenting the situation

<sup>69</sup>On enigmas in the literature of incest, see Archibald, "Incest in Medieval Literature and Society," pp. 3–4; and Roussel, "Aspects du Père," p. 50.

as a game, a rhetorical trick, one whose subjects and objects are impossibly confused. Father and mother, daughter and son, parents and offspring, are conflated in a description that defies logic: the “I” of the riddle eats his mother’s flesh; he has simultaneously “fonde” his father as well; his father is, therefore, also his wife’s son. These lines are finally insoluble.<sup>70</sup> The relative pronouns hopelessly confuse any actual kinship system: how can he eat both his mother and his father? How can his father become his offspring? Figuratively, Antiochus eats the flesh of both his parents, who are ancestors of his daughter; in this way, he has not only conflated his own parents with each other and with his offspring but also has merged his ancestry with his wife’s (his father is the offspring of his wife) and thus conflated himself with his wife.<sup>71</sup>

The riddle, of course, is confused at the literal level precisely because it indicates the confusion of social roles that incest represents, and the failure of cure in the literal instance of the sin. Antiochus destroys the communicative value of language in the process of destroying the communal value of his kingship. If the riddle does communicate, as it will to Apollonius, the hearer destroys what the language signifies—by knowing the incest, he destroys the secret, private, sealed space that engenders it:

“The question which thou hast spoke,  
If thou wolt that it be unloke,

<sup>70</sup>For three quite different, more sustained readings of this riddle’s tortured syntax, see Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, pp. 71–72; Watt, “Oedipus, Appolonius, and Richard II,” pp. 186–94; and Scanlon, “The Riddle of Incest,” pp. 124–25.

<sup>71</sup>For a provocative reading of Apollonius’s desire for the father as exactly what implicates him in Antiochan crime, see Watt, “Oedipus, Appolonius, and Richard II,” pp. 191–98. Shakespeare solves the riddle by putting the words into the daughter’s mouth, shifting blame toward her:

“‘I am no viper, yet I feed  
On mother’s flesh which did me breed.  
I sought a husband, in which labor  
I found that kindness in a father.  
He’s father, son, and husband mild;  
I mother, wife—and yet his child.’  
How they may be, and yet in two,  
As you will live, resolve it you.”  
(*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, 1.1.64–71)

Quotations from *Pericles* are from the Cambridge edition by Doreen Delvecchio and Anthony Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

It toucheth al the private  
 Betwen thin oghne child and thee,  
 And stant al hol upon you tuo."

(423–27)

Apollonius exposes the incest by using the very word "private": this answer is less a euphemism than a way of registering a lack of distinction between father and daughter. But all Apollonius has to do is indicate that underneath the riddling language lies an aberrant familial truth, and the barrier between the incestuous king and the rest of the world breaks down. Uncommunicative, irredeemable, and without any moral lesson, the riddle mystifies political power. Apollonius's plain language would seem to solve the narrative's initial problem here: when he destroys the riddle's mystification, he would seem to stage, within the plot, a refusal to apply the story to himself, like Amans's dismissal in the framework. Incest, he asserts, belongs wholly to Antiochus and not to himself.

Instead, however, unfolding the riddle only folds Apollonius into its dangers. Antiochus bestows upon the visiting prince the "grace" (437) of thirty days in which to escape. In response, Apollonius acts with his own version of cryptic behavior: he leaves "al prively" (451) in the dark of night. He has escaped, but has transferred to himself Antiochus's "private," a spirit of incest for which he spends the rest of the story compensating.<sup>72</sup> Yet because Apollonius has recognized tyranny, his journeys will revise Antiochus's conflation of parent and child, sovereign and subordinate, and eventually, story and reader. For if Antiochus represents an excessive "private" that encloses him within a circular system of kinship, nourishment, and corruption, Apollonius initially represents an excessive public drive that prevents him from settling within any kind of system at all for most of the story's duration. In fact he never does settle in one physical place but moves among several "other-worlds": Antioch, Tharsus, Pentapolis, Mitelene, Ephesus, and intermittently, his home of Tyre as well. Significantly, Apollonius does not end up in Tyre but in his wife's realm, Pentapolis—a kind of political exogamy.

<sup>72</sup>The echo of "private" is Gower's innovation. In HA, the word "secretus" is associated with Antiochus and Apollonius later leaves Tyre "occulte," in secret (6.18), but does not depart from Antioch in secret. In GR, he leaves in the dark of night. In Godfrey, the incest is "occultum" (2) and Apollonius leaves Antioch "celeri," in secret (10).

Thus, in departing “al prively” from Tyre, Apollonius fails, like Antiochus, to attend to the common profit of his people, who love him:

They losten lust, they losten chiere,  
 Thei toke upon hem such penaunce,  
 Ther was no song, ther was no daunce. . . .  
 “Helas, the lusti flour of youthe,  
 Our Prince, our heved, oure governour,  
 Thurgh whom we stonden in honour,  
 Withoute the comun assent  
 Thus sodeinliche is fro ous went!”  
 Such was the clamour of hem alle.

(476–78, 490–95)

The community of Tyre will prove capable of self-governance in the course of the tale, deflecting any suggestion that Apollonius embarks upon his journey of self-exploration at his realm’s expense. But here, as in Sir Orfeo’s similar departure, royal abandonment causes grief, a cessation of leisure activity, and a breakdown of the community’s function as “counsel,” for he has left without their “comun assent.” By depicting the grief of the abandoned citizens, Genius achieves something like the affective involvement that the account of Antiochus’s daughter elicited, but here, readerly involvement is more interrogative: the citizens’ grief prompts readers to call into question Apollonius’s conduct as king. He holds his people at a remove, failing the vicarious relation through which his presence makes them “stonden in honour.” Abandonment, the opposite of incestuous union and Apollonius’s overcompensation for the threat of incest, leaves Tyre in a kind of limbo throughout the story. Ironically, the fierce distance Apollonius maintains from his subjects is itself a close cousin, if not an outgrowth, of incestuous coercion—a self-induced isolation that reveals the plot in which he has become involved.

As often during structural transitions, Genius’s narration here calls attention to the plot’s retrospective structural logic. He intervenes after Apollonius has left Tyre: “Bot se we now what is befall / Upon the ferste tale plein, / And torne we therto ayein” (496–98). Repetition of the “plein” initial plot seems to mean that Genius will tell us the full story of Antiochus; he calls attention to the structural imbrication of the two kings, and suggests that the first may help interpret or make “plein” the second. But after relating that Antiochus plans to kill Apol-

lonius, Genius immediately returns to Apollonius himself: "Bot over this now forto telle / Of adventures that befelle / Unto this Prince of whom I tolde" (537–39). The circular movement of these transitions calls attention to the plot's basis in repetition: the "Apollonius" plot continually reproduces the original scene, so that successive events enact the significance of earlier moments. Thus Genius's transitions also call attention to temporal changes, emphasizing shifts and "turning" to new scenes, reiterating the episodic structure of the plot, calling attention to narrative progress.

Moreover, Genius's interruptions call attention to the way in which plot bridges narrative levels. We have already touched upon the fundamental "backward motivation" of plot in romance. For Brooks, retrospection is a function of narrative per se: "prior events, causes, are so only retrospectively, in a reading back from the end."<sup>73</sup> This implies that the structural logic of the narrative produces the thematic material, rather than that the material or story-stuff (*fabula*) produces the narrative form (*sjuzet*): plot, the shape of events, gives rise to significant material, rather than vice versa. When Antiochus's double Apollonius "emplots" incest, he reinvents kingship through successive backward references, while Genius's presence in the "stages of our story" makes the extratextual audience recognize the character's restructuring of the plot.<sup>74</sup> The actions of the characters, that is, are always interpretive—not inasmuch as Apollonius reflects upon his own incestuous proclivities, but inasmuch as he carries out undermotivated repetitions that focus audience attention on the structure and narration of the story while he enacts it. Genius, like the analyst, calls attention to the arrangement of the plot. In his transitions, readers are made aware simultaneously of Apollonius's desire to reshape events, and of Genius's ability to provide transitions, beginnings and endings—to segment and organize action according to an anti-incestuous logic. His interruptions invite readers to assess the hero's interpretive efficacy by taking stock of the situation continually, recognizing also the reflexes of incest that still remain. Like the analyst in transference, Genius intervenes by momentarily halting sheer reenactment in order to put incest in its proper perspective—helping the action become conceptual, making mere action into meaningful revision.

<sup>73</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 29.

<sup>74</sup> It is in Shakespeare where Gower appears as Prologue and Narrator to "stand i' th' gaps to teach you / the stages of our story"; see *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Prologue to Act IV, lines 8–9.

Gower's "Apollonius," then, demands more from readers than affective involvement with the violated daughter. Plot repetitions, Genius shows, demand audience involvement by calling attention to the uneven and benighted progress of the story—that is, the episodic structure that calls for audiences to distinguish past from present to produce significance. The fits and starts of Apollonius's development, the plot's movement, and the narrator's interventions ask readers to experience constantly the tension between recursion and progress, a double vision that Freud repeatedly calls a struggle or "battle."<sup>75</sup> The analyst's challenge—and the task of readers here—lies in his recognizing the status of any given event *as* an echo or a memory, a thing of the past, rather than an actual return to the past. In the so-called "talking cure" of psychoanalysis, as Brooks describes it, "the narratee listens to narration for the implied plot of past desire as it shapes and disfigures the present discourse, looking for the design of the story it would tell, working toward the recovery of the past as past, syntactically complete and reconciled with the present."<sup>76</sup> This historicizes incest in an entirely different register from the one with which Gower began Book 8.

In this sense romance offers a generic perspective on exemplarity because it insists on the moral value of a kind of "wandering cure." Antiochus provides a negative example from which the journeying Apollonius has to escape. But whereas the ostensible purpose of an exemplum lies in the reader's imitation or avoidance, Apollonius must enter Antiochus's plot in order to take it to heart. When the romance calls attention to the doubling between Antiochus and Apollonius, and the constant threat that incest will arise from the hero's actions, it emphasizes the metonymic character of both plot and its interpretation by readers. The romance, again, differs markedly from the self-enclosed and static images of incest represented in Genius's stories of Amnon, Caligula, and Lot. The emphasis on narrative process discourages the simple alignment or correspondence between example and application that Amans, in his rejection of the relevance of incest to his own love, implicitly assumes. The problem with Amans's interpretive method arises from its essentially analogical structure; surprisingly like incest itself, his exemplary expectations rest on excessive "sameness" between narrative and reader, short-circuiting the detours of narrative.

<sup>75</sup> Freud, "Observations on Transference-Love," p. 170.

<sup>76</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 235.

Apollonius progresses through *privete* to publicity, and back to secrecy again, as the magnetic pull of incest exerts its pressure on his narrative. Midway through the plot, having married, lost his wife, and left his baby daughter at Tharsis, Apollonius actually returns to Tyre, a development unique to Gower.<sup>77</sup> In a public act that revises his earlier, "privee" departure, Apollonius summons a parliament and appeals to the assent of his lords to hold a funeral for his wife: "Solempne was that ilke office, / And riche was the sacrifice, / The feste reali was holde: / And therto was he wel beholde" (1561–64). The staging of a public ritual not only renders his exogamous marriage official (even though the kingdom knew nothing of his wife until now) but also makes himself, complete with personal grief, legible to his subjects. The "pleie" and "chiere" that they lost when he departed is transformed into a more solemn, ritualized expression, akin to a coronation or a marriage feast. Apollonius becomes "wel beholde," visible and highly regarded; he offers his community something to "holde," a focused and ethical act of ritual binding. His public act revises the royal grief that led Antiochus to solitude and incest, insisting that kingship itself is constituted through this emergence from solitude, which in turn entails submission to the interpretive activity of his subjects. This definition remains precarious, however: after the funeral, Apollonius requests that his lords accompany him to Tharsis to retrieve his daughter, affirming his public ties to his subjects. But the journey sends him back into a destructive solitude that makes public ritual and governance according to counsel look equally insufficient.

### Innovation and the Influence of Audience

Interpretation may always fail to revise; repetition can always become recursion: the capacity for change hinges on such subtle shifts in meaning that, like many romances, "Apollonius of Tyre" ultimately seems to achieve its progress largely through happenstance, usually called "aventure." In the second half of "Apollonius," the impetus for transformation comes from a series of staged "readings" or interpretations of the king, first by his wife-to-be and later by his daughter. Thematically, as the tale progresses, the autonomous consent of subjects is increasingly figured through the educated will of these daughters. Structurally, the

<sup>77</sup>In HA, he goes to Egypt, and also in GR; in Godfrey, his travels are unknown.

daughters figure a kind of narrative exogamy, suggesting that an educated audience provides an innovative perspective on the past. Indeed, the tale's conclusion reveals that Tyre needs not Apollonius, but his daughter, who, married, will return to rule Tyre and produce a male heir, putting to rest the problem of incest's failure of succession. In the retrospective logic of romance, the return of the daughter to her father's kingdom suggests the degree to which *his* governance depends upon *her* autonomy for its continuance. Ultimately, far from compromising royal power, the two autonomous daughters shore up and publicize royal command. Their willed obedience—and their self-assertions beyond the framework of obedience—becomes identified with the productive misprision that the incest plot seeks.

At the height of his youthful travels, before wife and daughter have come on the scene, Apollonius is shipwrecked for the first of several times, and ends up destitute on the shores of Pentapolis. Invited to the king's hall, he sits "stille" at the feast, weeping for his loss of Tyre—a stillness and self-enclosed grief that have something of the recursiveness of his earlier "privete." This still grief may echo and overcompensate for the threat of incestuous violation, but it also leaves room for the king's daughter to express a desire unheralded by anyone else.<sup>78</sup> At the daughter's suggestion, Apollonius teaches her music and "tho sciences whiche he can" (810). To be sure, their shared recreation leads to the kind of moral frailty, connected with leisure, that led Antiochus astray:

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.

. . . . .  
Thenkende upon this man of Tyr,  
Hire herte is hot as eny fyr.

(834–38, 845–46)

In contrast to the incest scenario, however, here the daughter initiates desire. Although her love is attributed to "chance," and although her

<sup>78</sup>Bullón-Fernández notices that, whereas Artestrates's daughter initiates contact with Apollonius in HA, Gower has the relationship insistently mediated by her father (51). She finds that the privacy and secrecy of this new daughter's actions "do not require negative connotations" and hence revise Antiochan incest (52).

suffering, like the lovesickness more conventionally associated with male lovers, seems to afflict the girl from outside rather than being willed, nevertheless this passage marks a crucial development in the narrative's depiction of the wills of daughters. If incestuous suppression of a subject's will depends upon "privete" and stillness, then her fiery heart should derail the plot's recursion toward incest. Instead, however, such active desire risks violation in a new form, shaming or ill repute. Womanly "schame" demands secrecy here, so her father's careful "privete" becomes the defining feature of the marriage arrangement.<sup>79</sup> Her father asks her to choose a suitor by letter, a form at once public and "privee," expressive and conscious of shame. She writes:

"The schame which is in a Maide  
With speche dar nocht ben unloke,  
Bot in writinge it mai be spoke;  
So wryte I to you, fader, thus:  
Bot if I have Appolinus,  
Of al this world, what so betyde,  
I wol non other man abide."

(894–900)

Like Antiochus's riddle, the apparently riddling language here emphasizes secrecy. Her negative declaration ("I wol non") protects her, so that syntactically, she unlocks only her shame, not her desire; by speaking privately through writing, she protects herself from plain expression. The father's conference with Apollonius, too, is secret, until the hero's assent is garnered and the "accord" publicly declared. The possibility of Apollonius's refusal and the girl's public disgrace hovers over the scene: modesty revises incestuous "privete," but only just barely.

Narratologically, this episode's immense effort to preserve the girl's honor results in exogamous marriage, which, in turn, makes way for the death of Antiochus and, eventually, Apollonius's return to Tyre. But

<sup>79</sup>In HA, the daughter writes on wax to preserve her modesty, presumably because wax can be erased. Gower expands the delicate conduct required for Thaise to navigate between the poles of secrecy and ill repute. He has Antiochus's daughter establish the initial link between ill repute and incest: "Thing which mi bodi ferst begat / Into this world, onliche that / Mi worldes worschipe hath bereft" (329–31). Her compressed, chiasmic language signals not only the loss of "friendship" found in exogamy but also the loss of narrative progress itself. There is no solution to what she regards as an impossibly private, self-enclosed, and iterative event.

the tale's next sea storm reverts once again to incest, as his new queen apparently dies at sea, leaving him now "al one" (1103). This loss is almost immediately ameliorated for the reader by her marvelous revival when her casket washes ashore at Ephesus, marking a promise to the reader of "creative repetition" while also suggesting, in the retrospective logic of romance, that Apollonius has not quite yet learned to read well; he could solve the incest riddle, but plainer or more physical signs—signs of his wife's life—seem to escape him.<sup>80</sup> In his grief he temporarily avoids incest by leaving his daughter, Thaise, to be raised and educated in Tharsis, commanding that she be schooled.<sup>81</sup>

The education of daughters militates consistently against recursion, drawing first Thaise's mother and then the girl herself toward the possibility of public eloquence: as Thaise grows up at Tharsis, she becomes beloved of the people, like her father, and exerts a binding force in the "comun place" of the city. Her influence arises from her education: "Sche was wel tawht, sche was wel boked, / So wel sche spedde hir in hire youthe / That sche of every wisdom couthe" (1328–30). The explicit link here between book-learning and communal benefit recalls the terms of the *Confessio* itself, as established in Book 1, where Gower linked vernacular language, poetic style, and amatory theme in an effort to embrace a variety of readers. Thaise's education gives her wide knowledge, "every wisdom," creating social cohesion.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Thaise remains at risk of violation: her stepmother tries to have her killed, and she is sold into prostitution in Mitelyne. Prostitution realizes and denigrates her "comun" status: she is "cried" about the city "In syhte of al the people aboute" (1421–22), suggesting a particularly visual mode of "divisioun" wherein her objectification divides her from the community. Yet Thaise refuses the interpretation of "comun" as sexually available. Her education enables her to refute publicly those who would understand her as erotic object, revising both the isolated suffering of

<sup>80</sup> "Creative repetition" is Frye's term, *The Secular Scripture*, pp. 174–75.

<sup>81</sup> Although in the narrative this demand is coded as novel, it may not have seemed entirely foreign to English readers. In the later fourteenth century, girls did receive some schooling at home, and this increased in the early fifteenth century. See Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340–1548: Learning, Literacy, and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: Hambleton, 1989), esp. pp. 153–75.

<sup>82</sup> In HA, the citizens see Tarsia's beauty and finery (ornatum) as a marvel (31.3). In GR, she is praised for her beauty (282) and in Godfrey for she is beautiful (formosa, ornatus) and the populus reveres her (reveretur, 112–13).

Antiochus's daughter and the "schame" of Artestrates's daughter, her own mother.

Further, Thaise uses her rhetorical skills for economic advantage in this new, mercenary city. Having won the sympathy of her pimp's henchman, she begs him to let her earn his master money by leaving the brothel and establishing a school instead:

"Let him do crie ay wyde where,  
 What lord that hath his doghter diere,  
 And is in will that sche schal liere  
 Of such a Scole that is trewe,  
 I schal hire teche of thinges newe,  
 Which as non other womman can  
 In al this lond."

(1460–66)

Unlike the passive daughter of Antiochus, who is essentially "bereft" of her whole world, Thaise produces a novel social world. She demands a chamber where she can locate her school, suggesting an institutional stability and a feminine intimacy that revise the image of nurse and daughter trapped in the Antiochan chamber.<sup>83</sup> Thaise's new world responds to the communal need of lords who "will" that their daughters should learn "thinges newe." That is, she imagines a new audience of women, sanctioned and perpetuated by fathers.<sup>84</sup> Once she has estab-

<sup>83</sup>Unlike the more visible institutions for boys and men, the household seems to have provided a forum for the existence of communal reading among women. Felicity Riddy points out that "one of the features of convent life which is regularly criticised by the bishops is the way in which, from the thirteenth century on, religious communities were allowed to fragment into separate *familiae* or households." See "'Women Talking About the Things of God': A Late-Medieval Sub-culture," in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 104–27 (109). See also Mary Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Both have argued that the difference between such convent households and the lay households of aristocratic women may not have been very great, and indeed that books regularly passed between them.

<sup>84</sup>This image of fathers sending their daughters to school anticipates the historical development that Michael Van Cleave Alexander attributes mainly to Thomas More, whose school for his daughters included Latin grammar and expanded to include others in the early sixteenth century. See Alexander, *The Growth of English Education, 1348–1648: A Social and Cultural History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 81–82. There is little evidence for regular grammar schooling for girls in the fourteenth century, but it does seem clear that either in individual households or in nunneries aristocratic girls received some education in vernacular and even the Latin

lished the school, “al the lond unto hir secheth / Of yonge women forto liere” (1496–97).<sup>85</sup> The new educational community draws from the whole land, suggesting a diverse public world. Moreover, the school focuses on the multiple *desires* of her pupils: “Now comen tho that comen wolde / Of wommen in her lusty youthe” (1480–81). The fathers’ wishes authorize those of the daughters, who arrive in a state of intellectual desire to which Thaise responds with various disciplines, teaching music to some, proverbs and questions to others.

The school stages Thaise’s adaptation to social circumstances. The image of female schooling suggests a female audience reflective of the communal nature of reading among women in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.<sup>86</sup> But again, Gower’s notion of the eloquent woman is essentially an idealizing fiction. When he creates Thaise’s peculiarly female institution, rather than advocating female education, he draws upon a relatively familiar picture of communal reading in order to idealize the *image* of female institutional literacy. Indeed, Thaise’s adaptation to Mitelene’s mercantile ethos resembles Gower’s adaptation of his material to the wider audience that will appreciate his new style of English poetry. Her school, which teaches the disciplines she will later teach to her mourning father, depicts the structuring, even foundational function of audiences, with their novelty, variety, and eagerness to learn.<sup>87</sup>

Thaise’s female community, then, figures innovation itself: her school demonstrates and carries out the purpose of romance, which renews its dark beginnings by turning over repeated motifs to new interpretations. The readaptation of incest motifs reaches its climax when Apollonius, believing the false account of his daughter’s death at Tharsis, reenacts

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psalter (Orme, *Education and Society*, pp. 170, 175; Moran, *Growth of English Schooling*, pp. 69–70).

<sup>85</sup> In other versions of the tale, Thaise (Tarsia) saves herself at first by telling her story to inspire pity in her potential sexual customers. Having avoided rape, she then earns money for her pimp by performing on the lyre in public and expounding upon philosophical questions (HA 34–36; GR 287–88; Godfrey 141–44). Only in Gower does Apollonius explicitly order her to be educated, “set to bokes lore” (1300), when he leaves her in Tharsis.

<sup>86</sup> Riddy suggests ways in which regular reading aloud formed a “reading community” for many women during the period (110–11); see also Mary Erler and Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> Bullón-Fernández similarly stresses Thaise’s public function in this section of the story, arguing that “language as a social act displaces the threat of illegitimate sexuality,” revising Antiochus’s daughter’s passivity (55).

the circumstances of Antiochan grief: he flees his ship's cabin and goes below, where "for the conseil of noman / Ayein therinne he nolde come" (1602–3). The pressure of misfortune has destroyed his precarious respect for counsel; when the ship drifts to Mitelene, he will not even greet the king, Athenagoras. This complete rejection of community brings to a head the story's divisions between singular desires and common profit. Apollonius is in danger of that animal regression that made the incestuous father look like the "Cok among the Hennes."<sup>88</sup> But unlike Antiochus, Apollonius will listen to the therapeutic narrative of lineage that Thaise tells him, which, properly understood, repeats but extends his own life's events.

Like the analyst in response to transference, Thaise both encourages Apollonius's expressions of desire and redirects them. Athenagoras sends the renowned teacher to coax the silent stranger with her scholarly puzzles and riddles.<sup>89</sup> When the resistant Apollonius finally asks her to leave, Thaise refuses to depart at his bidding. If royal power relies on the king's capacity to make his word law, then Thaise's refusal takes up his own and turns it around: his words are not the words of a king, so she will not allow him to command her:

Bot as a madd man ate laste  
 His heved wepende away he caste,  
 And half in wraththe he bad hire go.  
 Bot yit sche wolde noght do so,  
 And in the derke forth sche goth,  
 Til sche him toucheth, and he wroth,  
 And after hire with his hond  
 He smot: and thus whan sche him fond  
 Desesed, courtaisly sche saide,  
 "Avoi, mi lord, I am a Maide;  
 And if ye wiste what I am,  
 And out of what lignage I cam,  
 Ye wolde noght be so salvage."

(1687–99)

<sup>88</sup>On the romance protagonist's descent away from his own identity (understood dynastically) into a kind of amnesia, and even animal metamorphosis, see Frye, *Secular Scripture*, pp. 95–126. "At the bottom is a memory which can only be returned to, a closed circle of recurrence; at the top is the recreation of memory" (183).

<sup>89</sup>In HA and GR, Athenagoras begins to figure out that Tarsia is Apollonius's daughter before he sends her in (HA 40; GR 289).

A number of critics have pointed out that Apollonius's rage and physical violence echo that of Antiochus; the enjambment of lines 1693–94 opens a brief space in which the activity of the prince's hand in the darkness is left to the reader's imagination.<sup>90</sup> Yet whereas Antiochus's riddle hid his crime, Thaise's narrative reveals her identity: she has a story, and suggests that the king learn to interpret it. In contrast to his Latin sources, where Thaise reveals her identity through riddles, Gower turns enigma into plain narration.<sup>91</sup> Her new narrative, in turn, "actualizes the past in symbolic form, so that it can be replayed to a more successful outcome."<sup>92</sup> Thaise teaches her father to interpret properly because she interprets his silence and rejection as itself an episode in a narrative—a contingent response rather than permanent separation. This mutual interpretive activity enables the series of adjustments that will result in recognition.

Genius governs the audience's response throughout this scene, undercutting the sense of precariousness that defined so many earlier revisions of incest. He establishes the entanglement of Apollonius's fate with that of Mitelene at a cosmic level: in the storm that drives Apollonius to his daughter's island, he is forced to follow Neptune's law (1595), and when he arrives the citizens of Mitelene are holding "hihe festes of Neptune" (1614) on the beach. Such gestures limit contingency by imposing a retrospective order on events. More concretely, the audience's foreknowledge is compounded by a reminder that Thaise at first knows nothing of the strange king's identity, even though readers do (1603). Genius assures us before the two have even recognized each other, "Bot of hem tuo a man mai liere / What is to be so sibb of blod" (1702–3). We are essentially guaranteed a successful recognition scene.

But we do not get it. Thaise begins her own story, a story she has told no one else except "this lord al one" (1728), but except for the potentially incestuous "he tho toke hire in his arm" (1732), Genius quickly removes the narrative into the realm of proverbial generality, where the "joie" of father and daughter illustrates the vicissitudes of

<sup>90</sup>I have made this observation before, in "Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble With Reading," *ELH* 63 (1997): 627–55 (638).

<sup>91</sup>Arthur Heiserman, *The Novel Before the Novel*, remarks that, in HA, "The recognition finally comes when Tarsia abandons art and weeps out her story in such prosaic detail that even her father cannot avoid seeing that this beautiful prostitute is his daughter" (215).

<sup>92</sup>Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 235.

Fortune: "So goth the world, now wo, now wel" (1738).<sup>93</sup> The gap at the recognition scene reminds us that plot, like Fortune's wheel, can always revert to the horrible origin, even as it moves toward renovation and what Brooks calls "lucid repose."<sup>94</sup> The end of Apollonius's isolation depends on his correct interpretation of the natural kinship bond. In the process of turning one thing into another, however, plot does not ultimately guarantee successful establishment of family and community; instead, Genius calls upon his audience to write the climax of Apollonius's plot ourselves—to distinguish between repetition and cure. Thaise's educated eloquence both enacts and calls for a reading that avoids incest, giving audiences the tools with which to understand the recognition scene as different from incestuous tyranny. That the scene avoids detailed performance leaves the story's conclusion adaptable to the idiosyncrasies of audience imagination.

After rediscovering Thaise, Apollonius finds a nearly sacral "grace" (1739) that allows him to ascend "into the liht" (1741), toward lucidity and royal authority. His kingship depends, in the end, on his ability to emerge from isolated grief into the imaginative realm of common profit—to enter the "common place" of his role as king, where he and his closest subject, Thaise, apply exemplary kinship relations to the wider political world. His kingship depends, that is, upon submission to his audience's influence. Thematically, the story's resolution here, in the public space of Mitelene, further depends upon the exogamy of Thaise, who, at her father's consent, promptly marries Athenagoras.

At first, the elision of an intimate recognition scene may disappoint; this is the kind of narration that gives Gower his reputation as a smooth and even skillful, but at times rather flat storyteller. Apollonius's reunion with his wife exhibits a fuller drama of recognition—she swoons upon hearing his voice and calls him husband, whereupon he "knew hire anon" (1862). But the story ends with a generalized account of Apollonius as ideal king. There are narrative and political reasons for the tactfulness of the recognition scene with the daughter and the distancing effects of the end of the tale. Gower calls attention to the necessity for audience involvement in the story's process of clarification, but

<sup>93</sup> Others have remarked on the recursive character of the recognition scene; Heiserman writes, "When the relationship between man and whore coincides with that between father and daughter, the tensions always sought by romances to vivify the paradoxical recognition and reversal become especially pleasing" (215).

<sup>94</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 61.

without enforcing particular audience response.<sup>95</sup> Familial and monarchical social bonds are not simply reestablished but also, because the language of the conclusion is impersonal, rendered natural. Apollonius's royal authority reaches past the circumstances of loss toward an image of steady, universal power.

When Genius depicts the recognition scene as an act of mutual interpretation, he implies that proper interpretation lies at the heart of moral experience, which grounds all political action. Amans, of course, responds by rebelling against the story of a sin he has never committed. In contrast to Thaise's recognition of contingency and change, he insists upon the consistency of his love (he puts all his love "in o place"). He complains that Genius has, from the beginning, misunderstood his situation: "Mi wo to you is bot a game, / That fielen noight of that I fiele" (2152–53). Disillusioned with stories, he is also impotent when it comes to rhetorical invention: no matter how many "thousand wordes on a rowe" (2050) he speaks to his lady, he says, her refusal overthrows them all. He wants advice on how to win her; the narrative dilations of the Apollonius story do not provide an instrument for success in love; the story does not rewrite *his own* story. Slowly, though, he learns that his resistance has disabled the affair, precisely because love demands a distinction between the lover's experience and the "love story"—or between the idealizing self and the actual beloved. When Amans recognizes his impropriety, he becomes reduced to his specific, mortal experience as John Gower, the poet looking at his aging self in Venus's harsh mirror.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup>On the liberation of readers available through the *Confessio's* framework, see Kurt Olsson, "Rhetoric, John Gower, and the Late Medieval Exemplum," *M&H*, n.s. 8 (1977): 185–200.

<sup>96</sup>Even those critics inclined to argue that the *Confessio* strives for a single, specific, coherent goal rarely find that goal clearly articulated. Minnis writes, "But what is the total effect of the ending of the *Confessio Amantis*; how can we gauge Gower's shifting tone? . . . human love . . . is being celebrated even as it is being left behind, and in face of all the moral imperatives" ("*De Vulgari Auctoritate*," pp. 60–61). For Wetherbee, although Genius provides some moral answers, "the project of the poem can never be brought to a satisfactory resolution, and must finally be abandoned. . . . it is [still] as if the instinctual energy of his verse were turning back toward the opening of the poem" ("Latin Structure and Vernacular Space," p. 31). Similar comments can be found in Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 262–68. Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), argues that concluding self-recognition allows Gower to see the design of events and order of the universe, despite the contingencies of love and "the elusiveness of moral certainty in our world" (394).

In this sense, the end of the *Confessio* becomes the story of John Gower's temporal existence: love becomes the stuff of memory. In the terms of transference, his unrequited love is the material that has finally been "worked through" and relegated to the past. In this context, we can look back on "Apollonius of Tyre" as the ultimate step in working through, a process to which readers are crucial. By emphasizing the fictive status of all the exempla compiled in the *Confessio*, "Apollonius" calls attention to its audience's involvement in the plot and, hence, in the structure of relations between authority and subject. Far from modeling exactly how readers should conduct themselves, subjecting them to morals, the story mediates on how readers garner authority and make therapeutic contributions to meaning. In the gap between incest and recognition lies the "exogamous" ethical work of reading, the confrontation of narrative changes as they unfold through time. Moral understanding thus comes to resemble textual repetition at its most generative: readers, rather than mirroring characters, reconceive them. For Gower, the efficacy of exemplary fiction depends upon an audience conscious of narrative desire. Looked at in this way, it is no wonder that he depicts his audience as a lover and fills his book with love stories.

When, in "Apollonius," Genius depicts readers not only as lovers or kings but women as well, the possibilities for novel and various readings increase dramatically. Nevertheless, the *Confessio* ends by reincorporating such variety. Because Genius emphasizes Thaise's education as an instrument of monarchy, "Apollonius" seems designed to argue for the normative benefits of female influence. Anxiety about new readership of many kinds was evident in fourteenth-century English texts, from conduct books seeking *gentil* audiences to mirrors for princes seeking to harmonize the will of king and subjects. In response to the possibilities of wayward reading, Gower's figure of what David Wallace calls "female eloquence" renders beneficial these potentially threatening new audiences.<sup>97</sup> Gower ends the *Confessio*, then, by realizing a form of feminine invention—and a shape for feminine desire—that calls attention to the affirmative possibilities of innovative vernacular reception. The various audiences featured in Thaise's school suggest that education perpetuates multiple desires in a "common place," drawing community together. Within the story's plot, then, female eloquence serves to confirm the

<sup>97</sup> Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 212–46. Bullón-Fernández argues that eloquence defines many of Gower's female characters throughout the *Confessio*.

communal ties that give fathers and monarchs hierarchical power.<sup>98</sup> Still, that power—and the authority of the narrative about its development—also depends intimately upon the experimentation, and the transformative influence, of its therapeutic audiences.

In the end, Gower imagines female audience hypothetically, and registers innovation in the explicitly fictive realm of romance. The central feminine audience of the *Confessio*—the beloved—never achieves the affirmative power hypothesized for Thaise in “Apollonius of Tyre.” As Kurt Olsson has it, Amans’s self-recognition in the end depends upon his dawning understanding that, in fact, his beloved has a separate existence and is not subject to his desires.<sup>99</sup> It seems to me that Gower makes “Apollonius” an imaginative experiment in cultivating an audience’s autonomy in order to appropriate it to socially affirmative ends. In Gower’s hands, the story investigates how the desires of those outside the self might be brought to bear on the ethical deployment of patriarchal power—an investigation that finally gestures beyond what the poem as a whole is able to achieve. Yet, if female eloquence can be an idealizing fiction only within the bounds of romance, and if the mental integration of Amans/Gower finally omits the lady entirely, nevertheless Gower has raised the serious possibility that newfangled audiences might contribute to the common good.

<sup>98</sup> Watt is similarly guarded about the affirmative nature of the tale’s ending, finding in it an allegory of Richard II’s failure to listen to good counsel; for her “it is far from clear that [Apollonius] has learnt much along the way” (207).

<sup>99</sup> Olsson, “Love, Intimacy, and Gower,” p. 99.