BULLÓN-FERNÁNDEZ, María 2000: *Fathers and daughters in Gower's* Confessio Amantis. Woodbridge: Brewer. Publications of the John Gower Society, volume 5. viii + 241 pp. $90.00/ €90.00.

This is a book worth reading for several reasons, and I hope it will set an example for many other scholars in the medieval field. I must confess that when I received it I was first quite taken aback by its title, as I expected it would unwind into a long and complex series of biased revisionist attitudes towards Gower. It is not. It is a well-argued, very well documented and academically sound piece of critical scholarship, and I think it deserves not just this sort of praise, but also some gratulatory words.

First, because it is not an archetypal feminist-polarised review of Gower's attitudes and ideology in his *Confessio,* although the author uses very wisely updated and contrasted feminist theories for most of its pages. Second, because it is never anachronistic: both the poem and the author are always carefully set in their historical and literary context, and while many logical excursions into other authors and periods are present in the different sections, I have not been able to detect any serious delectation in revising Gower from a contemporary-biased position. When we deal with the fourteen and fifteen hundreds many people tend to forget that society was considerably different then, and that moral judgement should best be relegated to a conveniently private discussion rather than aired with postmodern and postfeminist (maybe post feministic?) approaches.

Third: its integrity and coherence. Though several parts of the book: in chapters numbers two and four (see what the author says on pages viii, 75 & 158), and no less than in two sections of the first and fifth chapters ("Fathers and daughters: defining authority", pages 1-41; and "Textual Fathers and Textual Daughters: The 'Tale of Rosiphelee'..., pages 177-189), namely those devoted to the Tale of Rosiphelee and to the Tale of Apollonius (pages 45–64), were previously published in 1993, 1994 (also reissued in 1999), 1995, and 1998, they were rewritten in such a way that the book has an absolute continuity in its main themes. This is no mean achievement, as we are accustomed to finding many scholarly books whose miscellaneous and do-it-yourself origins betray a last minute rush of sending the original to the

publisher without proper editing. María Bullón-Fernández has managed to avoid that and to have a group of mentors and advisers who have helped her to reach a remarkable book.

Fourth: the author demonstrates an extensive comparativistic approach that shows true erudition and an excellent use of references, both modern and, very especially, early ones. All in all, if one is to find some minor element for criticism, there may be several footnotes whose purpose is merely referential (bibliographical information), that might have been incorporated into the main text (for instance notes 11 and 12 –page 5- in chapter one are the first non essential ones that the reader finds). However, most of the information, secondary discussion, amplification or debate contained in the footnotes tends to be interesting.

Fifth: despite its price, it is likely to become core reading for any Gower student and fundamental reading for most scholars devoted to the later medieval literatures. I could add some five or six other reasons of a more detailed and subtle importance for the strenuous medievalist, but I think these five may suffice as for now.

This monograph: *Fathers and daughters in Gower's* Confessio Amantis, also has a very revealing subtitle: *Authority, Family, State and Writing*. And as it promises, the four issues are discussed thoroughly and at sufficient length. It has five main sections: Defining Authority (pages 1-41), Redeeming Daughters (pages 42-101), Supplantation and Exchange (pages 102-129), Limiting Authority (pages 130-172), and a very noticeable last chapter: Textual Fathers and Textual Daughters (pages 173-215). A bibliography (pages 217-234), and then a names index and a topics index (pages 235-241) close the volume. The book is well balanced, and the publishers have taken great care: there are very few errata, such as for example the order of Howard Bloch's cited works on page 220, or an "s" missing in Johns Hopkins in the data for Elborg Forster's 1978 English translation of George Duby's *Medieval Marriage* (page 223). The structure of the volume is simple: a long introductory chapter (but summarising as well: hence that my discussion below will be centred on it), and then four chapters that present, exemplify and explain all the possible attitudes and

types of incest including fathers and daughters to be found in the different parts of Gower's *Confessio.*

Chapter 1: *Fathers and Daughters: defining authority* (pages 1-41), has these sections: [Introduction (pages 1-5)] It is not indicated as an introduction, but that is what those pages are. Then, "Discourse, Incest, and the Law" (pages 5-17); "Fathers and Daughters, Kings and Subjects: Familial and Political Authority" (pages 17-29); "Gender, the Private, and the Public" (pages 29-33); "Textual Authority" (pages 33-41); and, again without a label, the last part could be titled [Organization (pages 38-41)].

Chapter 2: *Redeeming Daughters: Thaise, Peronelle and Constance* (pages 42-101), is the first case study and collection of exemplary samples. It is headed by an "Introduction" (pages 42-45); and then three tales are discussed: "The Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" (pages 45-64), devoted to Thaise's exploits (it is significant to mention that the French poet François Villon also wrote poems to Thaïs some decades later); "The Tale of the Three Questions" (pages 64-75) where King Alphonse and his daughter Peronelle contend on the virtue and intelligence of Petro, the model knight; and finally "The Tale of Constance" (pages 75-101) where, especially if we confer it with Chaucer's own version, Constance symbolises the Church, and Bullón-Fernández very intelligently brings Julia Kristeva's interpretations on Christ and His Mother to her support of Gower's feminisation of the *Ecclesia.*

Chapter 3: Fathers as Husbands, Husbands as Fathers: Supplantation and Exchange in the "Tale of the false bachelor" and the "Tale of Albinus and Rosemund" (pages 102-129), is built on two stories, and is the shortest section in the book, as it deals (mainly) with the problems of supplantation and envy and their rather gruesome consequences on the self and identity, and ambiguity and the perils of both misunderstanding and drinking (in a way: the Bibe cum patre tuo is also a wink towards the excesses of power). Its structure is simple: an "Introduction" (pages 102-104); and then "The Tale of the False Bachelor" (pages 104-115); followed by "The Tale of Albinus and Rosemund" (pages 115-129).

Chapter 4: *Limiting Authority: Leucothoe, Virginia, and Canace* (pages 130-172), as in the cases of chapters two and five, also deals with three tales. It is

headed by an express "Introduction" (pages 130-133); and immediately we are confronted with "The Tale of Leucothoe" (pages 134-145); "The Tale of Virginia" (pages 145-157), a staple in many medieval works dealing with public and private affairs in a wider political context: it is the sad story of Virginius (father), his daughter Virginia and the wicked Roman Apius Claudius (a king in the tale), and how Virginius and Virginia react when the father thinks that the king has exceeded his authority and that a subject is not a serf or mere property. The crucial part of the plot, however, is that Claudius, acting as a tyrant, tries to have Virginia and deprive her of her virginity without her father's consent. Finally we find "The Tale of Canace and Machaire" (pages 158-172), a tale also about the limits of authority, but a tale where the heroine, Canace, seems to challenge her father's authority rather than that of the ruler. The tale questions his right to order her to kill herself, even though she has committed incest with her brother.

Chapter 5: Textual Fathers and Textual Daughters: The "Tale of Rosiphelee," the "Tale of Jephthah's Daughter," and "Pygmaleon and the statue." (pages 173-215) finally analyses the father-son-like relationship of Genius and Amans, and centrally Bullón-Fernández's main thesis –as I see it- of the author as father, the text as a daughter, and the act of writing (or narrating) as a transgression of the cultural establishment as Gower does not want to commit himself and tries to stand apart from other more outspoken contemporary colleagues. However, the author herself is likely to contend otherwise and say that the book does not argue that writing is a transgression of the cultural establishment, or that Gower wants to stand apart from his contemporary colleagues, i.e., that indeed Gower wants writing (narrating) to become a major voice that influences political decisions. The "Introduction" (pages 173-177) helps us to remember Gower's position of authority as creator or giver of live, and the narration's (semi?)ancillary status. All that is illustrated by "The Tale of Rosiphelee" (pages 177-189); "The Tale of Jephthah's Daughter" (pages 189-199), the only biblical story in this study; and "Pygmaleon and the statue" (pages 199-215), where Pygmaleon is presented by Bullón-Fernández as the confessor and the statue the confessant, in clear parallel with Genius and Amans on the one hand and Gower and his narratio on the other. In this Gower departs from other sources (Ovid, Le Roman de la Rose...), and Genius/Pygmaleon are

implicated in the desire of creation that they are trying to regulate. That both fall in love with their creation, and as their creation is part of themselves, is the sort of Narcissism that Bullón-Fernández enhances by a whole set of references and comparisons with the tradition and forms of courtly love. Both characters are blind to the structures of "authority and the incestuous implications involved in artistic creation" (p. 212). That both artists produce female offspring, and both are also husbands to their creatures. In the case of Pygmaleon, he exerts absolute power. However, Genius (or Gower?), Bullón-Fernández explains, self limits his voice and his dominion over his text.

The book as a whole deals with the problem of incest presenting both literary and historical evidence for that sort of problem when siblings and fathers and daughters are involved. The mother/son problem is atoned (but dealt with) as the election of Elektras rather than Oedipuses is more in connection with what Bullón-Fernández labels as "discourse, incest and the law." She presents the Christian canonical position and points out very significantly that Genius' position as a priest is what allows Gower the poet to defend confession as a means of instructing Amans. As a result of this suasory attitude, a section on lechery and its subdivisions according to medieval catechisms follow suit. That Genius explains to Amans that sibling incest was "the necessity of times", and that incest and sexual desire precede taboo, is first discussed by using the story of the Flood and the "naturalness" of incest. This historical development from the times in which there were no laws against incest through Abraham's time implies evolution. Siblings are now forbidden fruit, but one may resort to cousins. The convenience of "acts against kynde" is now discussed and Genius becomes some sort of Lévi-Strauss, Rubin and other feminist critics, Butler... I have found particularly becoming the way in which Bullón-Fernández deals with the issues of homosexuality and heterosexuality when she explains how Genius has used the stories and metamorphoses of Narcissus and Iphis. As one may have expected, Genius promotes procreative sexuality –and the author procrastinates a little bit by commenting on the point that creative writing and the exchange of words can be compared to the exchange of women.

This leads to the immediate discussion of familial and political authority, and hence to the expounding of the Tale of Apollonius as an example of the subjection of woman in marriage in accordance with canon law. The public and private spheres, the views on the self and society are brought to the front while Bullón-Fernández implements how the performative power of language taboo subverts ideology in Gower's discourse. While incest can remain as a family matter, once that family has social power, the case becomes public. Now we are to find the implications applied to the case of king Richard II. Gower argues that tyrants can be deposed (?), or at least this is my reading of Bullón-Fernández's interpretation. And if the *Confessio* was in the make around 1390, Richard II had had lots of trouble with his subjects. From the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 to his legislative and financial policy in 1397-1399 that ultimately might have led to his deposition by his cousin. Richard II's refusal to comply with the law turned him into a tyrant… and doing away with tyrannical moods is allowed… or this is what I gather from this book. However, I may be wrong or have read those pages too fast. If Gower was a clerk in 1390, I wonder whether all this issue may be an extrapolated anticipation of what we find later on pages 37-38. Especially as Bullón-Fernández now leads us towards the argument that the King is a father (to his children and to his people), and that regal rules (applicable to daughters and subjects) complement political rules (that govern the relations of the king and his wife together with his relation to the land). This is very well argued and Bullón-Fernández most convincingly presents the fact that the queen (or a woman) is a land to be governed without oppression; just the same as family relations are similar to those in between king and nation. That the king must be a loving and caring father to his children, or a good and faithful husband to his queen is not just medieval politics: it is something that Bullón-Fernández brings forward from her reading of Genius's teachings.

In the same way that government has been illustrated in the private and the public arenas, gender is now brought forth. This is introduced by the contention of textual authority (although the author discusses this at length in the last chapter), where Genius has become the narrative voice, and hence leads the development of the plot and the story, and Amans a devoted audience. Bullón-Fernández quite cleverly wishes to avoid incongruities at

this point and advances her idea that Gower has used "divided counsel" by using Genius as the leading voice, but keeping control as author and thus conducting the exhortative aim of the poem. Bullón-Fernández transforms the argument by proving that Gower is exploring textual authority, and hence both Amans (internally) and Gower (externally) question Genius's *auctoritas.* If Genius can be considered (page 35) as Gower in his priestlike manner, when Amans' name is disclosed, we learn that he is called John Gower, and in such a way Gower, the author, becomes a character. Bullón-Fernández proves her point very well: Gower is both *auctor* and *persona* (even *personae).* So, the text is similar to the author's daughter and performs a feminine role (page 37, also, expanded in pages 199ff.). The ultimate result, a brilliant thesis in this book: Gower refuses to create one auctorial voice because, as a father to his text, he does not want to commit incest with his literary daughter.

A final explanation of the organization of the book (pages 38-41) closes this introductory section where the author has raised a multitude of expectations. Her last paragraph here summarises most of what will be expounded (page 41):

> This book asks why Gower raises the spectre of incest, but, more crucially, it also asks why fathers and daughters are so central to some of the most significant tales in his Middle English poem... Due to the hierarchical and gendered character of this relationship, this type of incest enables Gower to explore the boundaries of power and authority in different, though interrelated, spheres, and to raise questions about power, subordination, and the limits of the authority figure...

Together with what I have found most interesting: Bullón-Fernández does not just ask questions: she answers them quite deftly. The author has also been able to demonstrate that Genius' authority and Amans' questioning are a rather sharp and double-edged razor with which the author shows how "Gower's own anxieties about his relationship with his own text" (page 41) work as the underlying leit-motif in the *Confession.* The fatherly authority of the author/narrator/character is ultimately contested by the model of personal and social hierarchy in Gower's life and in Gower's society. An enjoyable book. Read on.

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