

My Family First: Draft-dodging Parents in the *Confessio Amantis***Lauren Kiefer**

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is difficult to pigeonhole: a late fourteenth-century Middle English text, it is at once a social complaint, a romance, a dream vision, a penitential manual, and a mirror for princes. Within the text, a social complaint frames a dialogue between a Lover and Genius, the priest of Venus, in which the Lover confesses his sins against love. That dialogue in turn frames over one hundred *exempla*, or moralized tales, each illustrating a particular sin against love. Book Seven of the *Confessio*, however, focuses on the education of Alexander and the arts of kingship. As Kurt Olsson has observed, the *Confessio*'s aggregation of genres and emphases creates more than one dialectic within the poem.¹ Recent criticism has suggested three oppositions within the poem: the political versus the personal realm,² the Christian versus the secular realm,³ and the ethical versus the poetic realm.⁴ While acknowledging the presence of other voices within the poem, this paper will focus on the *Confessio*'s secular voice: the voice that complains of the division that plagues fourteenth-century England, and dreams of seeing that division replaced by love. This voice, which I associate with the implied author, is deeply concerned by the unravelling of human bonds, represented in their most basic form by the nuclear family.

"Love is falle into discord," Gower complains at the beginning of the *Confessio*.⁵ In particular, Gower shows how war perverts love. For example, Genius asserts that the Crusades pervert the love of Christ, who bought all other men with his death "In tokne of parfit charite" (3.2496). Whereas Christ died to free men, and His apostles died to spread faith in Christ, the Church in Gower's time is killing others. As a result, many of those who were won to Christ's faith have gone astray, and "The charite wherof we prechen" has become "noght worth a Stree" (3.2538-39). Instead, "mai men se moerdre and manslawhte / Lich as it was be daies olde," before Christ walked the earth (3.2544-45).⁶ But Gower does more than just tell us that war is wrong. In many of his *exempla*, Gower shows us how war drives apart families and perverts parental love into deception and violence. The three most vivid examples of this perversion revolve around the figure of Ulysses: they are "King Namplus and the Greeks" (3.973-1083), "Nauplus and Ulysses" (4.1815-96), and "Achilles and Deidamia" (5.2961-3201). Gower borrows all three tales from medieval traditions concerning the Trojan War. Thus, all three tales traditionally depict violence. In addition, all three traditionally implicate Ulysses, the Trojan hero known for deception. However, Gower alone creates a particular emphasis on families and children, by making key changes in the central story.

The medieval tradition from which Gower's stories arise begins with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Ajax accuses Ulysses of framing Palamedes, another Greek soldier. According to Ajax, Ulysses accused Palamedes of betraying the Greeks for money, and cemented the charge by planting the money in Palamedes's quarters. Treacherous Ulysses was "male convicti nimium memor iste furoris" ("Too mindful of madness unfortunately exposed"), Ajax claims.⁷ The details of Ulysses's "exposed madness" appear in Hyginus's *Fabulae*, a first-century B.C. compilation of traditional stories. Here, we see that Ulysses was a draft-dodger, aiming for an exemption on the grounds of mental instability:

Agamemnon et Menelaus Atrei filii cum ad Troiam oppugnandam coniuratos duces ducerent, in insulam Ithacam ad Vlixem Laertis filium uenerunt, cui erat responsum, si ad Troiam isset, post uicesimum annum solum sociis perditis egentem domum rediturum. (5) 2. itaque cum sciret ad se oratores uenturos, insaniam simulans pileum sumpsit et equum cum boue iunxit ad aratrum. quem Palamedes ut uidit, sensit simulare atque Telemachum filium eius cunis sublatum aratro ei subiecit et ait, Simulatione deposita inter coniuratos ueni. tunc Vlixes fidem dedit se uenturum; ex eo Palamedi (10) infestus fuit.⁸

(When Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus, were leading the princes who had sworn together to attack Troy, they came to Ithaca, to Ulysses, the son of Laertes, to whom it had been reported, that if he went to Troy, he would return home after twenty years alone, lacking any companions. Therefore, when

he knew that those making the request were coming, feigning insanity he put on a dunce cap and yoked a horse with an ox to his plow. When Palamedes saw him, he sensed that he was faking and having lifted Ulysses's son Telemachus from the cradle, threw him beneath the plow, and said, "Having laid aside fakery, I have come with those who have sworn together." Then Ulysses pledged that he would come; from that time on, he was hostile to Palamedes.)

This story becomes Gower's "Nauplius and Ulysses," a central story in the *Confessio's* series of tales about Ulysses. Gower makes a few visual changes to the story: the dunce cap disappears, and the cow and the horse become foxes. However, Gower's most important revisions involve Ulysses's motivations and the identity of his recruiting officer.

In Gower's version, Ulysses has not been told that he will return home alone after twenty years. Instead, the *Confessio* specifically tells us that he loves his wife too much: when the Greeks come to take him to Troy, "Anon upon Penelope / His wif, whom that he loveth hote, / Thenkende, wolde hem noht behote" (4.1822-24). In addition, Gower specifically describes Ulysses drawing his plough aside for his child, a detail Hyginus omits (4.1854-55). Gower thus creates a symmetrical pair of motivations for Ulysses: he dodges the draft out of love for his wife, but succumbs to the draft out of love for his child. Unlike Hyginus's Ulysses, Gower's protagonist always thinks first of his family.

This portrait of Ulysses as a family man does not originate with the *Confessio*. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ulysses blames his hesitation on his wife, classing himself with the great Achilles to make his case seem sounder: "me pia detinuit coniunx, pia mater Achillem, / primaque sunt illis data tempora, cetera vobis" ("An affectionate wife held me back; an affectionate mother held back Achilles. The first days were given to them, the rest to you").⁹ Thus, Ovid's Ulysses also weighs duty to family against duty to comrades. But Gower makes the relationship between the family and the military more adversarial than Ovid does, by making one key change in the traditional story. In Gower's version, it is not Palamedes but Palamedes's father, Nauplius, who drags Ulysses off to war. In other words, Gower pits the two fathers against one another.

The true significance of this revision becomes apparent when we remember that Ulysses is responsible for the death of Palamedes. The story of Ulysses's treachery against Palamedes would have been known to medieval audiences even if it had appeared only in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In fact, though, versions of the story found their way into a wide variety of texts, including Dictys of Crete's *Ephemerides Belli Troiani*, Servius's commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, Lactantius Placidus's commentary on Statius's *Achilleid*, Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*, Beno t de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, and Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*. Several of these authors describe the betrayal as Ulysses's revenge on Palamedes for drafting him. While Hyginus tells the two stories separately, Servius and Lactantius conflate them into one,¹⁰ and Pierre Bersuire even has Palamedes seek advice from Ulysses, and then blames Palamedes for not being more wary: "Potest etiam dici quod fatuum est quod homo illi cui nocuit se committat vel ab eo consilium petat" ("It can also be said that he is foolish who entrusts himself to a man whom he has harmed, or seeks advice from that man").¹¹ By changing the identity of Ulysses's recruiting officer from Palamedes ("Palamades" in the *Confessio*) to his father Nauplius ("Nauplius" in *Confessio* Book Four; "Namplus" in *Confessio* Three), Gower replaces the pair of tricksters with a pair of devoted fathers.

That Nauplius is just as devoted to his son Palamades as Ulysses is to his son Telemachus, becomes clear in "King Namplus and the Greeks," another of Gower's tales concerning Ulysses. Here again, Gower gives a traditional story a fresh emphasis. The story on which "King Namplus" is based once again appears as a brief allusion in the *Metamorphoses*, where Diomedes speaks of "cumulumque Capherea cladis" ("Caphereus [Nauplius's homeland], the peak of our destruction").¹² The full story appears again in Hyginus: because Locrian Ajax has dragged Cassandra from Pallas's temple, a storm and adverse waves arise, in which Ajax is struck by lightning, and as the rest of the sailors pray to the gods,

Nauplius audiuit sensitque tempus uenisse ad persequendas filii sui Palamedis iniurias. 3. itaque tamquam auxilium eis afferret, facem ardentem eo loco extulit quo saxa acuta et locus periculosissimus erat; illi credentes humanitatis causa id factum nauis eo duxerunt, quo facto plurimae earum confractae sunt mili(5)tesque plurimi cum ducibus tempestate occisi sunt membraque eorum cum uisceribus ad saxa illisa sunt; si qui autem potuerunt ad terram natate, a Nauplio interficiebantur.¹³
(Nauplius heard and felt the time had come to avenge the injuries of his son Palamedes. Therefore, as if

he were offering them help, he raised a burning torch on the very spot where there were sharp rocks and the most dangerous place; believing it had been done out of humanity, they directed their ship there, through which act many of them were smashed to pieces, and many soldiers along with their leaders died in the storm, and their limbs were dashed against the rocks along with their guts; and if any were able to swim to shore, Nauplius killed them.)

As with "Nauplius and Ulysses," Gower interrupts Hyginus's tale to paint a brief family portrait. Here, in the very middle of the storm, when "The See bet in on every side" (3.997), we suddenly learn that "it fell thilke time thus" (3.1001) that there was a king named Namplius,

and he a Sone hadde,
At Troie which the Gregois ladde,
As he that was mad Prince of alle,
Til that fortune let him falle:
His name was Palamades. (3.1003-07)

The story as a whole does not require that we know of Palamades's stature among the Greeks at Troy, or even of his name; what Gower is doing in these lines is creating a new motivation for Nauplius's savagery, by allowing us to feel his pride in his son's accomplishments. The ensuing lines depict Palamades's death as his father might see it, and his father's inevitable reaction:

Bot thurgh an hate natheles
Of some of hem his deth was cast
And he be tresoun overcast.
His fader, whan he herde it telle,
He swor, if evere his time felle,
He wolde him venge, if that he mihte,
And therto his avou behihte. (3.1008-14)

When Gower describes Namplius hearing the story of his son's death, the preceding lines take on a new meaning. The omissions are the omissions of a sympathetic messenger, speaking to a grieving father: Palamades's death becomes a result of vague hatred and treason, rather than of any action of Palamades's. Unlike Hyginus's Nauplius, Gower's Namplius decides on vengeance not as the occasion arises, but there and then, on learning of the news, and he nurtures his hatred for a long time afterwards: "And thus this king thurgh prive hate / Abod upon await algate" (3.1015-16).

In Gower's "King Namplius and the Greeks," we see how war turns a father's love to hatred. However, in "Nauplius and Ulysses," we see war make that same loving father willing to jeopardize the life of another man's son. Like Hyginus's Palamedes, Gower's Nauplius knows immediately that Ulysses's insanity is merely feigned; Gower says that "Nauplius, which the cause kniew, / Ayein the sleihte which he feigneth / An other sleihte anon ordeigneth" (4.1838-40), drawing on the traditional topos of the trickster tricked. By setting Ulysses's son in front of his plough, Nauplius "in such wise. . . thoghte assaie, / Hou it Ulixes scholde paie, / If that he were wod or non" (4.1848-50). The word "paie" is significant here: Nauplius is not so much testing Ulysses as "paying" him back, whether he is mad or not. The fervor of Nauplius's militarism at this point completely overwhelms any parental feeling he might have, as his concluding speech makes clear: it is "gret schame to a king," Nauplius declares (4.1862), when

Thou wolt in a querele of trowthe
Of armes thilke honour forsake,
And duelle at hom for loves sake:
For betre it were honour to winne
Than love, which likinge is inne. (4.1864-68)

Nevertheless, we see in "King Namplius and the Greeks" that Nauplius himself forsakes honor utterly when his own son's life is in question rather than someone else's. In fact, Nauplius's ruthless manipulation of parental love in Book Four--his attempt to make Ulysses "paie" in the service of militarism--sets off a chain of "payments" which ultimately includes not only Palamedes but Achilles.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ulysses answers Ajax's charge by pointing out that Achilles, too, dodged the draft: "Quid, quod me duri fugientem munera belli / arguit incepto serum accessisse labori / nec se magnanimo maledicere sentit Achilli?" ("What though he argues that, fleeing the wages of hard battle, I came late, when the toil had already begun? Does he not realize he is speaking ill of the great Achilles, as well?").¹⁴ As we saw, Ulysses goes on to explain that he was responding to his wife, while Achilles was responding to his mother. The full story of Achilles's draft-dodging for his mother unfolds when Ulysses takes credit for drafting Achilles:

Praescia venturi genetrix Nereia leti
dissimulat cultu natum, et deceperat omnes,
in quibus Aiacem, sumptae fallacia vestis:
arma ego femineis animum motura virilem
mercibus inserui, neque adhuc proiecerat heros
virgineos habitus, cum parmam hastamque tenenti
'nate dea,' dixi 'tibi se peritura reservant
Pergama! quid dubitas ingentem evertere Troiam?'¹⁵

(His mother the Nereid, foreseeing that he would come to his deathbed, hid her son with clothes, and had deceived everyone, Ajax included, with the trick of the clothes he put on: I slipped in with the feminine prizes arms that would move a manly heart, and although the hero had not yet put aside his maidenly garments, I said to him as he grabbed the shield and spear, "Son of a goddess, Pergamum, about to perish, is waiting for you! Why do you hesitate to overthrow great Troy?")

Drafted himself, Ulysses shows no compunction about drafting Achilles, who is also attempting to dodge the war.

In the *Confessio*'s version of the story, "Achilles and Deidamia," Gower once again emphasizes the toll that callous militarism takes on families. The title itself introduces a figure that Ovid's Ulysses does not bother to mention: Deidamia, the mother of Achilles's son. As with "Nauplius and Ulysses" and "King Namplius and the Greeks," Gower revises a traditional story to create an emphasis on familial bonds rather than on individual heroics or vice. Whereas "Nauplius" and "King Namplius" create a symmetric pair of fathers (Ulysses and Nauplius), "Achilles and Deidamia" creates two symmetric pairs: the pregnant young Deidamia is presented first as part of a pair of children (with Achilles) and then as part of a pair of mothers (with Thetis). At the beginning of the tale, we see the proud, protective love of Nauplius and Ulysses mirrored in Thetis and Lichomede (Deidamia's father). By the end, we see all three families (Thetis's, Lichomede's, and Achilles and Deidamia's) marred or destroyed by the ruthless tactics of Ulysses, a parent who, like Nauplius, has already been parted from his own child.

Even more than "Nauplius and Ulysses" and "King Namplius and the Greeks," "Achilles and Deidamia" lingers over family portraits. Gower begins by describing Thetis's protective stance towards her young son, "whom to kepe and warde, / Whil he was yong, as into warde, / Sche thoghte him safely to betake" (5.2963-65). Like Nauplius and Ulysses, though, Thetis is less scrupulous about other people's children. In her anxiety over her young boy's safety, Thetis lights upon another family in which to hide him: the family of Lichomede, a king with "faire dowhtres manyon" (5.2978). Already, we see the stage being set not for war but for marriage; and sure enough, Lichomede allows Achilles, "for Thetis his moder sake" (5.3044), to share living quarters with Deidamia, "His oghne dowhter, the eldeste, / The faireste and the comelieste / Of alle hise doghtres whiche he hadde" (5.3045-49). Unlike Ovid's version, Gower's tale lingers over the growing intimacy between Achilles and Deidamia, taking pains to emphasize the naturalness of their relationship. "Wher kinde wole himselve rihte, / After the Philosophres sein, / Ther mai no wiht be therayein," the narrator begins, and adds,

And that was thilke time seene.
The longe nyhtes hem betuene
Nature, which mai nocht forbere,
Hath mad hem bothe forto stere. (5.3058-64)

Six lines later, the militaristic Greeks intrude on this idyll with another "it befell" (5.3070. The word "fell" is also used to introduce deliberate violence in "King Namplius and the Greeks" [3.1002] and "Nauplius and Ulysses" [4.1841]). We

then hear of all their agonizing and councils, and finally of the stratagem described in Ovid, ending in the arming of Achilles. However, the narrator appends,

Lichomede nothing lowh,
Whan that he syh hou that it ferde,
For thanne he wiste wel and herde,
His dowhter hadde be forlein;
Bot that he was so oversein,
The wonder overgoth his wit. (5.3186-91)

Like Ulysses and Nauplius, Lichomede is struggling to protect his child in the face of forces beyond his control. In the ensuing lines, we see that war robs him of a son-in-law, Deidamia of a husband, and Pyrrhus of a father: Genius explains solemnly that "in Cronique is write yit / . . . / Hou that Achilles hath begete / Pirrus upon Deidamie" (5.3192-95), but then adds, "Bot that was nothing sene tho, / For he is to the Siege go / Forth with Ulixé and Diomede" (5.3199-201). The concluding moralization, "If o womman an other guile, / Wher is ther eny sikernesse?" (5.3204-05), fixes the story's emphasis squarely on the families left at home, rather than the warriors marching off to battle: it is Deidamia that is the true victim of guile, not Achilles.

All three "draft-dodging" tales--"King Namplus and the Greeks," "Nauplius and Ulysses," and "Achilles and Deidamia"--depict the way in which militarism perverts and sometimes destroys familial love. But these tales need not be viewed in isolation. Over the course of Books Three, Four and Five of the *Confessio*, Gower carefully builds a composite picture of the sort of pressures that society can exert upon the family, and the negative results that can ensue. For example, "King Namplus and the Greeks" forms a part of a larger series of tales in which love begets anger or hatred. In "Canace and Machaire" (3.143-335), a father's devotion to his daughter makes him finally hate her. In this story, the father's love turns to hatred when he discovers that his children have committed incest together. Rather than focus on the incest, though, Genius accuses the father of failing in his devotion to his daughter. According to Genius, "he which ladde his wrahthe so / Hath knowe of love bot a lite" (3.332-33). In decrying the sin of parental wrath rather than the sin of fraternal incest, "Canace and Machaire" suggests the extreme importance Gower places on parental devotion.¹⁶

In the tale of "Orestes" (3.1885-2200), a son's devotion to his father "Agamenon" leads him not merely to hate his mother "Climestre," but to rip out her breasts and throw her body "Unto the hound and to the raven" (3.2077).¹⁷ Genius ostensibly condemns the murderous mother, but his formulation of the moral is complex and ambiguous: "Who that thenkth his love spiede / With moerdre, he schal with worldes schame / Himself and ek his love schame" (3.2298-200). In avenging his father on his mother, Orestes, too, speeds his love with murder, and faces "worldes schame": "fame with hire swifte wynges / Aboute flyh and bar tidinges, / And made it cowth in alle londes" (3.2107-09), until the kings of the surrounding region assert that "He is noght worthi forto regne: / The child which slowh his moder so" (3.2126-27). Unstated but hovering over the tale once again is the destructive influence of the Trojan War, which traditionally catalyzes the chain of tragic events by forcing Agamemnon to murder his daughter Iphigenia. Gower begins his tale of Orestes by alluding to the "renoun" of the Troy story as a whole, "Whos fame stant yit. . . / And evere schal to mannes Ere" (3.1885-87) and of Agamemnon's leading role in particular, a "thing. . . knowen overal" (3.1893). The tale of Orestes needs little revision to demonstrate the malign influence that war can exert on a family.

"Nauplius and Ulysses" occurs in the very next chapter, *Confessio* Book Four, where it forms part of a series in which love is pitted against militarism. Like the tale of Orestes, three of the tales in this series make reference to Troy, which by the end of the *Confessio* becomes a symbol of the evils of war. Book Four opens with the story of "Eneas and Dido" (4.77-142), in which Eneas arrives at Carthage "With gret navie, which he ladde / Fro Troie" (4.80-81). Like many of Gower's Troy stories, "Eneas and Dido" focuses on the relationship between the two characters rather than on the military goal which destroys it; far from glorifying Aeneas's conquests, the narrator ends the story with Dido's suicide, asserting simply that "taringe upon the nede / In loves cause is forto drede" (4.139-40).¹⁸ "Eneas and Dido" is immediately followed by "Ulysses and Penelope" (4.147-233), where again, military conquest is presented strictly as an obstacle to love. Here, Penelope writes a letter to Ulysses at Troy, threatening unchastity if he does not come home soon. Flying in the face of all tradition, Gower has Ulysses sail straight home from Troy in this story, with the result that "thus was cessed the debat / Of love, and Slowthe was excused" (4.230-31). In "Demophon and Phillis"

(4.731-878), Demophon opens the story by sailing "To Troieward with felaschipe" (4.732), again to his peril. Like Gower's Dido and Penelope, Phillis here writes a letter threatening suicide if he makes "eny tariinge" (4.101), and makes good her threat when Demophon does delay. At the end of the story, Demophon "gan his Slowthe forto banne, / Bot it was al to late thanne" (4.877-78).

Reminiscent of the tales in *Confessio* Book Three, the tale of "Jephthah's Daughter" once again portrays a murdering father (4.1505-95). A biblical parallel to the classical story of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, "Jephthah's Daughter" is perhaps the most blatant example in the *Confessio* of war destroying a family, since it is Jephthah's victory in war that forces him to kill his daughter. Like Nauplius and Ulysses, Jephthah subscribes to a militarism that robs him of human sympathy: in exchange for victory in battle, he promises God a human sacrifice, not even of an enemy, but of the first person who greets him on the way home (4.1515-16). When he discovers the folly of his vow, Jephthah's ensuing meditation again reveals the extent to which war has dehumanized him. Without a bit of irony or self-consciousness, he contrasts his joy in battle with his sorrow at killing his daughter, lamenting,

I hadde al that I coude sein
 Ayein mi fomen bi thi grace,
 So whan I cam toward this place
 Ther was non gladdere man than I:
 But now, mi lord, al sodeinli
 Mi joie is torned into sorwe,
 For I mi dowhter schal tomorwe
 Tohewe and brenne in thi servise. . . (4.1540-47)

To the end, he refuses to see that his own bloodthirstiness has come back to haunt him; instead, he concludes philosophically that "Nou wot I that in no manere / This worldes joie mai be plein" (4.1538-39). Like Nauplius and Ulysses, he remains blind to his own role in perpetuating the cycle of violence. In spite of these early suggestions that military pursuits can jeopardize love, Genius in the second half of Book Four attempts to link love and war via chivalry. However, when the priest of Venus urges military feats as part of the repertoire of a good lover, Amans logically asks, "What scholde I winne over the Se, / If I mi ladi loste at hom?" (4.1664-65). In other words, the Lover sees militarism and romantic love as fundamentally at odds. In the same passage, Amans goes on to note that "A Sarazin if I sle schal, / I sle the Soule forth withal, / And that was nevere Cristes lore" (4.1679-81). That is, religious love is also at odds with militarism.¹⁹ In response to these objections, Genius tells the story of "Nauplus and Ulysses," where Nauplus's stirring speech about honor--"betre it were honour to winne / Than love" (4.1867-68)--is supposed to demonstrate the importance of military valor. But as we examine the story and its sequel more closely, we can see that Nauplus's stirring speech is no more than the blustering of a bully--and that he, too, is unwilling to sacrifice his son to "the greater good" of military endeavor.

Finally, *Confessio* Book Five, in which "Achilles and Deidamia" appears, is full of stories of families destroyed or abandoned. Immediately following "Achilles and Deidamia," Genius tells us the story of "Jason and Medea" (5.3247-4229), in which once again, a hero is seduced first into militarism (or "knythode") and then into abandoning his family. Just as Achilles responds to the lure of the "bryhte helm" by arming himself "in knyhtli wise" (5.3168-81), Jason responds to the glittering fleece by determining that he will "of his knyhtod undertake / To do what thing therto belongeth" (5.3280-81). Each sails off with a boatload of heroes in the direction of Troy: Achilles "is to the Siege go / Forth with Ulixes and Diomede" (5.3200-01); Jason takes with him "suche as were of his lignage, / With othre knihtes whiche he ches / . . . and Hercules, / Which full was of chivalerie" (5.3292-94), and stops first at Troy, where the local king's lack of hospitality engenders "the dissencion / Which after was the destruccion / Of that Cite" (5.3307-09). Gower mentions the Trojan War here even though the narrator admits that "that is noight to mi matiere" (5.3310), in order to alert the reader that this is another tale of violence begetting violence, perverting love and breaking bonds; that is, Gower identifies "Jason and Medea" as a "Troy story," even claiming that "the tale in special / Is in the bok of Troie write" (5.3244-45).

Like "Nauplus and Ulysses," "Achilles and Deidamia," and "Orestes," "Jason and Medea" involves several interlocking sets of broken bonds. Like Achilles, Jason is "stered" both "Of love, and ek of his conqueste" (5.3412-13); as in the other Troy stories, this dichotomy leads to multiple tragedies. Just as Ulysses's sowing his land with salt

foreshadows the abuse of his land and family in his absence, Jason's sowing the land with serpent's teeth and raising self-slaughtering armies from the "seeds" foreshadows the barrenness and self-slaughter that his ruthlessness will ultimately beget. Like Deidamia, who attempts to hide her pregnancy (the "lost. . . maydenhede" that was "afterward wel knowe," 5.3068-69), Medea deceives her father on behalf of "The kniht which hath mi maidenhede" (5.3740). Gower focuses not on her theft of her father's treasure, but on her abandonment of her family: when men tell the king that Medea and Jason have slipped away in the night, he immediately

axeth where his dowhter was.
 Ther was no word bot Out, Allas!
 Sche was ago. The moder wepte,
 The fader as a wod man lepte. . . (5.3909-12)

Like Lichomede, Medea's father has nothing to laugh about. Medea seems more devoted to her new father-in-law, restoring his youth by her magic arts; but here, too, Gower turns filial piety into something perverse and violent: in a reversal of Canace's and Dido's self-mutilation (each thrusts a sword into her heart; see 3.307-09, 4.134-35), Medea thrusts a sword into her father-in-law's side, "that therout mai slyde / The blod withinne" (5.4158-59). As a result, she kills off the father and replaces him with a child, whose head, heart and face are "Lich unto twenty wynter Age" (5.4170). Gower emphasizes the interconnectedness of conquest, deception, violence and abandonment: Medea's efforts to help Jason win the fleece, steal with him "fro kiththe and kinne" (5.4180) and turn his father's age into youth are all "to hire aquit" when he abandons her for a new wife (5.4186). Just as Jason prefers a twenty-year-old father to an aged one, he prefers a "yonge freisshe queene" to Medea (5.4206). In another image of perverted familial love, Medea gives the new queen a deadly cloak, "For Sosterhode hem was betuene" (5.4205), and finally slays Jason's sons before his eyes as her payment for his deception: "Lo, this schal be thi forfeiture," she asserts (5.4214). Like the Ulysses and Orestes cycles, the complicated story of Jason and Medea reveals the extent to which ruthless conquest and militarism can pervert love into a cycle of hatred and vengeance.

Like Jason himself, the Lover evinces no sympathy for the suffering protagonists in the story, but is instead captivated by the glittering fleece. When Genius accedes to his desire to know more about this prize, we discover that behind the tragedy of Jason and Medea lies yet another story of abandonment: the tale of "Phrixus and Helle" (5.4243-4361). Here again, a king takes a second wife after having children with the first, albeit after the first wife's death. Through a complicated stratagem, the second wife convinces the king to sacrifice his children to the goddess Ceres, echoing Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to Athena, and the other stories of murdering parents ("Canace and Machaire," "Jason and Medea") which precede this one. Genius emphasizes the interconnectedness of his stories of violence and deception, noting that from Phrixus's sheep "cam after al the wo, / Why Jason was forswore so / Unto Medee, as it is spoke" (5.4359-61). These interconnected stories of familial abandonment and murder prepare us for the stories of "Theseus and Ariadne" (5.5231-495) and "Tereus" (5.5551-6047). Although "Tereus" is the closest to "Orestes" and "Jason and Medea" in terms of sheer perversity and horror, it is in the story of Theseus and Ariadne that Genius finally steps forward and condemns people who choose glory or passion over familial bonds, asserting that Theseus "the lawe of loves riht / Forfeted hath in alle weie, / That Adriagne he putte aweie" (5.5476-78). The vice which all these heroes and kings--Namplus, Aeolus, Orestes, Ulysses, Achilles, Jason, Theseus and Tereus--share is "unkindeschipe," a word which means at once "unkindness" and "unnaturalness." Unkindeschipe is a self-perpetuating quality: it affects a man's heart so that "he can no good dede aquite" (5.5488). For this reason, Genius commands, "This vice above all othre fle" (5.5495).

We can trace a rough progression from tales of perverted devotion to family in *Confessio* Book Three, to discussion of the militarism which perverts it in *Confessio* Book Four, to an emphasis on the victims of the perversion--women and children--in *Confessio* Book Five. In all three books, however, Gower repeatedly privileges an individual's bonds to spouse and children over any other--over the demands of heroic destiny, chivalric glory, or societal convention. All is not fair in love and war, Gower asserts. The world is continually worsening, and "If that a man the sothe seie, / The cause hath ben divisoun" (Prol.850-51). The solution, Gower suggests, is not to let our basic bonds--to marriage and to family--be weakened at any cost.

Notes

1. Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 13.
2. Examinations of Gower's political emphasis include George R. Coffman, "John Gower, Mentor for Royalty: Richard II," *PMLA* 69 (1954), 953-64; Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53 (1978), 94-114; George B. Stow, "Richard II in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: Some Historical Perspectives," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), 3-31; Judith Ferster, "O Political Gower," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), 33-53; and María Bullón-Fernández, "Confining the Daughter: Gower's 'Tale of Canace and Machaire' and the Politics of the Body," in *Figures of Speech: The Body in Medieval Art, History, and Literature, Essays in Medieval Studies* 11: 1994 Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and David A. Robertson (Chicago, 1995), 75-85. Examinations of Gower's personal emphasis include Hugh White, "Division and Failure in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Neophilologus* 72 (1988), 600-16; James Dean, "Gather Ye Rosebuds: Gower's Comic Reply to Jean de Meun," in *John Gower: Recent Readings. Papers presented at the meetings of the John Gower Society at the International Congress on Medieval Studies*, Western Michigan University, 1983-1988, ed. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1989), pp. 21-38; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer and the Boethian Tradition," in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R.F. Yeager, *English Literary Studies* 51 (Victoria, B.C., 1991), pp. 7-35; and Chauncey Wood, "Petrarchanism in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), 239-55.
3. Proponents of a Christian emphasis in the *Confessio* see the poem as mainly concerned with religious conversion. Books which express this viewpoint include Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion*, and Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis*, *English Literary Studies Monograph Series* 56 (Victoria, B.C., 1993). Proponents of a secular emphasis discuss the poem's concern with earthly, temporal problems. Articles which express this viewpoint include Rosemary Woolf, "Moral Chaucer and Kindly Gower," in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Scholar and Storyteller*, ed. Mary Salu and R. Farrell (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), pp. 221-45; Hugh White, "Nature and the Good in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, pp. 1-20; and Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, pp. 65-93. Many of the articles focusing on the *Confessio*'s political agenda also imply a secular focus within the poem; however, Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale, Ill., 1978) and "John Gower and the Book of Daniel," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, pp. 159-87, links politics and Christianity in the *Confessio*.
4. The "ethical" school sees the *Confessio* as straightforward and didactic. Articles which express this viewpoint include Charles Runacres, "Art and Ethics in the *Exempla of Confessio Amantis*," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 106-34; Judith Davis Shaw, "Lust and Lore in Gower and Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review* 19.2 (1984), 110-22; Gerald Kinneavy, "Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the Penitentials," *The Chaucer Review* 19.2 (1984), 144-61; Götz Schmitz, "Gower, Chaucer, and the Classics," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, pp. 95-111; A.J. Minnis, "De vulgari auctoritate: Chaucer, Gower and the Men of Great Authority," in *Chaucer*

and Gower: *Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, pp. 36-74; and R.A. Shoaf, "'Tho Love Made Him An Hard Eschange' and 'With Fals Brocage Hath Take Usure': Narcissus and Echo in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), 197-207.

The "poetic" school sees the *Confessio* as ironic or subversive. Articles which express this viewpoint include David W. Hiscoe, "The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Philological Quarterly* 64.3 (Summer 1985), 367-85; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Genius and Interpretation in the *Confessio Amantis*," in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed. Arthur Groos et al (New York, 1986), pp. 241-60; James Simpson, "Ironic Incongruence in the Prologue and Book I of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Neophilologus* 72 (1988), 617-32; James Dean, "Gather Ye Rosebuds," pp. 21-38; and Anthony Farnham, "Statement and Search in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Mediaevalia*

16 (1993) 141-57 .

5. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 2 vols. (London, 1900), 1, Prologue.121. All further citations are from this edition.

6. Both Russell Peck (*Kingship and Common Profit*, p. 89) and R.F. Yeager ("Pax Poetica: On the Pacifism of Chaucer and Gower," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9 (1987), 105) cite this section of the *Confessio* as evidence of Gower's pacifistic stance.

7. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. G.P. Goold, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London, 1984), 2, 13.59. The translations are my own.

8. Hyginus, *Hygini Fabulae*, ed. H.I. Rose (Lugduni Batavorum, 1934), 95, pp. 69-70. The translations are my own.

9. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.301-02.

10. Servius, *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum*, ed. Edward Rand et al., 2 vols., (Lancaster, Pa., 1946), 2.81, pp. 340-42;

Lactantius Placidus, *Commentarius in Achilleida*, in *Lactantii Placidi qui dicitur commentarios in Statii Thebaida et commentarium in Achilleida*, ed. Richard Jahnke (Lipsiae, 1898), 93, pp. 491-92.

11. Pierre Bersuire, *Petrus Berchorius. De formis figurisque deorum. Reductorium morale, liber xv: Ovidius moralizatus, cap. i. Textus e codice Brux. Bibl. Reg. 863-9* critice editu, ed. J. Engels (Utrecht, 1966), p. 167. The translations are my own.

12. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.472.

13. Hyginus, *Fabulae* 116, pp. 101-02.

14. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.296-98.

15. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.162-69.

16. A great deal of recent criticism has focused on Genius's apparent failure to condemn the incest in this tale. On the one hand, several critics attribute the absence to different motives on Gower's part. William Calin sees the absence as undermining the "process of exemplifying" ("John Gower's Continuity in the Tradition of French Fin' Amor," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), p. 101); similarly, James Simpson sees Gower expressing skepticism towards other moralizations of Ovid ("Genius's 'Enformacioun,'" p. 167). Georgiana Donavin suggests that the absence reveals Genius's moral inadequacy (*Incest Narratives*, p. 37), while A.S.G. Edwards argues that Gower himself has trouble delineating "any more fulfilling form of sexuality" than incest ("Gower's Women in the *Confessio*," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), p. 234), and Rosemary Woolf takes Gower's sympathy for Canace as evidence of his "kindliness" ("Moral Chaucer and Kindly Gower," pp. 226-27).

On the other hand, Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, p. 86, C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *The Chaucer Review* 19.2 (1984), 100-06 and Thomas J. Hatton, "John Gower's Use of Ovid in Book III of the *Confessio Amantis*," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1987), 260-62, all assert that the tale does implicitly condemn the siblings' incest. Finally, Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower"; A.C. Spearing, "Canace and Machaire," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993), 211-21; and Bullón-Fernández, "Confining the Daughter," all see Aeolus's response as implicitly incestuous--a reading which would explain his dramatic shift from love to hatred.

17. In fact, Georgiana Donavin sees the murder as a result of "the hero's sublimated desire for his mother Clytemnestra" (*Incest Narratives*, p. 39).

18. Russell Peck sees this tale as a condemnation of both Dido and Aeneas: Aeneas is "hard and too slow," Dido "soft and too quick" (*Kingship and Common Profit*, p. 91). Peck does not go so far as to attribute Aeneas's "hardness" to his militarism, however.

19. However, Russell Peck, although he takes Genius's anti-Crusade rhetoric in Book Three as evidence of Gower's "strongly pacifistic stand" (*Kingship and Common Profit*, p. 89), interprets Amans's arguments here as "one further instance of Sloth" (p. 92).