

Essays in Medieval Studies 16

[Page numbers of the printed text appear at the right in bold.]

page 79**Queer Relations****Carolyn Dinshaw**

This paper draws on materials from my book, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Duke University Press, 1999). The book has a double focus: it's about the ways various communities in late medieval England dealt with sexual issues as they constituted themselves as groups (I have gathered materials produced by and around the heretical followers of John Wyclif, known as Lollards) and it's about ways various sexual communities today can use relations to the past--especially to such phenomena as those groups cast out--in constituting ourselves. In this paper I maintain a similar double focus.

One Sunday evening in December, 1394, Eleanor Rykener walked the streets of Cheap Ward, a busy commercial district in London. It was no doubt cold that night, and Eleanor was no doubt bundled up. But she was still woman enough to catch the eye of John Britby, passing through the high road of Cheap; he approached her and asked her to have sex with him. Eleanor agreed, named her price, and the two withdrew to a stall in nearby Soper's Lane to do the deed. It was then that authorities of the city of London, waiting nearby, apprehended them and put them in prison, and it was sometime thereafter, in front of the Mayor and Aldermen of London in the Guildhall, that her confession unfolded.

The confession, that is, of "John Rykener, calling [himself] Eleanor, having been detected in women's clothing." In a separate examination, John Britby confessed that he thought Rykener was a woman, and, thinking thus, asked her

start of page 80

to have sex. Maybe they hadn't really gotten started in that libidinous act, and so John Britby might not yet have been disabused when the two were apprehended. But by the time of his interrogation at the latest, Britby understands that Eleanor is a man, and the two are described as having committed "illud vitium detestabile, nephandum, et ignominiosum," as the recording scribe phrased it: "that detestable, unmentionable, and ignominious vice"--most likely sodomy, *the* unspeakable vice. Under interrogation, Rykener responded to questions about who taught him how to ply his trade, for how long, where, and with whom he had committed the act; he related a tale of unofficial apprenticeship in embroidery (with one Elizabeth Brouderer), tutelage in the act of having sex in the manner of a woman and getting paid for it, and many, many sexual contacts in various locales. In private houses as well as taverns, he had sex as a woman with clerics (who remunerated him well), and he had sex as a man with women (nuns, wives, and unmarried women), whose monetary rewards, if any, Rykener didn't mention. He seems in this deposition particularly eager to implicate male clerics, some by name, and such eagerness links him to the civic authorities who apprehended him in the first place (they, too, were out to get licentious ecclesiastics), even as it may be a strategy to save his own life. After all, though there wasn't a secular law against sodomy in England until the sixteenth century, the punishment recommended in various late thirteenth-century legal textbooks was death.

I want to take some time here to consider John/Eleanor Rykener's confession, recently unearthed by Sheila Lindenbaum and edited by David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras.¹ I'll try to discern how to read this very anomalous document. What kinds of things might have been going on in London at the time that would help us understand Rykener's narrative and his treatment--apprehension, imprisonment, and interrogation, but no further record of any case pursued? After discussing this document in the context of a very unsettled London at the end of the

fourteenth century, I want to think with you about what we can *do* with this information. What kinds of histories, and what kinds of communities, can we create with it? For these latter meditations, I shall turn to Foucault--not the now-predictable and somewhat routinized Foucault of the *History of Sexuality*, Volume One, though I'll mention that work several times here, but Foucault in the archive, sensing (as he put it) a "vibration" from the very documents he reads. Foucault in the archive experiences the intensity of a relation that I want to consider as itself constituting a queer history. This Foucault, writing a brief piece just months after the publication of the *History of Sexuality*, Volume One, is concerned not only with ruptures and breaks in sexual history but with relatedness across time.²

My most general concern here will be to argue for a use of historical relations in our current projects of queer self-fashioning and community building. For if we imagine that the self, as Earl Jackson, Jr. puts it, "is ... a collaborative

start of page 81

effort," made up of relations or crossings between all kinds of cultural phenomena, and if we imagine, via Donna Haraway, that communities are built up of partial connections between such selves that are "constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another," then let's imagine the widest possible usable field of others with whom to make such relations and fashion selves and communities.³ I want to imagine relational processes that engage many kinds of cultural differences (though not all in the same ways): racial, ethnic, national, sexual, gender, class differences, and even (I'm arguing) temporal differences. Thus the medieval, as well as other dank stretches of time, becomes itself--in all its incommensurability--a resource for self- and community formation.

This paper is in three parts.

Part One: It Takes One to Know One

 The world described by John/Eleanor Rykener in his confession seems in many respects like something straight out of the *Canterbury Tales*, the latest of which were composed at just about this time, the early to mid-1390s. The fragmentary *Cook's Tale*, for example, offers a whiff of Rykener's Cheapside milieu, including a dissolute apprentice and his friend, whose wife turns tricks for a living; Chaucer even calls the Cook "Roger Hogge of Ware," the name of a person actually documented in London at this time.⁴ Rykener's examination in fact reads a bit like a *Canterbury Tale*. The very names of the principals fit nicely: while "Brouderer" is probably a by-name for Elizabeth the embroideress (whose surname was probably Moryng),⁵ "Rykener" seems particularly appropriate for a prostitute (who reckons--counts--money) telling a story (reckoning--recounting, narrating). Most interestingly, "Eleanor," the name Rykener goes by, sometimes spelled with a capital "A" in the document, might be playing with his own "alienness," his own otherness.⁶ The emphasis on lascivious clergy hints at estates satire, and the sheer Volume of sexual partners Rykener enumerates in his confession has the makings of a good fabliau.

Chaucer did indeed take up complex issues of sexual deviance in confessional narratives--of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner--as well as in fabliaux like the *Miller's* and *Reeve's Tales*, tales most likely written at about this time. Sexual aberrations were in fact in the air, or at least accusations of sexual deviance were flying in and around London. About six weeks after Rykener's arrest, Parliament met in London, at which convocation an extraordinary thing happened. The startling event was alluded to in the General Prologue to the *Lollard Bible*, that translation into Middle English by the heretics who advocated popular accessibility of the Scriptures. This Prologue mentions that sodomy, that horrible sin, and the "strong mayntenance thereof, ... is knowen to many persones of the reume, and at the last parlement."⁷ These heretical Lollards were in fact proving themselves pervasive, tenacious, and bold. Wyclif's

start of page 82

doctrines had been condemned in 1382, he died (of a stroke) in 1384, but his beliefs found support among diverse ranks of English society through the reign of Richard II, even as anti-Lollard opposition "uneven[ly] but stead[il]ly consolidat[ed]" itself, as Paul Strohm argues. As Strohm puts it, the 1390s were drastically "unsettled."⁸ In the January or February following Rykener's arrest in December, these heretics posted a brash, polemical manifesto, known as the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*, on the very doors of Westminster Hall during the 1395 Parliament session.⁹ That document--confident, sharp, at points even snide--stated Lollard positions on a dozen major issues concerning the reform of the Church, both theologically and socially: the illegitimacy of the established priesthood and all its separate privileges, for example; the unsupportable doctrine of transubstantiation; and, at considerable length, sodomy.

The Third of the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions* is wholly given over to a refutation of the orthodox requirement that clergy be celibate; that requirement, they argue, brought sodomy into the Church in the first place.¹⁰ This fact can be proven by both logic and experience, they contend. Logic proves that sodomy is rife among clergy, since they're gorging themselves with fine food and drink, and such intake requires natural purgation "or worse." (This is the build-up and release model of male sexuality that Joan Cadden, for example, analyzes.)¹¹ Furthermore, experience proves this point, the Lollards argue, because some men don't like women, and such aversion can be ascertained by a secret test; "and when you prove such a man, mark him well, for he is one of those."

More on this secret test in a moment. For the time being, let me note that there is some evidence, even beyond the General Prologue to the Lollards' own Bible, that this Parliament was remembered in later years as the one in which accusations of sodomy filled the air.¹² The importance of this topic among the twelve reform-minded *Conclusions* is emphasized by the poetic coda that, according to several sources, ended the Lollard manifesto itself. A short Latin poem condemning the orthodox clergy reads:

Plangent Anglorum gentes crimen Sodomorum;
Paulus fert, horum sunt idola causa malorum.
Surgunt ingrati Giazitae, Simone nati,
Nomine praelati, hoc defensare parati.
Qui reges estis, populis quicunque praeestis,
Qualiter hiis gestis gladiis prohibere potestis?¹³

(The English people bewail the crime of Sodom; / Paul says that idols are the cause of these ills. / The ingrate Giezites, born of Simon, rise up, / Prelates by name, ready to defend this crime. / You who are kings, and whosoever preside over the people, / How might you be able to prevent such goings-on with force?)

start of page 83

According to a later chronicler, this poem was itself posted on suspected sodomites' doors in a sort of Lollard guerilla action, once the *Conclusions* themselves failed to have any reforming effect; this, as the chronicler put it, made the prelates mad. Mad enough, it seems, to write their own poetic response, a line-by-line parody:

Gens Lollardorum gens est vilis Sodomorum,
Errores eorum sunt in mundo causa dolorum.
Hii sunt ingrati, maledicti, daemone nati,
Quos vos, praelati, sitis damnare parati;
Qui pugiles estis fidei populisque praeestis,
Non horum gestis ignes prohibere potestis.¹⁴

(The race of the Lollards is the vile race of Sodom, / Their errors are the cause of the world's troubles. / They are

ingrates, cursed, demon-born, / Whom you, prelates, should be prepared to condemn. / You who are fighters of the faith and preside over the people, / You cannot withhold fires from their actions.[15](#))

So these accusations of sodomy got slung around, in the first instance here by the heretics (who are themselves the ones usually so accused: think of the Old French word *bougre*, for example, simultaneously denoting heretic and sodomite),[16](#) then by the orthodox. Such reverse accusation happens not only in the six-line Latin poem which elicited the "takes-one-to-know-one" rejoinder, but in other polemical missiles fired at the time as well. These reverse accusations can certainly suggest that "sodomite" was used as a term of general insult. The exact reversal tends in fact to drain the accusation of content and render it an all-purpose vilification; indeed, in the second poem, "gens Sodomorum" works much the way the slur "faggots" does today, even if that term is generally unacceptable in polite American society while the former was an acceptable moral judgment. And the two terms may work similarly for historical reasons: faggots were bundles of wood with which heretics (among other things) were burnt. Sodomites, faggots: everything bad sticks to these names, whether or not same-sex sexual relations are specifically or primarily denoted. But the reversal also raises more fundamental questions: if Lollards say clerics are performing sodomy, and clerics say Lollards are guilty of sodomy, who really *is* doing the deed? And how can you tell? Who has the authority to accuse? And why are these accusations being made?[17](#)

Such a reversal raises suspicions: that sodomy is everywhere, or sodomy is nowhere to be found--fingers are pointing but they don't rest anywhere. That you can't tell who's doing it: anyone can be accused, and there's no way of knowing. And that such accusations are being made for the purposes of power, not for the reformation of the true Church. "Crimen Sodomorum" was not the worst sin to be accused of in and of itself; there's plenty of contemporary local evidence of this. Simony or heresy were finally far more consequential accusations in themselves, and they may have provided the kind of "stigmatizing contex[t]" that allowed sodomy to become visible in the first place (as Jonathan Goldberg, following Alan Bray, argues in a later context).[18](#) But accusations of the sin of sodomy work with those more serious accusations (as we see here) and unleash a pack of anxieties that any use as an all-purpose, nonspecific insult may have in fact been trying to bring under control.

As if in nightmarish, proleptic confirmation of the anxieties circulating during that Hilary term of Parliament in 1395, then, John/Eleanor Rykener walked the streets of Cheap Ward. And as he does, let's imagine how that Lollard secret test might work. Let's imagine that a Lollard catches sight of a friar or a priest whom he suspects, sees him making a deal with Rykener--Eleanor had in fact so offered herself very many times. Imagine that that cleric "likes" her, in the language of the Lollard Third Conclusion, and the Lollard observes this. What does this tell the inquiring Lollard, waiting and watching nearby? That the cleric is not "one of those" who likes no women? Or that he is *indeed* one, because Eleanor is of course no woman but a man in drag? The Lollard certainty that those clerics who engaged in sex with men could be readily discerned and marked out is belied by Rykener's testimony. In fact the heretics sound much like the authorities who apprehended Rykener, as both groups seek to eradicate sodomy: from his/her queer perspective, dissent and orthodoxy, resistance and power look remarkably alike.

Part Two: Nobody's Perfect

I want to look more closely now at the testimony of that creature who, we might say, queers people and discourses around him. Let's start with the paradoxical references here to vice. The offending act during which John/Eleanor Rykener and John Britby are apprehended is initially denoted as "illud vitium detestabile, nephandum, et ignominiosum" (461), as I mentioned earlier. Plenty of strong language is used in court documents for acts of prostitution, as Ruth Mazo Karras demonstrates; but the adjective "nephandum," traditionally used for same-sex sodomy (following Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians), most likely marks the unnamed vice as sodomy--sex between two men--here. (Prostitution, as Karras and Boyd show, was conceived of as a female act.)[19](#) As the interrogation proceeds, the document refers again and again, after its opening salvo, to such vice: unmentionable by

nature, it nonetheless becomes "illud vitium antedictum" (462), the *aforementioned* unmentionable vice. This paradox neatly exemplifies Foucault's point about sexuality in general as it developed out of premodernity: the sexual act here is defined as unspeakable, yet it is spoken of Voluminously.²⁰ This sexual behavior constitutes the truth of the confession, the thing that is produced and confessed, the knowledge that is pursued; Rykener is asked "who had taught him to exercise this vice, and for how long and in what places and with what persons . . ." (463).

How did Rykener and Britby themselves refer to what they were doing?

start of page 84

Unless other texts come to light, we'll never know. The court proceedings were conducted in English; the clerk interpreted and recorded them in Latin, and these phrases ("nephandum," "detestabile"), though they could be Rykener's own, as Karras and Boyd suggest, learned by him in the confessional or in sermons, are necessarily the clerk's interpretation of Rykener's words. The clerk chose to write a *précis* in Latin rather than a verbatim English confession, which would have been another option;²¹ but he nonetheless wrote a fairly detailed account, which suggests that he at least viewed the case as having some interest or revealing something about city life, privileges, and customs.²² The emphasis on clerical offenses in the document might therefore be the clerk's, in his recording; it might be the interrogators'; or it might be Rykener's own, as I suggested earlier, shaping his narrative to appeal to London officials' zeal to apprehend misbehaving clerics, on the one hand, and, on the other, to save his own life. Indeed, the intent to save his own life perhaps drives his confession; Rykener had apparently already proved himself compliant, agreeing at the outset of his testimony that everything happened just the way John Britby said it had.

The appearance of this man brought into court "in veste muliebri" (461) must have been unusual indeed. Marjorie Garber contends in *Vested Interests* that the appearance in a text, whether historical or fictional, of a transvestite marks a crisis of categorization:

By "category crisis" I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another ... The binarism male/female, one apparent ground of distinction (in contemporary eyes, at least) between "this" and "that," "him" and "me," is itself put in question or under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of overdetermination--a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another.²³

I want to resist the tendency of this approach to efface the transvestite's own subjectivity. To look *at* the transvestite, not *through* him, as Garber insists we do, still privileges the interrogating eye--this is a point about Garber's work made in a recent article by Susan Stryker--and my resistance to such effacement will become clear shortly.²⁴ For the moment this hypothesis about the category confusion a transvestite enacts is useful on the legal stage of this Guildhall chamber, where the indeterminacy of gender categories intersects with sexual category confusion in sodomy. Foucault's famous observation that sodomy is "that utterly confused category" is borne out in this short document.²⁵ Whereas the traditional condemnatory language of male-male sodomy is used initially (by at least the clerk, I'd argue) to describe the vice the two men were caught performing, the interrogatory pursuit of this crime entails a questioning as to

start of page 85

"with what persons, *masculine or feminine*, [he] had committed that libidinous and unspeakable act" (463, my emphasis), which results in a narrative of Rykener's many sexual contacts as a woman with men, and many other sexual exploits as a man with women. "Sodomy" itself has a very slippery denotative range at this time, as various commentators, including Karma Lochrie and Allen J. Frantzen, have discussed, a range including male/male anal intercourse, mutual masturbation, and unnatural intercourse with one's own wife.²⁶ The specificity of sexual behaviors--presumably of some consequence at this hearing in a court that handled cases of prostitution but very rarely male-male sodomy--is blurred by this cross-dressed figure. Perhaps he deploys a discourse of sodomy himself to

produce effects such as we've seen around Parliament, especially to confuse the potentially deadly opposition between himself and these authorities he faces.

Other language in the document works hard, however, against such confusion; it tries to hold the line between the sexes and preserve the distinct gender binaries that sustain heterosexuality. Heterosexual relations form a powerful structuring matrix through which the events seem to have been presented (by the participants) and a lens through which this incident is seen (by the municipal officials, by the clerk).²⁷ Male-male sex is here clearly modeled heterosexually, as it often was in medieval discourse. In the language of the apprehended John Britby, we hear the force of such heterosexual organization. The gender of the pronouns shifts from masculine to feminine when Britby's words at the time are indirectly quoted, reinforcing his testimony (which includes the emphatic repetition of "mulier") that he thought this man was indeed a woman.

John Britby confessed that he was passing through the high road of Cheap on Sunday between the above-mentioned hours and accosted John Rykener, dressed up as a woman, thinking he was a woman, asking *him* as he would a woman if he could commit a libidinous act with *her*. (463, my emphasis)

Rykener in turn solicits John Britby's desire on a heterosexual model, and apparently acts on one, too, since he mentions sex as a woman only with men, and sex as a man only with women. Masculine/feminine in this model is correlated with active/passive. You can hear this in Thomas Aquinas's motto, repeated through the late Middle Ages, about the necessary evil of prostitution. Thomas suggests that it's active penetration of a passive partner that matters, in heterosexual prostitution and in its debased alternative, male-male sodomy. "Remove the sewer and you will fill the palace with ordure; similarly with the bilge from a ship; remove whores from the world and you will fill it with sodomy."²⁸ There's that association of sodomy and purging we've seen in the Lollard Third Conclusion. Modeling the act of penetration in the discourse of Rykener's case here are the gender binaries of heterosexual relations, masculine and feminine, correlated implicitly with active and passive.

start of page 87

But those stark binaries don't preclude more complex--queerer--desires. The document, despite its normalizing moves, invites us to try to read otherwise than heterosexually, to try to explore bits that won't be assimilated into the hetero frame. For one thing, the unspoken, paradoxical, and shifting place of sodomy perhaps marks a space in this narrative where queer desires emerge. Why, for example, did Rykener choose this labor over other kinds of labor available even to very poor men? There is no other extant record of male prostitution in late medieval England, as far as is currently known. He learned how to have sex *modo muliebri* from the whore Anna. Why did Anna teach him, or why did he ask for instruction? By the time he met up with Elizabeth Brouderer he had learned that lesson, and Elizabeth dressed him in women's clothing. Whose idea was that, and how did it arise? Perhaps his appearance was "feminoid," as Donald Howard said of Chaucer's Pardoner, and that feminine appearance suggested this occupation in the first place. This was the case with Rolandino, known as Rolandina, a fourteenth-century transvestite prostitute in Italy whom Guido Ruggiero writes about.²⁹ Or perhaps he liked male-male sex, or liked dressing up, or embroidery, and either was impelled to exploit these desires for money, or learned through taking on this occupation that he liked aspects of it. Though the cross-dressing sounds initially like a business opportunity, as Karras and Boyd note, it's also notable that Rykener was apparently not only turning tricks but living and doing embroidery as a woman in Oxford.

It's impossible to discern with any certainty what Rykener's various customers wanted, but it's no doubt too limited to assume that those desires can be understood simply in the binary gender terms of heterosexuality. John Britby insists that he had wanted a woman on that December night. But did he insist this mainly to save his own skin? The

dogged repetition of "mulier" in the record can be read as an inflection of anger or humiliation; but it can also convey fear. An unfortunate rector of Theydon Garnon earlier seems clearly enough to have wanted a woman, and just as clearly never to have been disabused about what he got. After having sex, he was caught in a scam based on the idea that Rykener could have a husband:

[He] further said that a certain Phillip, rector of Theydon Garnon, had sex with him as with a woman in Elizabeth Brouderer's house outside Bishopsgate, at which time Rykener took away two gowns of Phillip's and when Phillip requested them from Rykener he said that [he] was the wife of a certain man and that if Phillip wished to ask for them back [he] would make [his] husband bring suit against him. (463)

Further testimony notes that three friars had sex with Rykener numerous times, but it's not clear whether they were "ignotos" (sic, translated as "unsuspecting") only at first or during the entire time of their acquaintance in Oxford, where Rykener was working and passing as a woman:

start of page 88

Rykener further confessed that for five weeks before the feast of St. Michael's last [he] was staying at Oxford, and there, in women's clothing and calling himself Eleanor, worked as an embroideress; and there in the marsh three unsuspecting scholars--of whom one was named Sir William Foxlee, another Sir John, and the third Sir Walter--practiced the abominable vice with him often. (463)

Not only is a "secret test" incapable of discerning very reliably which men commit sodomy with other men; it may be that these clerics themselves were always convinced that they were having sex with a woman. Or further, it may be that in the male in feminine clothes they got exactly what they wanted.

 We may find in fact that heterosexual terms are used--by the accused, as well as in the common cultural discourse of sodomy and transvestism here--to express desires that nonetheless blur or exceed those very categories, just as I'm using the term "he" to refer to this masculine/feminine, active/passive creature. As the instance of the "three unsuspecting scholars" can suggest, the desires that circulate around and through Rykener might be much more heterogeneous indeed. Are those clerics really unsuspecting, or might they want a feminized man, or a phallic woman? Might they want something that's not a woman but not a man either, something that seems to them neither fully masculine nor fully feminine? Is that what makes them *ignotes*--not only unsuspecting, but profoundly unknown themselves, because what they want is unheard of? If and when they were disabused of the belief in this creature's femaleness, did they, anticipating Joe E. Brown in *Some Like It Hot*, chirp, "Nobody's perfect," and get on with it?

The male transvestite prostitute can in this way reveal to us the queerness of desires and a certain malleability of gender. Rykener acts like a woman on certain occasions, like a man on others, and the prostitution context certainly highlights the performativity of gender here.³⁰ Women, particularly harshly regulated by gender in this culture, as the Lollard Eleventh Conclusion makes clear, are the ones who know best how to exploit the fact that gender can be performed. Women are the ones in Rykener's narrative who exploit the dominance of gender expectations. They capitalize on gender expectations, make gender work for them. They teach Rykener to mimic them, and femininity clearly takes practice: at first Rykener plays only the daylight role and Elizabeth's daughter does the heavy lifting at night.

Elizabeth also brought her daughter Alice to diverse men for the sake of lust, placing her with those men in their beds at night without light, making her leave early in the morning and showing them the said John Rykener dressed up in women's clothing, calling him Eleanor and saying that they had misbehaved with her. (463)

But fairly soon, it seems, Rykener can sustain whatever scrutiny is applied

during sex; he goes on to testify to the authorities about that unlucky rector of Theydon Garnon. And in Oxford later still Rykener seems to be passing successfully as a woman.

The interrogation of this cross-dressed person caught in a sodomitical act suggests that laws based on clear and apparent sex difference, that is, heterosexually based laws--laws regulating prostitution, for example, that presume that only women act like women--are irrelevant or inadequate in the face of queer desires or queer truths about the inessentiality of gender, the inadequacy of binary gender categories of heterosexuality, and the resistance of bodies to their official gender constitution and categorization. Finally, Rykener's feminine gender performance demonstrates that at least fundamentally--in regard to the fundament, that is--masculine and feminine are indistinguishable, and this is what may make him/her a nightmare for not only civil but also ecclesiastical authorities, as well as for dissenters such as the Lollards. The Wife of Bath, another sex/gender anomaly created at about this time, in her *Prologue* addresses the agendas behind the clerical regulation of gender behavior and constitution of normative anatomy; but the inconclusiveness of Rykener's court proceedings may be a sign of a momentary failure of such laws and agendas, such failure the result of his/her queer and queering presence.

There seems to have been no pursuit of a formal legal case beyond this interrogation. But we can be certain that Rykener's queerness was not celebrated on those Guildhall premises. The inconclusiveness of the case and the technical inapplicability of the law of course do not preclude danger to him/her; the silence of the records regarding this case might be the final silence of a violent death or the muteness of a maimed life. S/he might be imagined standing on a street corner while insults and accusations fly around him/her, but that image must neither be idealized nor taken to represent a stable or safe situation of happy indeterminacy. "I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of relikes or of seintuarie. / Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie," Harry Bailley, the Host of the *Canterbury Tales*, bursts out after having been solicited by that figure of sexual and gender indeterminacy, the Pardoner.³¹ The Pardoner is, in his turn, silent; who knows what happened to John/Eleanor Rykener?

Part Three: (You Make Me Feel) Mighty Real

One day several centuries later in the Bibliothèque Nationale Michel Foucault came across an account in an internment register, one of two that moved him to compile what he later called "an anthology of existences":

Jean Antoine Tousard, sent to the chateau of Bicetre 21 April 1701: "Apostate, friar, seditious, capable of the greatest crimes, sodomite, atheist if it were possible; this is a veritable monster of abomination that there would be less inconvenience in suppressing than in letting go free."³²

This, and a similar fragment, made a "physical" impression on Foucault--as if, he drily observes, it were possible to have any other kind. He assembled these and other extremely brief fragments into a collection, or at least he intended to do so. The short essay I'm quoting here, "The Life of Infamous Men," was written as a preface to a collection of the same name which didn't appear as planned; only in 1982, in collaboration with historian Arlette Farge, did a Volume eventually appear, *Le Désordre des familles*. In this brief essay, Foucault wrote that these fragments are "[b]rief lives, chanced upon in books and documents," the experience of whose narrative rapidity and factual reality is so *intense* (his term) one doesn't know whether it's "the vividness of the words" or "the violence of the facts" that causes such a physical stir (76 [237]). It's not that the narratives provide "lessons to contemplate," he insists, but quite the opposite, "brief effects whose force fades almost at once" (76 [237]). In fact, it's not clear to Foucault that the "intensity" he feels from these materials can be "restore[d]" [*restituer*] "in an analysis," which is why he decides on presenting the

collection with a minimum of editorial intervention (77 [238]). "This is in no way a history book," he maintains (76 [237]). These, then, are

Lives which are as though they hadn't existed, lives which only survive from the clash with a power whose only wish was to annihilate or at least to efface them, lives which only return to us through the effect of multiple chances. (81)

What is it about these "singular lives" that causes "that vibration which I feel even today" (77 [238])? That causes him to "broo[d]," "gras[p]," seek? I think the repeated word "intensity" provides a key. In the Deleuzian scheme operating here, "intensity ... is in itself pure difference," as Foucault explained it in his 1970 review of Deleuze, "Theatrum Philosophicum." Intensity doesn't suggest a phenomenological relation between a "unified subject" and an "originary experience," and it doesn't suggest a relation of resemblance or similarity between two things. Intensity is difference "that displaces and repeats itself"; it propels thought which is itself "disintegration of the subject."³³ Intensity is affect, too, and sensation, "ardor of a different kind," as Brian Massumi puts it.³⁴ So Foucault's sensation of intensity as he reads these documents indicates postmodern *diffeacut;rance*, "the multiple ... the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of similarity,"³⁵ and at the same time it indicates a connectedness, a very desubjectified connectedness, between his life and those infamous ones, all considered fragmentary. As he put it on the cover of the French edition of *Herculine Barbin*, whose 1980 publication inaugurated the series "Parallel Lives," "The ancients loved to put in parallel the lives of illustrious men; one could hear the exemplary shadows speak across the ages." Parallels join at infinity; but the lives of such infamous men are the inverse, "lives so parallel that no one could join them."³⁶ They diverge into obscurity. But Foucault senses his own relatedness to them. Judith Butler remarks in *Gender Trouble* on his relation to Herculine;

start of page 91

both of them contest straightness, sexual normativity.³⁷ And as he puts it in "The Life of Infamous Men," he is "shock[ed]" by "these words and these lives"; constrained and pained as he is by various vectors of power, he is moved toward both "beauty and fright" (78 [239]), the beauty and terror, perhaps, of queer community, constituted by nothing more than such connectedness, even across time, of singular lives that contest and unveil normativity. One shift of emphasis in Foucault's final works, from the end of the 1970s to his death, is precisely toward *collective* self-fashioning, post-identitarian self-creation such as he found it in the context of gay communities in the U.S. (Didier Eribon has suggested this recently.)³⁸ So though Foucault insists here that "this book will not satisfy historians" (78 [239]), it might satisfy the *queer* historian who sees that queer histories are made of just such relations across time, and that queer communities draw on just such crossings of time as well as on crossings and interrelations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, and class.

John/Eleanor Rykener could perhaps have been in such a collection of infamous men, and mine would be the anthologizing body feeling the vibration from the document, crossing time, religion, nation, sexuality in making a relation to that incommensurable creature outside the normative fourteenth-century English household, even as I stand outside the normative household of current American culture. Rykener's interrogation would definitely qualify. Among Foucault's principles of selection for his anthology, he insisted "that it should be a question of personages having really existed," and "that these narratives not simply constitute strange or pathetic anecdotes, but that in one way or another . . . they should have really taken part in the miniscule history of those existences, of their misfortune, of their rage or of their uncertain madness" (78 [239]). The *Plea and Memoranda Rolls* in which Rykener's deposition appears are records of proceedings in London city court; they not only claim evidentiary status but they also performed an aspect of the legal process itself. Rykener's collision with the London law not only produced him for later gazes, such as my own, but had an effect on the court, too; it resulted in this document, which may have been recorded to mark some sort of precedent.³⁹ This document performed in the real of which it speaks, as Foucault puts it (78 [239]). Foucault insists, in fact, that such documents of "real existences" caught by power strike him much more intensely than any products of literature or the imagination. One of his major points in "The Life of Infamous Men" concerns the rise of "literature"

after the seventeenth century as "part of that great system of constraint by which the West compelled the everyday to bring itself into discourse." It's clear, though, from Foucault's literary vocabulary in this very essay--he speaks of these lives as "strange poems," of "frugal lyricism"--that literary figures hold out the promise of intensity, too, of connections by which to fashion selves (76, 77 [237, 239]).

I think that's a crucial point, and it's one that Michael Lucey, who has also written on Foucault's essay, agrees with.[40](#) It's crucial to my argument because I

start of page 92

want to suggest that all the materials I've discussed here--the *Cook's Tale* as well as John/Eleanor Rykener's deposition, the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath as well as the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*--can function in such anthologies of infamy as materials of queer histories. Rykener's document--even as the narrative and the life it witnesses are constructed by various discourses--affords a different kind of record from, say, the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*. Rykener provoked, and altered by that very provocation, the London legal apparatus. But beyond that time and place, there is, as Foucault acknowledges, "a certain equivocation of the fictitious and the real" (80 [241]), since documents such as these come down to us fragmented and isolated. As queer historical projects aim to promote a queer future, the possibility of queernesses in the past, of lived lives or fictional texts, becomes crucial. It's not that Rykener functions as any kind of role model for latter-day queers. In his incommensurability, how could he? But the simple fact that such an obscure life suggests queernesses in a particular moment in the *past* makes it seem less likely that queers could ever be completely exterminated in the *future*--not because there is a clear continuity of deviant identities or behaviors across time, but because queernesses seem always to haunt dominant structures.

Fictions as well as documents of practice can end up promoting a queer future. "The most intense point of lives, the one where their energy is concentrated, is precisely there where they clash with power, struggle with it, endeavour to utilise its forces or to escape its traps," as Foucault put it (80 [241]). Since that power can be deployed through, or as, literature, as Foucault rightly saw, such literature can be important in the very defining struggles he describes. The fictions of the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath, even the *Cook's Tale* can be valuable to queer selves and histories in that they can be, and have been, appropriated for queer use; their forces can be utilized, inhabited, posed against dominant structures, in order to fashion queer existences.

Queer relations of the particular kind I'm describing are intense: they consist in affect, sensation, points of dispersal that are as well points of contact. Queer histories can be built up of cross-temporal relations between lives or texts, relations that won't make up a homogeneous or unified community across time but rather a "community of doubt," as postmodern writer Robert Glück puts it, referring to a tradition that connects him both to the fictive Pardoner and to the real fifteenth-century autobiographer Margery Kempe. Identifying with the historical can be a way of *disorganizing* a solid, homogeneous self or community, as Glück has said.[41](#) The political interest of such a model of queer relations is in precisely those anti-identitarian qualities: its refusal of resemblance; its insistence on indeterminacy; its rejection of modernist historical narratives that are inevitably, if silently, racialized; and its emphasis on multiple points of contact between lives. What interests me most as a medievalist is that such a concept of queer relations across time recognizes the past, including the *distant* past, as a vibrant and heterogeneous resource for self-fashioning

start of page 93

as well as community building. Such rethinking demands that we reconceptualize positivistic notions of causality and of homogeneous periodization, following feminist and postcolonial historians, and that we continue to recognize, as Evelyn Hammonds points out, quoting Judith Butler, that cultural differences are not "parallel or analogical" but "require and deploy each other."[42](#)

So--getting to my final point--when a postmodern theorist like Homi K. Bhabha, in his postcolonial project, seeks to unleash resistance and foster subaltern agency, he urges us to open up new locations and find "new times" in the constitutive fissure of linguistic signs in colonialist and nationalist discourses, "new times" wherein other cultural meanings may emerge, other histories may be found, and ultimately other modes of political and cultural agency may be enacted.⁴³ Such a drastic postmodern rethinking of subjectivity, time, and the writing of history in the context of a politics of social marginality is very valuable to the development of a queer history such as I've been describing it here. Is there buried in official documents, in gaps, repetitions, prefigurations, other weird narrative temporalities, some other sign to be read, some other voice to be heard? Here, in the Lollard polemics as well as in Rykener's possibly quite wily confession, parodic repetitions of accusations of sodomy may destabilize authoritative pronouncements and contribute to an atmosphere of unknowability in which heresy and orthodoxy, temporal and spiritual, even male and female are rendered indistinguishable and in which the voice of deviant desire may thus emerge.

But despite the fact that Bhabha explicitly intends to contest the sentence of traditional history, in his influential essay "DissemiNation" these "new times" emerge by contrast with paradigmatically old times: the Middle Ages. His notion of the radical hybridity of postmodern identities is bought at the cost of the medieval. Merely displacing rather than eliminating totality (as Paul Strohm has remarked in relation to other postmodern theorists), Bhabha produces via a convenient and simplified Benedict Anderson a binary modernist narrative of history--produces a dense, obvious (and white) Middle Ages against which the arbitrary modern groovily emerges--though he routinely critiques such binary narratives in decrying "teleology and holism."⁴⁴ And this totalizing force applies pressure elsewhere in Bhabha's work; it is no coincidence (at least to this queer medievalist) that his treatment of an undifferentiated, homogeneous distant past intersects with his treatment of sexuality.⁴⁵

Limiting the conceptualization of the Middle Ages, the postmodern theorist limits the radicality of his remapping of the present. But times in the distant past, in all their incommensurability and heterogeneity, offer a vibrant resource now for building up agents--selves and communities--in all *our* incommensurability and heterogeneity. Foucault in the archive plays out a sensible relation to the past that I am interested in as it contributes to the form and matter of queer histories--as I touch on John/Eleanor Rykener, tracking him as he was caught in the gaze of municipal power and as he returned that gaze; as

start of page 94

I am caught by the norms of my time and place; and as I seek to contest that normativity by tracing other kinds of relations, not reproductive, not mimetic, but rather affective and metonymic. Such preoccupations with matters of the past can prompt not the creation of the kinds of books that would please "historians," as Foucault sneered, but rather the creation of another kind of community across time.

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Notes

1. I am much indebted to Boyd and Karras's editorial work and to their commentary on this document: David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," *GLQ* 1 (1995), 459-65, and Ruth Mazo Karras and

David Lorenzo Boyd, "'Ut cum muliere': A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York and London, 1996), pp. 101-16. The *GLQ* essay prints the Latin as well as an English translation of the document. Brackets at various points in Boyd and Karras's English translation signify that gender is not indicated in the Latin text. For the prostitution context I have also relied on Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York and Oxford, 1996).

2. See Michel Foucault, "La Vie des hommes infames," first published in 1977 and collected in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 vols. (Paris, 1994), 3: 237-53. See Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris, trans., "The Life of Infamous Men" in *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney, 1979), pp. 76-91. Didier Eribon discusses this essay in his *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains* (Paris, 1994), pp. 265-69. I worked out these ideas about Foucault and queer history with Professor Michael Lucey while team-teaching a course at the University of California Berkeley in the fall of 1995; his essay touching on these materials is now in print ("Balzac's Queer Cousins and Their Friends," *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick [Durham, 1997], pp. 167-98).

3. Earl Jackson, Jr., "Interview with Robert Glück," *Red Wheelbarrow* 1 (1995): 24-40, at 40; Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, 1991), pp. 183-201, at 193 (emphasis original).

4. On dating, see Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, 1992). On speculations about the "flesh-and-blood Roger of Ware," see Muriel Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (1967; rpt. London, 1975), pp. 187-88. Edith Rickert, in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 Oct. 1932, p. 761, lists documents that seem to identify the Cook; see also Earl

start of page 95

D. Lyon, "Roger de Ware, Cook," *MLN* 52 (1937), 491-94. And see V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* (Stanford, 1984), pp. 257-79, esp. 259, for discussion of Chaucer's representation of the Cook.

5. See Boyd and Karras's notes in "Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute."

6. Thanks to Jim Cain for suggesting this to me.

7. General Prologue in *The Holy Bible ... Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, 4 vols., ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford, 1850), 1: 51. On the date of the General Prologue--between January-February 1395 and January-February 1397--see Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (1920; rpt. Cambridge, 1966), pp. 256-58.

8. Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Lollard Joke," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995), 23-42, at 31, 29.

9. See Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 24-29 and notes.

10. "Ɖe thirddē conclusiun sorwful to here is þ at þ e lawe of continence annexyd to presthod, þ at in preiudys of wimmen was first ordeynid, inducith sodomie in al holy chirche; but we excusin us be þ e Bible for þ e suspecte decre þ at seyth we schulde not nemen it. Resun and experience prouit þ is conclusiun. For delicious metis and drinkis of men of holi chirche welen han nedful purgaciun or werse. Experience for þ e priue asay of syche men is, þ at þ e[i] like non wymmen; and whan þ u prouist sich a man mark him wel for he is on of þ o. Ɖ: e correlary of þ is conclusiun is þ at þ e priuat religions, begynneris of þ is synne, were most worthi to ben annullid. But God for his myth of priue synne sende opyn ueniaunce" (Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, p. 25). (The third conclusion, sorrowful to hear, is that the law of continence [i.e., celibacy] annexed to priesthood, that was ordained first in prejudice of women, induces sodomy in all holy church; but we excuse ourselves [for mentioning sodomy] by the Bible because of the suspect decree that says we should not name it. Reason and experience prove this conclusion. For delicious foods and drinks of men of holy church will have necessary purgation or worse. Experience [proves this conclusion] because the secret test of such men is, that they like no women; and when you prove such a man mark him well for he is one of those. The corollary of this conclusion is that the private religions [i. e., orders of monks and friars, plus hermits, anchorites, and secular canons], beginners of this sin, are most worthy to be annulled. But God for his might send open vengeance on secret sin.)

11. Joan Cadden, "Sciences/Silences: The Natures and Languages of 'Sodomy' in Peter of Abano's *Problemata* Commentary," *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 40-57, at 44.

start of page 96

12. *The Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi* records another event at that parliament in 1395 that carried a sodomitical charge, though it seems that this event must have in fact occurred at an earlier date. See *Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. George B. Stow, Jr., Haney Foundation Publications, 21 (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 135.

13. Thomas Walsingham, *Annales Ricardi Secundi*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, Rolls Series (London, 1866), pp. 182-83. For consistency, I have capitalized "Sodomorum."

14. Thomas Wright, ed., *Political Poems and Songs*, Rolls Series (London, 1861) 2: 128. For the Lollard guerilla action, see John Bale, Conclusion, *A Brefe Chronycle concernynge the Examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ Syr Johan Oldecastell* ([Antwerp?], 1544), ff. 50-1 (qtd. in Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* [1853-70; rpt. New York, 1965] 3: 819 n).

15. Note that the last line might be alluding to burning sodomites. There's a lot of uncertainty about sodomy's punishment in late medieval England, but this poem seems to be the only known suggestion that sodomites might have been burned in medieval England. Thanks to Alan J. Fletcher for his comments on this line (personal correspondence).

16. For terminology linking heresy and sodomy, see Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford, 1979), pp. 8-9.

17. Compare David M. Halperin's observations about "what constitutes authoritative speech about a gay subject: who is authorized to speak, to whom, and with what truth-effects," questions that, I want to argue here, are particularly raised by the occasion of speaking about sodomy (Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* [New York and Oxford, 1995], p. 13).

18. Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, 1992), p. 19, and Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London, 1982).

19. Karras and Boyd, "Ut cum muliere," pp. 104-105.

20. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; rpt. New York, 1990).

21. This option was exercised in other, perhaps specifically politically sensitive, cases. For a discussion of the language of the rolls, see A. H. Thomas and Philip E. Jones, *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1926-61), 4: vii-xix; on the verbatim confession of John Russell, see esp. 4: xii.

22. For the character of the rolls, see Thomas and Jones, *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, 2: vii.

23. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992), p. 16.

24. For this point about Garber's effacement of transgender subjectivity, see

start of page 97

Susan Stryker, "Introduction," *The Transgender Issue, GLQ* 4 (1998), 145-58, at 148.

25. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, p. 101.

26. See Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia, 1999), especially chapter 5, "Sodomy and Other Female Perversions"; Allen J. Frantzen, "The Disclosure of Sodomy in Cleanness," *PMLA* 111 (1996), 451-64.

27. But it seems that lens cannot clarify exactly what the crime or crimes were; as Karras and Boyd put it in "Ut cum muliere," He was feminine, if not literally a woman; but this was not a crime. He was not a prostitute as medieval people understood that concept, and it was unclear whether he was a sodomite.... If, in fact, they did not prosecute him, but took his statement and released him, this may have been because they did not know quite what to make of him. (110)

28. According to Karras, who quotes this passage in *Common Women* (185 n. 7), the authorship is contested. But this motto, whether by Aquinas or not, was popular through the Middle Ages.

29. See Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 344. Karras and Boyd (113 n. 9) cite the fourteenth-century Venetian case of Rolandino Ronchaia, who "was a male transvestite working as a prostitute, but he was accused of sodomy, not prostitution." For this case, see Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1985), p. 136. Details therein help open interpretive possibilities for John/Eleanor Rykener; Rolandino became known as Rolandina, living and working as a female prostitute because of his feminine appearance

30. Karras and Boyd argue strenuously that a prostitute could be seen as a certain type of person and prostitution a sexual orientation and not simply the act of selling sex. Whether or not this is the case here, my point concerns something else: in the act of prostitution Rykener takes on a feminine role that s/he apparently sheds or plays down in other sexual contexts, so that the prostitution is the occasion to perform a gender transgression.

31. "I wish I had your balls in my hand, instead of relics or relic-boxes; let them be cut off, I'll help you carry them": *The Pardoner's Tale*, ll. 952-54, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987).

32. Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men," p. 77 ("La Vie des hommes infames," 3: 237-38).

33. Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, 1977), pp. 165-96, at 183. For Deleuzian intensity as distinct from phenomenology (with its "unified subject" and "originary experience"),

start of page 98

see Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 47 and note.

34. Massumi, *A User's Guide*, p. 47.

35. Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," p. 185.

36. Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains* (265), quoting the book cover describing *Les Vies parallèles*: "Les Anciens aimaient à mettre en parallèle les vies des hommes illustres; on écoutait parler à travers les siècles ces ombres exemplaires. Les parallèles, je sais, sont faites pour se rejoindre à l'infni. Imaginons-en d'autres qui, indéfiniment, divergent.... Ce serait comme l'envers de Plutarque: des vies à ce point parallèles que nul ne peut plus les rejoindre." Michael Lucey quotes this passage (and notes Judith Butler's use of it as well) in "Balzac's Queer Cousins and Their Friends," p. 169. For an explanation of parallel lines' joining at infinity, see <http://www.math.toronto.edu/mathnet/questionCorner>.

37. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1989), p. 102.

38. Didier Eribon, "S'acharner à être gay," *Ex Aequo*, No. 5, May 1997.

39. Boyd and Karras, "Interrogation," p. 460.

< a as successfully passing be to seems Rykener >

The interrogation of this cross-dressed person caught in a sodomitical act suggests that laws based on clear and apparent sex difference, that is, heterosexually based laws--laws regulating prostitution, for example, that presume that only women act like women--are irrelevant or inadequate in the face of queer desires or queer truths about the inessentiality of gender, the inadequacy of binary gender categories of heterosexuality, and the resistance of bodies to their official gender constitution and categorization. Finally, Rykener's feminine gender performance demonstrates that at least fundamentally--in regard to the fundament, that is--masculine and feminine are indistinguishable, and this is what may make him/her a nightmare for not only civil but also ecclesiastical authorities, as well as for dissenters such as the Lollards. The Wife of Bath, another sex/gender anomaly created at about this time, in her *Prologue* addresses the agendas behind the clerical regulation of gender behavior and constitution of normative anatomy; but the inconclusiveness of Rykener's court proceedings may be a sign of a momentary failure of such laws and agendas, such failure the result of his/her queer and queering presence.

There seems to have been no pursuit of a formal legal case beyond this interrogation. But we can be certain that Rykener's queerness was not celebrated on those Guildhall premises. The inconclusiveness of the case and the technical inapplicability of the law of course do not preclude danger to him/her; the silence of the records re