

**Handout for “Gower and #MeToo”
Georgiana Donavin, Westminster College
ICMS, 2019**

Sources for Teaching:

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Dunn, Caroline. “The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England.” *Speculum* 86.1 (2011): 79-116.

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Gravdal, Kathryn. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Harbert, Bruce. "The Myth of Tereus in Ovid and Gower." *Medium AEvum* 41 (1972): 208-214.

Lepley, Douglas L. "The Tale of Tereus (CA, V, 5551-6048)." In *John Gower's Literary Transformations in the Confessio Amantis: Original Articles and Translations*. Ed. Peter G. Beidler. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982. 63-69.

Mast, Isabelle. "Rape in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Other Related Works." In *Young Medieval Women*. Ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 103-32.

Renda, Patricia A. "Mythopoesis and Ideology in Late Medieval and Early Modern Versions of 'Lucrece' and 'Philomela'." PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005.

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Ruyak, Natalie Epinger. "The Tale of Neptune and Cornix (CA, V, 6145-6217)." In *John Gower's Literary Transformations in the Confessio Amantis: Original Articles and Translations*. Ed. Peter G. Beidler. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982. 71-74.

Salisbury, Eve. "Chaucer's 'Wife,' the Law, and the Middle English Breton Lays." In *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*. Ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrill Llewelyn Price. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. 73-93.

Watt, Diane. "Gender and Sexuality in 'Confessio Amantis'." In *A Companion to Gower*. Ed. Siân Echard. Cambridge: Brewer, 2004. 197-213.

Windeatt, Barry. "The Art of Swooning in Middle English." In *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*. Ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011. 211-30.

Partial Course Calendar for Constructing Gender in Medieval Literature:

Unit 3: #MeToo in the Middle Ages

Week 12

Mon., April 8

“The Wife of Bath’s Tale” / “The Tale of Florent”

For next time, read the e-packet on “raptus” in the Middle Ages.

Wed., Apr. 10

Sexual Assault in Medieval Law and History

For next time, read Gower’s tales of Lucrece, Philomene, Cornix, and Calistona in the *Confessio Amantis* e-packet. Prepare to discuss the following questions in class:

*What happens in each tale?

*What are the consequences of sexual harassment and assault?

*What is the narrator’s (priest’s) perspective on rape—and how do you know that he holds this perspective?

*How does the tale’s imagery support or contradict the priest’s perspective?

*What lesson/s does Amans learn about sexual harassment and assault? Where and how is the instruction conveyed?

Week 13

Mon., Apr. 15

Gower’s Unconsenting Women

Brainstorming Ideas for Response Papers

For Monday, write a three- page paper that focuses on one of the four tales discussed today in class. Use the discussion questions to develop a thesis statement. For next time, read “Apollonius of Tyre.”

Wed., Apr. 17

Rape, Saints, and Sinners: The Princess of Antioch and Thaise

Week 14

Mon., Apr. 22

Seminar on Response Papers

Quotations from student response papers

Philomene

“In the case of Philomene, there is a double standard because the rapist is both punished and pardoned—tricked into eating his son, but also turned into a bird, the freest of creatures.”

“The author’s view of rape is strictly negative, although the primary concerns relate not to the physical or emotional trauma of the experience, but to the impropriety of Tereus’s behavior and the irreversible loss of Philomene’s maidenhood.”

Cornix

“Repeatedly Cornix’s beauty is referenced, almost as a justification or explanation—one that contradicts the narrator’s claim that men should never rape.”

“Cornix can be saved and allowed to keep her maidenhood only by being dehumanized and turned into a bird. Gower’s message is unclear as to why it is important not to rape. The confessor’s final lines discuss how attempting to rob a woman of her virginity results in ‘harms of all kinds.’ Harms to whom, though? Apparently, Cornix is ‘safe,’ though transformed to a bird. Are we to pity Neptune, then, like Amans, because of his unrequited lust?”

“With Cornix, there is the duality of her being a black bird and her virtue being white, like a tough protective exterior with a pure soul inside. And Cornix seems very happy to be protected in this way. This tale made me think that all women need this protection, since Cornix was only walking down the beach, as many of us do, when Neptune threatened her. If Pallas had not intervened, the very same thing might have happened the next day.”

Calistona

“The stealing of Calistona’s virginity is the stealing of her humanity, hence her alteration into a bear.”

“The narrator believes that rape is theft: Jupiter steals what Calistona regards as most precious. Interestingly, the other female characters blame Calistona rather than Jupiter. Is this the same kind of victim-blaming that we see from both women and men today?”

“Gower omits Ovid’s narrative of Jupiter cross dressing as Diana to trick Calistona. In this omission, a more heteronormative view of Jupiter and Calistona’s ‘relationship’ is perpetuated, and thus the argument could be made for Juno and Diana’s view that Calistona wrongly breaks a vow to live chastely in a female community.”

“This tale is disheartening because women both inflict the punishments and face the consequences of rape.”

“Being turned into a bird seems like a reward in comparison to Calistona’s transformation into a bear because the birds fly away and escape, while the bear is mercilessly hunted, even by her own kin.”

Lucrece

“Genius equates rape with tyranny in Lucrece’s tale. In the use of the phrase ‘lecherous pride’ Genius casts Arrons as a sex maniac who wants to triumph over Collatin by ‘the destruction of his wife.’ Rape is represented as a tool against women, their husbands, and their country.”

“Gower uses concrete language to indicate pity for victims. As Arrons rises from a soft bed to rape Lucretia, the story makes clear how vilely the kind care that the lady showed her guest is betrayed.”

“The ending is ambiguous, since it does not state definitively whether executing Arrons would be suitable or whether the father could condemn his son to death, or whether the king was seeking a higher sense of morality and justice by banishing his son, rather than continuing to perpetuate a system of meaningless violence.”