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John Rykener, Richard II and the Governance of London

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On the first Sunday of December 1394 between the hours of eight and nine at night, John Rykener was solicited for sex in Cheapside. In the darkness of the winter evening John Britby, a Yorkshireman and innocent abroad, supposedly mistook Rykner by his dress for a woman.[1] The two men adjourned to a side street to do the deed. There they were immediately detected 'by certain officers of the city' lying together 'over [*super*] a stall in a lane called Soper Lane' doing 'illud vitium detestabile nephandum et ignominiosum', a knowingly opaque circumlocution that here perhaps signals anal sex.[2] Caught *flagrante delicto*, they were arrested, imprisoned, and subsequently brought before the mayor's court. Questioned before the mayor, Rykener told how he first dressed as a woman to sell sex and took the working name Eleanor. He then proceeded to confess to a litany of homosexual encounters with friars and secular clergy whilst masquerading variously as an embroideress and as a barmaid, but also heterosexual couplings with both nuns and a laywoman. All allegedly occurred during the course of a prolonged trip to Burford, via Oxford and returning to London by way of Beaconsfield and lastly the lanes by St Katherine's Hospital just beyond the walls to the east of the city. It is a remarkable narrative.

The unusually full account contained in the London Plea and Memoranda Rolls of John Rykener's appearance before the mayor's court is both vivid and dramatic. Its narrative of cross-dressing, male prostitution, gay sex, clerical promiscuity and the like seems to offer a rare window onto late medieval sexuality and sexual mores. The discussion of the case offered by David Boyd and Ruth Karras in 1995 helped firmly to locate Rykener in the

[1] Rykener has lately achieved a posthumous fame as a cross–dressing male prostitute: R. M. Karras and D. L. Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere": A Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by L. Fradenburg and C. Freccero (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99–116.

[2] The Rykener case is recorded in London Metropolitan Archives, *Plea and Memoranda Roll A34, m.2*. All transcriptions of the Latin text and translations into modern English are my own. *Stall* here is a term for a table on which merchandise is displayed: *MED* under *Stal(le (n.)*, 2. The meaning of *super* is ambiguous since it could also be translated as 'by' or 'on'. 'By' implies the two men lay on the ground, which seems unlikely given the filthy state of the lane. 'On' is more likely, but 'over' would make the most sense of the city's officers' supposed conviction of the nature of the sexual act being performed. Soper Lane is one of a number of narrow streets that open off Cheapside. Historically associated with the pepperers, by the late fourteenth century it was occupied by mercers, drapers, and fishmongers. Some shops appear to have been run down by this date. The narrow lanes opening off the south side of Cheapside had a long association with prostitution, suggested by the names of the nearby Gropecunt and Popkirtle Lanes: *ibid*., pp. 203, 241; D. J. Keene and V. Harding, *Historical Gazetteer of London before the Great Fire, vol. 1: Cheapside* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1987), pp. 645–810.

history of gender and sexuality.[3] The focus, therefore, has been on the person of John/Eleanor Rykener and what he and the narrative about him can tell us about late medieval constructions of sexuality.[4] Subsequently the case has stimulated some excellent scholarship. Karras and Boyd themselves argued that Rykener's cross dressing and his 'passive' role when engaged in anal sex with other men points to a medieval understanding of gender as performative.[5] Their view that the mayor's court was more anxious about Rykener's gender transgression than prostitution or sodomy has become something of an orthodoxy.[6] Carolyn Dinshaw and Ruth Evans consider the cultural climate of late fourteenth-century London, which Evans comments was 'a nodal point for the production and dissemination of numerous texts that are beginning to create a public discourse about political events'.[7] Dinshaw suggests resonances between the 1395 'Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards', Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and the Rykener text.[8] Evans, who is interested in the idea of the cross-dressing, multi-tasking Rykener as 'imitator', sees resonances between the Rykener text and Thomas Favent's slightly earlier *Historia Mirabilis Parliamenti*.[9]

My own initial reading echoes the cultural concerns of Dinshaw and Evans by drawing attention to the magisterial agenda with (dis)honest trading that runs through the text. Rykener is here represented as a tradesperson who purports to be an embroideress and a barmaid, but actually sells sex. His labour is thus in allowing his body to be used for the sexual gratification of others rather than honest work. Even as a prostitute he is a dishonest trader: he poses as a woman selling straight sex to male clients, whereas he is in fact a man masquerading as a woman.[10] The sex he sells to his unwitting, and hence cheated customers is in fact anal sex. This is the purpose of John Britby's reported testimony that he believed Rykener to be a woman. Britby here colludes with the magistrates' agenda to highlight Rykener's dishonesty. Rykener is no less complicit in his testimony. In offering a salacious history of cross-dressing and sexual transgression, Rykener allows the mayor and his fellow magistrates ammunition against a variety of targets.

3 D. L. Boyd and R. M. Karras, 'The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London', *GLQ*, 1 (1995), 459–65, expanded the following year as Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', pp. 99–116. The underlying text was brought to their attention by Sheila Lindenbaum.

4 For subsequent Rykener scholarship see C. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 100–12, 138–39; F. Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, trans. by P. E. Selwyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 269–71; J. M. Bennett, 'England: Women and Gender', in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by S. H. Rigby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 87–106 (pp. 87–8 and 100–1); T. Linkinen, 'Sukupuolinen vieras John "Eleanor" Rykener: Naisena esiintynyt miesprostituoitu 1300-luvun Lontoossa', *Historiallinen aikakauskirja*, 3 (2004), 326–34; C. Beattie, 'Gender and Femininity in Medieval England', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. by Nancy Partner (London: Arnold, 2005), pp. 153–70; R. Evans, 'The Production of Space in Chaucer's London', in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. by A. Butterfield (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 41–56: J. M. Bennett and S. McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London', *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), 1–25. Rexroth's book was first published in German in 1999. I have only listed some more important items. I have not read Tom Linkinen's article.

5 Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', pp. 109–10. Cf. Beattie, 'Gender and femininity', pp. 155–58.

6 E.g. 'gender transgression, rather than sodomy or prostitution, is at issue in the legal proceedings against ... John Rykener': R. S. Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York: Macmillan, 2000), p. 183, n. 38. See also Bennett, 'England: Women and Gender', p. 87.

7 Evans, 'The Production of Space', p. 45.

8 Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, pp. 100–12.

9 Evans, 'The Production of Space', pp. 41–56.

10 Cf. Evans, 'The Production of Space', pp. 49–50.

In relating how he had first dressed as a woman at the instigation of one Elizabeth Brouderer, Rykener continues the theme of dishonest trading. Elizabeth used her own daughter to lure male clients, but substituted Rykener during the night, telling the clients the following morning that they had in fact had sex with Rykener.[11] This Elizabeth Brouderer is probably to be understood as the Elizabeth Moring noted at length in the city's Letter Book 'H' ten years earlier.[12] Elizabeth was tried for operating a brothel under the cover of an embroidery business and for luring girls into prostitution under the guise of apprenticeships. The narrative again takes a sideswipe at incontinent priests and offers an account of one Joan who had complained to the mayor that her mistress had made her spend two nights with a priest under the pretext of lighting his way home. Joan's innocent abroad naïveté, reminiscent of the eponymous heroine of *Fanny Hill*, another male-authored narrative from a later era, serves as a foil for Elizabeth's deception.

These two apparently related cases co-exist with more conventional prosecutions for deception such as of a baker who inserted iron into his bread to increase the weight, a trader selling counterfeit spices, a scrivener who forged deeds, or a man who masqueraded as the Earl of Ormond.[13] Interestingly, these cases are all recorded in the Letter Books of the City; the kinds of cases recorded alongside the Rykener case in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls tend to focus on property and debt litigation.[14] The records insist on a moralizing discourse of deceit and falsehood discovered and punished which serves to reinforce the claim to moral authority of the civic governors. What the Rykener and the Moring cases specifically reveal, however, is a concern to enforce a conservative gender ideology which clearly distinguished men from women by dress and understood heterosexuality as normative.[15] An anxiety about women traders follows from this agenda. Such concerns may be contextualized in the understanding that society after the plague was in need of reform and that a divinely sanctioned social and gender hierarchy had to be restored.[16] Both cases also reflect an urban economy in which women were conspicuous as traders and apprenticeships were available to young women in much the same way as young men.[17] Like the mid-eighteenth-century world critiqued by Cleland in *Fanny Hill*, London is represented as a place of trade and commerce, where people bought and sold a very diverse range of commodities and services. Concern about honesty is here a specifically bourgeois concern that grows out of the needs of trade.[18]

Although Dinshaw and Evans both appreciate the fictive qualities of the narrative, no one to date has questioned the historicity of the actors or events described. Rykener's historicity

[11] That Brouderer's intention was to blackmail customers is suggested in Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 270.

[12] Rexroth argues that such an identification is 'speculation', but this is predicated on his understanding of the historicity of the Rykener case: *Deviance and Power*, p. 270, n. 14; *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries*, ed. by H. T. Riley (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1848), pp. 484–86.

[13] *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. by Riley, pp. 496–98, 527–29, 536–37.

[14] I discuss below the Walpole case that is recorded immediately alongside that of Rykener and does not fit this pattern.

[15] For a discussion of the appropriateness of a modern discourse of homosexuality and heteronormativity etc. see T. Pugh, *Sexuality and its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1–19.

[16] Cf. J. Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past and Present*, 144 (1994), pp. 3–35, especially 11–19, 27.

[17] Caroline M. Barron, 'The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century London', in *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the later Middle Ages*, ed. by D. E. S. Dunn, The Fifteenth Century Series, 4 (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), pp. 139–53.

[18] Cf. Gervase Rosser's arguments respecting the value of guilds in an urban, commercial context: 'Crafts, Guilds, and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town', *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), 3–31.

is indeed implicitly important to Judith Bennett, David Boyd and Ruth Karras, Shannon McSheffrey, Frank Rexroth and several other commentators in their discussions of the case.[19] That the text was created as the record of an actual case has always been presumed. Certainly the presence of the case in the Plea and Memoranda rolls initially appears unproblematic, though closer scrutiny reveals a slight inconsistency in the location of the entry at the very beginning of the second membrane of roll A34 alongside only one other case. This second case concerns one John Walpole, tailor, who had a longstanding grievance over his treatment in Ludgate jail. Its immediate interest here is that it references the issue of good governance by the mayor and aldermen and it is written up in a staged and dramatic way. It purports to give the findings of a jury of inquest dated 6 February 1395 concerning a verbal exchange in the vicinity of St Paul's between Walpole and John Fressh, the mayor, which had culminated in Walpole taunting the mayor with the threat, 'mayor, do me justice, or I will bring such a mob about you that you will be glad to do justice'. In response the mayor had ordered that he be taken to Newgate Prison, but as he was led away Walpole raised the hue and cry protesting that 'the mayor of London wants to have me falsely imprisoned because I sue for justice'. On arrival at Newgate, Walpole asserted that a number of earlier mayors had governed falsely. The jurors concluded that 'a great part of the uproar and rancour in the city from the time of Nicholas Twyford to the present day was made and spread by the ill-will of John Walpole, who was a great disseminator of discord'.[20] Introduced into this account at the point that the two men had entered St Paul's churchyard are the notorious Sir John Bushy and Sir William Bagot, both by this date closely associated with Richard II. They appear to play no part in the narrative other than to be present at this one moment, so their inclusion in the inquest account is very deliberate.

Somewhat unusually these two cases together occupy the whole of the recto of that membrane.[21] It is, however, the details of the Rykener case that raise the most immediate queries. First, as others have remarked, though Britby and Rykener are brought before the mayor presiding over the mayoral court and are made to answer questions put to them and though there is a clear statement that the two men were discovered engaged in sex, no

[19] Bennett, 'England: Woman and Gender', pp. 87–88, 100–1; S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 149; Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', pp. 101–16; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 269–71. It is, of course, historians rather than literary scholars that have based their arguments on the assumed historicity of the case.

[20] *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London. Volume 3: 1381–1412*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 229. Twyford was mayor in 1388.

[21] The minutes of business in the mayor's court are not consistently recorded in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls. It would seem that certain more interesting cases were singled out for record in the City's Letter Books, which served as memoranda of the business of City government, whereas much routine court activity, often concerning property and debt litigation or administrative matters such as recording letters of attorney were documented in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls, albeit in rather loose chronological order. Other cases noted earlier (membrane 1) on the same roll (A34) as the Rykener case is found include a plaint by an apprentice whose master had failed to make him a freeman even after ten years (dated 4 November 1394) and a property dispute (dated 26 January 1395). On the verso of the second membrane there are again a couple of property and debt cases dated 18–19 October 1395. The cases on the third (and final) membrane of the roll also date to 1395. The previous roll (A33) contains cases from 1393 (membranes 1–3), 1394 (membranes 4–5r, 6–7r, 8), and stray cases from various years at the beginning of the fifteenth century (membranes 6v and 7v). None of the cases from 1394 on roll A33 is later in date than October, so the inclusion of the Rykener case on the following roll is logical, but its placement at the beginning of a new membrane is noteworthy. See *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1381–1412*, ed. by Thomas, pp. 205–32. For discussion of the mayor's court see *Calendar of Early Mayor's Court Rolls, 1298–1307*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), pp. vii–xlv; C. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 154–56.

actual charges are recorded. Neither transvestism nor buggery were matters that are otherwise documented in English secular courts and the mayor's court of London would not have been considered competent to exercise jurisdiction at least in respect of sodomy.[22] Britby may have confessed to fornication, but this fell outside the competence of the court.[23] Prostitution, understood as the sale of sexual services — we are specifically told that Rykener demanded payment for his labour — was outlawed within the city of London and Soper Lane was very much within the city.[24] That said, there seems to have been little concern otherwise to prosecute or to punish individual sex workers; the main targets were the pimps and procuresses who controlled the trade. It may be that Rykener is an exception to this rule of thumb; he was no poor young woman forced or tricked into selling her body in order to get by, the pawn of the pimp or procuress who controlled her, nor was he offering vaginal sex.[25] But this does little to account for the questions posed to Rykener, nothing to explain his fulsome confession to numerous instances of both homosexual and heterosexual sex, almost all of which fell outside the boundaries of the court's jurisdiction (sometimes by many miles), nor the details of his work as an embroideress or a tapster (barmaid) which form part of his narrative. Even if we suppose — to confuse an historical Rykener with the textual Rykener — he was pathologically garrulous or a compulsive liar, the decision of the clerk making the entry to include so much detail irrelevant to the one specific transgression of prostitution within the city walls remains problematic.

Second, there is no record of a verdict or of punishment. Indeed, and quite exceptionally by the standards of the mayor's court, there is no further record of any response or action on the part of the court nor any further notice of Rykener. This is in essence a corollary of the first point. The absence of explicit charges and of any verdict or sentence is all the more striking a lacuna since, though the record is not an actual trial transcript, it still presents an unusually full account of what the two allegedly told the court. It ends abruptly with the last words of Rykener's reported testimony. No space is left before the next entry to suggest that such material was intended or that the clerk had left his task incomplete.

The discussion thus far draws attention to some peculiarities of the Rykener case, but of itself hardly disproves its historicity. I wish now to explore further evidence for the two

[22] The (?)early fourteenth-century English law compilation known as *Britton* indicates sodomy was punishable by death by burning. This would have made it a felony and so a matter reserved to the royal courts and beyond the jurisdiction of a borough court, though there is no evidence this was in fact the case: *Britton: The French Text Carefully Revised, with an English Translation, Introduction and Notes*, ed. by Francis Morgan Nichols, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1865), I, 41. Helmut Puff has shown that towns within the German Empire and Switzerland, which historically often enjoyed rather greater autonomy, did act in sodomy cases, but not usually before the fifteenth century: H. Puff, 'Localizing Sodomy: The "Priest and Sodomite" in Pre-Reformation Germany and Switzerland', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1997), 165–95; H. Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp, 17–18. See also McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, pp. 148–49; Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', p. 113, n. 10. Cf. the late fourteenth-century case of the hermaphrodite priest of Lübeck discussed below.

[23] This was a matter for the Church courts in their *ex officio* (or policing) capacity: Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 70.

[24] R. M. Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 14–15.

[25] Karras and Boyd argue that Rykener would not have been considered a prostitute because the medieval understanding of the prostitute 'was intimately tied up with femininity': Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', pp. 103–5. However, that the text clearly presents Rykener's interest in payment for sexual services and his promiscuity/availability, both crucial characteristics of medieval understandings of prostitution, suggests otherwise. There may be other reasons why the text is not in fact concerned with charges, verdicts, or punishments.

protagonists of the case, considering first John Britby. As a locative byname *Britby* (or obvious variant spellings) is obscure: there is a Britby in Cumberland and there are a small number of near-contemporary men named *Britby*. Of particular interest are a John Britby, clerk, noted in March 1384 and a John de Britby, recorded as the vicar of Stainton near Yarm (Yorkshire, North Riding), a church appropriated to Guisborough Priory, from 1410. It is possible these two references concern the same man towards the beginning and rather later in his career.[26] Given the apparent rarity of the name and the near coincidence of dates and of location — Britby is said to be from the county of York, i.e. Yorkshire, but not from a town or city that might be known in London such as York or Doncaster — it very possible that the John de Britby, subsequently vicar of an obscure Yorkshire parish, but perhaps only a clerk in minor orders some sixteen years earlier, was one and the same as the John Britby who propositioned Rykener. He may also have been at one time a royal clerk.[27] This does not absolutely confirm the historicity of the John Britby of the record, but it does make it likely. It certainly suggests at least that this is not a fabricated name.

If *Britby* is a very unusual name, then *Rykener* is no less. I have discovered only three other Rykeners, including two — perhaps one and the same — John Rykeners. A John Rykener of Bengeo (Herts.) is noted in 1403. Perhaps more interesting is John Rykener, clerk noted in January 1399 as having escaped from the Bishop of London's prison at Bishop's Stortford (Herts.) together with one Thomas Mareys, chaplain.[28] This prompts the question of why he was imprisoned in the first place. His clerical status no doubt explains why he was subject to the bishop's jurisdiction, but what serious matter led to him being held in an, albeit leaky, jail?[29]

[26] John Britby, clerk, was named with two other clerks, two knights and several other men as one of those enfeoffed with the manor of Powerstock (Dorset) by the (presumably) dying Sir William de Wyndesor, the husband of Alice Perrers: *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Richard II–Henry IV*, 10 vols (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1895–1909), *1381–85*, 390 (hereafter *CPR*). For John de Britby, vicar, see J. Graves, *The History of Cleveland, in the North Riding of the County of York* (Carlisle: Jollie, 1808), p. 479. This John appears to have been replaced as vicar in 1435, which would be compatible with this same John being a young man in 1394, but could also fit with his being a clerk, perhaps in minor orders, ten years earlier.

[27] Nicholas de Rounhey, one of the two other clerks named in the notice of the 1384 enfeoffment (note 25 above), can be identified with a chaplain of that name who was presented to the church of Debden (near Saffron Walden, Essex) by the king, the living being then temporarily in the king's gift. Rounhey would therefore appear to be a clerk in the king's service rewarded in the usual way with ecclesiastical preferment. This lends credence to the possibility that Britby was at some point a clerk in royal service, though — assuming he was the same man — his career seems not have been very successful. The vicarage he occupied latterly — valued at £5 14s. 2d. in the early sixteenth century — was not very lucrative and was dependent on Guisborough Priory and not royal patronage: *CPR 1374–77*, p. 130.

[28] *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Richard II–Henry IV*, 10 vols (London: H. M. S. O., 1914–1932), *1402–5*, 287 (hereafter *CCR*); *CPR 1396–99*, p. 461. John Rykener of Bengeo was associated with Sir Edward Benstead and Philip Thornbury, esquire, Hertfordshire landowners. There is a place called Rickney near Bengeo so the names may be related. Of John Rykener, clerk, nothing is otherwise known; the Patent Roll entry is concerned with the bishop of London's failure to keep his prison secure rather than the prisoners who escaped. The *Victoria County History* observes that the bishop's gaol at Stortford 'was used for all criminals within the liberty of the bishop in Hertfordshire, but the greater number of prisoners were convicted clerks'. It goes on to note that there were numerous escapes of prisoners during Bishop Robert Braybrooke's time. The propinquity of Bengeo and Bishop's Stortford — they are only a dozen miles apart — strengthens the possibility that these two Johns are one and the same. The third Rykener was a William Rykener, monk, recorded in the infirmary of St Swithun's cathedral priory at Winchester in 1382: *The Victoria History of the County of Hertford*, ed. by William Page, 5 vols (Westminster: Constable, 1902–23), III, 297–99; *Compotus Rolls of the Obedientiaries of St Swithun's Priory, Winchester*, ed. by G. W. Kitchin, Hampshire Record Society, 7 (London: Simpkin, 1892), p. 279.

[29] Simple fornication would not be a reason for a clerk to be held in a bishop's prison awaiting judicial process, but a variety of more serious matters would. This chance notice in the Patent Rolls could thus tally with the case from

Rykener is thus an actual, but uncommon name and the John Rykener of our text may well be identified with, or at least based upon, one or other (or both) of the men just noticed. He, like his client Britby, may have been a clerk or *clericus*, perhaps part of a larger subculture of men with clerical training drawn to the capital by the prospect of employment in royal service and the lure of ecclesiastical preferment. It is entirely possible that these two men came at some point to the attention of the city authorities. It follows that the entry in the Plea and Memoranda rolls at least names actual historical personages. It may even be that Rykener was known or suspected as practicing illicit sex. He may even have been caught with Britby.

Rykener may have been a real person, but his unusual name — as Carolyn Dinshaw has suggested — has some interesting resonances. She comments ' "Rykener" seems particularly appropriate for a prostitute (who reckons — counts — money) telling (reckoning — recounting, narrating) a story'.[30] Following Dinshaw's lead, we may note that the Middle English noun *rekenere* describes one who keeps accounts, precisely the kind of office a secular clerk might perform. Among the spellings found are those that substitute an *i* for the first *e*, taking us closer in sound to Rykener's name.[31] Dinshaw's discussion of the 'appropriateness' of Rykener's name references the Middle English *rekenen* — from which *rekener* derives.[32] The first meaning of *rekenen* — to count or to reckon — seems pertinent to trade generally rather than prostitution as such; the Bracton-author states that a burgess's son 'is taken to be of full age when he knows how properly to count money, measure cloths and perform other similar paternal business'.[33] The second meaning — 'to narrate' or 'recount' — seems especially pertinent in this instance. There may also be resonances of the verb *raiken*, which can mean to wander about at will.[34] The Rykener of the record relates an extraordinary narrative that takes him from London to Burford and back again. This logic would suggest his name may not just be happy coincidence, but deliberate choice if not actual fabrication.

Some other names noted in the narrative appear to signify actual persons. As already noticed, Elizabeth Brouderer or Elizabeth the embroideress, who employed Rykener and 'first dressed him in womanly garb', is probably one and the same as the Elizabeth Moring who appeared before the same court nine years earlier for running a prostitution racket masquerading as a legitimate embroidery business. She lured innocent girls by offering them apprenticeships only to prostitute them.[35] Moring at the time was living in All Hallows on the Wall parish, but she was expelled from the city by way of punishment. It is very possible that she subsequently resided at an address outside Bishopsgate, which is the location that Rykener attributes to Elizabeth Brouderer, being a matter of perhaps a couple of hundred yards distant, but, significantly, beyond the city gates.

A number of other named persons give every impression of being real personages, but I have only managed to identify one. Dns William Foxlee, scholar of Oxford, was very probably the same person as the Dns Foxle noted in 1410–11 as a chaplain of New College.[36] Philip,

the mayor's court, but hardly explains the five year interval between the two.

30 Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 103.

31 *MED*, under *rekenere (n.)*.

32 *MED*, under *rekenen*.

33 *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, ed. by George E. Woodbine, trans. by Samuel E. Thorne, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968), II, 250.

34 *MED*, under *raiken 1c* and *1d*.

35 Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 59–60 and 163, n. 49; Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', p. 114, n. 42. A translation of the case is published in *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. by Riley, pp. 484–86.

36 A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957–

the rector of Theydon Garnon ought to be identifiable, but in fact other rectors' names are recorded for the pertinent date. I have been unable to find Brother John Barry of the Friars Minor, John Clerc of the Swan at Burford — with whom Ryckener claimed to have stayed for six weeks whilst employed in the capacity of a tapster or barmaid — and Joan, the daughter of John Mathew of Beaconsfield — with whom he claims to have lain like a man.[37] Dns. John, formerly chaplain at the Church of St. Margaret Pattens is also in principle identifiable.[38] The Oxford scholars Dns. John and Dns. Walter, and Brother Michael, another Franciscan, an anonymous Carmelite, and six foreign men, who encountered Rykener at Burford, together with two foreign friars minor, two chaplains, many nuns and many other women, married and single, all noticed in Rykener's account, are at best names. There is enough detail here to lend Rykener's account credibility, but we might also see this in part as a rhetorical strategy.[39]

Eleanor or Alianor is the name that Rykener adopted when dressed in women's clothing. It is not a rare name, but it is a name much more associated with royalty than the commonality.[40] It is, therefore, a name with pretensions, but it could well have satirical intent. Dinshaw suggests the name references Rykener's 'alienness' or 'otherness'. This may tell us more about modern scholarly interests in 'the other' than contemporary perceptions, though some resonance with the Middle English term for a foreigner cannot be overruled.

The final name to be explored is 'Anna meretrix quondam cuiusdam famuli domini Thome Blount' whom Rykener claimed first instructed him how to have sex as a woman. *Anna*, or *Ann(e)* in English, was rarely used as a given name as early as 1394.[41] Indeed easily the best known Anne was the recently deceased queen, Anne of Bohemia. It could be, therefore, that this Anne or Anna too was not a native Englishwoman — and perhaps Dutch or German since the name was more common in these regions.[42] *Meretrix* is here a slightly problematic term as

59), II, 720.

37 A Thomas de Ulseby was presented to the rectory of Theydon Garnon in 1391 and a William Wasselyn in October 1394; no Philip is found: R. Newcourt, *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense: An Ecclesiastical Parochial History of the Diocese of London*, 2 vols (London: Motte, 1708–10), II, 584. Barry is not found among the recorded graduates of either university. 'The Swan' at Burford is documented in 1629 by the bridge over the River Windrush. Swan Lane, which runs off Burford's High Street, was historically Mullender's Lane. 'The Swan' is not noticed among the medieval inns recorded in the recent 'England's Past for Everyone' study of Burford: R. H. Gretton, *The Burford Records: A Study in Minor Town Government* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), pp. 310, 370; A. Catchpole, D. Clark and R. Peberdy, *Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2008), p. 47.

38 John Stakbole was rector in 1379, but neither of the two chaplains named in that year was called John: *The Church in London, 1375–92*, ed. by A. K. McHardy, London Record Society, 13 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1977), p. 11.

39 Church court depositions include details designed to show that the deponent really witnessed the events they describe. Witnesses were sometimes specifically asked additional questions about the clothes people wore or the weather.

40 The name *Alianor* or *Eleanor* is scarcely to be found in the extant nominative listings for the later fourteenth-century poll taxes. Using a sample of about 1,300 female names from the Suffolk poll tax of 1381, Sara Uckelman found only one instance: S. L. Uckelman, 'Index of Names in the 1381 Suffolk Poll Tax', pp. 1–25 (p. 7), published electronically at http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/english/suffolk1381.pdf (accessed 1 March 2011).

41 Philip Stell counted the frequency of names of some 17,000 females from extant poll tax returns for Yorkshire in 1379 and 1381. Commenting that 'the names of the Holy Family … were almost never used', he noticed the name Anne (Anna) only six times: P. M. Stell, 'Forenames in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Yorkshire: A Study Based on a Biographical Database Generated by Computer', *Medieval Prosopography*, 20 (1999), 95–128 (pp. 116 and 126). Uckelman found nine instances of *Anna* in the Suffolk 1381 poll tax returns: Uckelman, 'Index of Names', p. 6.

42 Anna is found in sources of the period from the Low Countries: B. Brokamp, 'Female First Names in the Annual Accounts of Deventer 1337–1393', published electronically at http://www.deventerburgerscap.nl/studies/voornamen-vrouw-en.htm and S. L. Uckelman, 'Dutch Names

there is a tension between the Latin word for a prostitute that the recording clerk has chosen and Anne's former association with a servant/employee/retainer of Sir Thomas Blount; the translation 'whore' offered by Karras and Boyd probably gets us close to the English term that hides behind the Latin.[43] In modern English, it might also be rendered as *mistress*, though the Latin text could just as well have read *mulier*, *amazia*, or even *amica*. The juxtaposition of Anne and *meretrix*, however, begins to read like a formal appellation, Anne the Prostitute.

We know or may surmise four things about the textual Anne. First, she was most likely dead. The text describes her as formerly the mistress of an unnamed man, a formula that could perhaps imply that the relationship had ended, but much more likely indicates she was deceased.[44] Second, she was probably not English. Third, she is closely identified with the sex trade; it is implicitly as a professional sex worker that Anne taught Rykener to have anal sex like a woman. Fourth, she was at one time the mistress of someone in the service of Sir Thomas Blount. Evidently Blount's name is more important than that of the anonymous employee. Sir Thomas was a man of supposedly comparatively modest means who achieved a considerable degree of importance through devoted service to Richard II.[45] Anna was then very much the girl who danced with a man who danced with a girl who danced with the Prince of Wales — or in this instance the king himself. Once again, however, the historicity of Anne as a person is less than clear. The one-time attachment to an anonymous man who worked for one of the better known courtiers of the day hardly identifies her. Her given name is bound up with a work identity that lends her only a generic identity as a foreign, possibly Flemish sex worker. This is, of course, a plausible identity. Several of the women working as employees of the Southwark stews — in effect brothels — according to the 1381 poll tax returns were given the rather significant second name of Frowe, a version of the Dutch word for woman.[46] Ruth Karras indeed notes that 'Flemish, Dutch, and Low German women are particularly prominent in the records as prostitutes and bawds' and speculates that Flemish women may have been especially in demand as prostitutes.[47] What we can be more certain of is that women from the Low Countries were associated with the London sex trade in the contemporary imagination.

Thus far the evidence for the historicity of this case is ambivalent. The two principle protagonists are likely real persons. At least one of the men for whom Rykener provided sex in return for payment is also documented, though one is not. The case appears within the appropriate archive and is written in a form clearly informed by the conventions of the mayor's court. Magisterial concerns about dishonest trading — and women as dishonest traders —

1393–96', published electronically at http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/dutch/dutch14.html (all accessed 1 March 2011). Cf. also O. Leys and J. van der Schaar, *Vlaamse vrouwennamen en Hollandse naamgeving in de Middeleeuwen*, Anthroponymica, 10 (Amsterdam: Instituut voor Naamkunde, 1959), p. 28.

43 Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', p. 111.

44 Karras and Boyd render the Latin 'Anna meretrix quondam cuiusdam famuli' as 'Anna the whore of a former servant', but I read *quondam* to qualify Anne's status rather than that of Sir Thomas's employee: Karras and Boyd, ' "Ut cum muliere" ', p. 111.

45 Sir Thomas Blount had remarried for the second time to a widowed heiress beyond childbearing age, in all probability, earlier in 1394: L. Clark, 'Sir Thomas Blount (*b.* after 1348, *d.* 1400)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published electronically at http://www.oxforddnb.com (hereafter *ODNB*); 'Sir Thomas Blount (exec. 1400), of Laverstock, Wilts.', in *The House of Commons, 1386–1421*, ed. by J. S. Roskell, Linda Clark and Carole Rawcliffe, The History of Parliament, 4 vols (Stroud: Sutton, 1992), II, 261–62.

46 *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, ed. by C. C. Fenwick, Records of Social and Economic History, n. s. 27, 29, 37, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–2005), II, 564. Two women named *Aughte Frowe* are recorded, where *Aughte* may represent a form of the modern Dutch girl's name *Aagtje*, a variant of Agatha.

47 Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 56–57.

colour the way the narrative of the case is presented. To this we may add concerns about incontinent priests and, to use contemporary terminology, aliens or foreigners in modern English. These sorts of concerns are echoed in the extant wardmote court records of a generation later, but are here suggested by the regular notice of clergy, particularly friars, among Rykener's clients, including two alien Franciscans and six foreign men, and the resonances of the Anne or Anna just discussed.[48] There remains, however, much that is odd about the case, viz. its position on the extant rolls, the absence of either charge or outcome, and the entirely uncharacteristic trouble of the clerk to record events allegedly located outside the city of London and hence by any measure outwith the jurisdiction of the court.

In the section that follows I shall attempt to recover the possible meanings or resonances of Rykener's itinerary. Rykener's first named destination was Oxford. He stayed for five weeks in the guise of an embroideress and confessed to having frequently (*sepius*) committed sodomy there with three scholars, all described as *dominus* ('Sir'), the courtesy title for a priest. Oxford may not have been a serious rival to London, but it was county borough with a taxed population in 1377 of 2,357 suggesting, once clergy are added in, a total easily approaching 4,000.[49] In 1327 the town had been granted laws and liberties modelled on the city of London and this was confirmed in 1378.[50] Indeed only a year before, in September 1393, the mayor of Oxford had personally met with the then London mayor and aldermen to verify the pertinent entry in the city's Letter Book 'E'.[51] The authority of the borough's mayor, aldermen, and bailiffs to govern effectively through their officers and courts, however, was seriously undermined by the rival authority of the University. Since 1355 and the St Scholastica day riot between townsfolk and scholars, it was the University, not the town, that regulated the trade in foodstuffs, the cleansing of the streets, and the carrying of weapons in the streets. The Chancellor's court exercised jurisdiction over all transgressions, other than homicide and mayhem, involving clerks of the university, their families, or employees.[52] Oxford may constitutionally have been modelled on London, but in effect by the later fourteenth century its civic institutions were emasculated. Rykener's narrative implicates three scholars and in so doing casts aspersions on the capacity of the Chancellor of the university to regulate those under his authority. Oxford may have another resonance. Richard II's favourite Robert de Vere, who lived in exile following the rout at Radcot Bridge and had died in 1392, inherited the title of Earl of Oxford.[53]

Burford in the last years of the fourteenth century was a much smaller place having only 367 taxpayers in 1377.[54] A seigniorial borough enjoying limited civic autonomy, in the later fourteenth century it was one of the Cotswold boom towns associated with the wool trade and cloth manufacture.[55] 1394, however, was a date of some significance for Burford. In that

[48] Cf. the 1422 wardmote court: *Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1413–37*, ed. by Thomas, pp. 115–41.

[49] *The Poll Taxes*, ed. by Fenwick, II, 287.

[50] *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, 6 vols (London: H. M. S. O., 1903–27), IV, 12–13; *A History of the County of Oxford. Volume 4: City of Oxford*, ed. by A. Crossley and C. R. Elrington (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1979), p. 51.

[51] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London. H: 1375–99*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: City of London Corporation, 1907), pp. 398–99.

[52] *A History of the County of Oxford*, ed. by Crossley and Elrington, IV, 54–57.

[53] Richard had specifically asked that Robert be allowed to return only months before his death. When his body was eventually brought back, Richard reportedly opened the coffin, 'looked long at his face and touched it with his finger, publicly showing to Robert, when dead, the affection which he had shown him previously, when alive': A. Tuck, 'Vere, Robert de, Ninth Earl of Oxford, Marquess of Dublin, and Duke of Ireland (1362–1392)', *ODNB*.

[54] *The Poll Taxes*, ed. by Fenwick, II, 290.

[55] Gretton, *Burford Records*, pp. 12–13, 165–66; Catchpole et al., *Burford*, pp. 19, 33–52.

year Thomas Despenser achieved his majority and gained control of the manor which had previously been held in wardship by the crown. Despenser effectively grew up at court with the young Richard II and, like Robert de Vere, became one of his intimates and most ardent supporters. Modern economic historians would doubtless point to Burford as an example of a community that flourished in the new climate after the Black Death. From the perspective of London's civic governors at the end of the fourteenth century, however, Burford must have looked like the wild west — unregulated crafts, the absence of guild structures that were subject to the oversight of civic government, little effective control over the training of craft workers or the quality of goods, little control over the market, and a court that was driven by a lord's concern with revenue rather than a magisterial concern with order.[56] Rykener's Burford was also a symbol both of aristocratic control of town government and of the court of Richard II. Here Rykener plied with impunity his trade under the guise of a barmaid of the Swan.[57]

Beaconsfield lies six miles north of Windsor halfway along the main road between Oxford and London, being some twenty miles or so — a day's journey — from each. Beaconsfield then may signify little more than a break in Rykener's journey.[58] A Nicholas Bekenesfeld, however, was made a buyer for the royal household in 1394.[59] Beaconsfield may thus allude to the extravagant ways of the royal court by reference to the royal buyer who bore its name. Even during this pause — the duration is not specified, but it might well be but a single night — Rykener still managed to have sex with a couple of foreign Franciscan friars whilst dressed as a woman and sex 'as a man' with John Mathew's daughter, Joan. That Joan is described in relation to her father would tend to signal that she was unmarried and possibly comparatively young. From the perspective of a clerical calculus of sin, simple fornication weighed much less heavily than buggery with a man in holy orders, but this is not a Church court record.[60] The concerns of a civic court and of civic governors are not identical. Joan is identified in relation to her father because her father is deemed to stand in authority over her. By managing to seduce Joan — implicitly on a single night and possibly using his disguise as a woman to approach her — Rykener is seen as threat to family life and patriarchal order.

Rykener's final destination on his circuitous excursion were the lanes located behind St Katharine's Hospital, to the east of the Tower and to the south of St Mary Graces, and so within the Liberty of St Katharine's, an area associated with the sex trade.[61] The hospital of

[56] Gretton, *Burford Records*, p. 83; T. B. Pugh, 'Thomas Despenser, Second Lord Despenser (1373–1400)', in *ODNB*. Martyn Lawrence comments: 'none of the six generations of Despensers were particularly concerned with local lordship. Notwithstanding their success at court, their estates were poorly managed': M. Lawerence, ' "Too Flattering Sweet to be Substantial"? The Last Months of Thomas, Lord Despenser', in *Fourteenth Century England, IV*, ed. by J. S. Hamilton (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 146–58, quoting p. 152.

[57] By analogy with a satirical poem from the end of Richard's reign edited as 'On King Richard's Ministers', the Swan could have been taken as an allusion to Thomas of Woodstock or indeed his wife Eleanor de Bohun, the swan being the Bohun badge: *Political Poems and Songs Related to English History*, ed. by T. Wright, Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores, 14, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859–61), I, 363–66.

[58] Beaconsfield had a tax population of 194 in 1377. It would appear to have been divided between a multiplicity of manors, but in 1394 much land was under the immediate control of Sir Hugh Berwick. The Victoria County History otherwise offers few clues to the community at the end of the fourteenth century: *The Poll Taxes*, ed. by Fenwick, I, 62; *The Victoria history of the county of Buckingham*, ed. by W. Page, 5 vols (London: Constable, 1905–28), III, 155–65.

[59] *CPR 1391–96*, p. 539.

[60] Cordelia Beattie represents the clerical tradition from the *Somme le Roi* in table form: C. Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 49, table 2.1.

[61] Cf. *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. by Riley, pp. 487–88.

St Katharine had been refounded in 1273 by Queen Eleanor of Provence. Thereafter it was the queen who appointed masters and took an active interest in its running. It was the recipient of royal patronage and came to support a number of royal chantries even at a time it was struggling to support the poor persons for which it was founded.[62] St Mary Graces was also a royal foundation of 1350 and apparently still being built around this date.[63] The Tower was, of course, a royal palace. Rykener's encounter with the former chaplain of a London city church and two other anonymous chaplains within the shadow of the Tower, and on land associated with the queen, begins to look like a dramatic illustration of the sewer theory of prostituion.[64] In medieval thought prostitution was a necessary evil and its regulation the key to good order; in the words of the continuator of Thomas Aquinas' *De Regno*, 'take away the sewer and you will fill the palace with foulness'. The text goes on, 'take away prostitutes from the world and you will fill it with sodomy'.[65]

Although Rykner's itinerary to the west of London follows an established route, it contains at the very least some striking coincidences relating to recent events. Oxford sent a mayoral delegation to London in 1393. Thomas Despenser assumed by reason of his majority the lordship of Burford in 1394. Nicholas Bekenesfeld, who presumably hailed from Beaconsfield, was appointed a buyer for the royal household in 1394 — and Richard II was purchasing lavishly in London at this time; Caroline Barron has characterized the period 1392–94 as a 'spending spree' on the part of the royal wardrobe, much of this expenditure being made in the City.[66] The itinerary also continues the allusions to King Richard and the royal household suggested by the otherwise gratuitous reference to Sir Thomas Blount and, more tenuously perhaps, the recently deceased Queen Anne. Burford signifies Despenser, Oxford denotes Robert de Vere, Beaconsfield signifies Nicholas Bekenesfeld, the Swan at Burford may, as we shall see, denote Thomas of Woodstock and his wife Eleanor de Bohun, and the lanes by St Katherine's allude once again to the queen and more specifically to the royal palace of the Tower.

There is one further dimension to Rykener's narrative worth noticing. Not only does Rykener describe a peregrination punctuated by sex acts, he also offers information about how he made his livelihood. He first described how he stole ('*asportavit*') two gowns from the rector of Theydon Garnon, who had visited Elizabeth Brouderer's house and had had sex with him 'as with a woman'. When the priest demanded Rykener return the gowns, Rykener claimed that he was married; any claim in the courts would have to be made against Rykener's husband.[67] This was tantamount to blackmail since to sue Rykener alone risked exposing the true nature of the rector's misdemeanour.[68] When he stayed for five weeks in Oxford, Rykener

[62] *The Victoria History of London. Volume 1: Romano-British London, Anglo-Saxon Remains, Ecclesiastical History, Religious Houses*, ed. by William Page (London: Constable, 1909), pp. 525–30; *CPR 1377–81*, p. 559.

[63] Page, ed., *A History of the County of London: Volume 1*, pp. 461–64.

[64] This is indeed illustrated by the case a century later of one Alice who allegedly acted as 'a common bawd especially between gentlemen of the court and whores living in the precincts of St. Katherine': Karras, *Common Women*, p. 79.

[65] H. A. Kelly, 'Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark', *Speculum*, 75 (2000), 342–88 (p. 343, n. 3).

[66] C. M. Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II with London 1392–97', in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. by F. R. H. Du Boulay and C. M. Barron (London: Athlone, 1971), pp. 173–201, at p. 197.

[67] It is possible that anxieties concerning dealings with married female traders lie behind this part of the narrative.

[68] Interestingly, if we may extrapolate from the example of Emma Northercote who sued a priest for non-payment for services, sex workers may have had less to fear from the secular courts than their clients. It may be that borough courts would welcome the opportunity thus presented of showing up a man in holy orders: M. Kowaleski,

tells how he dressed as a woman and, calling himself Alianor, worked as an embroideress. Implicitly Elizabeth Brouderer, who 'first dressed him in womanly garb', taught him also the craft of embroidery as a front for sex work. Needlework was very much associated with women. The seamstress and the dressmaker are both occupations readily found among women sex workers.[69] Embroidery or 'brouderie,' however, has high-status implications. The product of broiderers' workshops went to make ecclesiastical vestments or bed hangings and dress accessories for the very wealthy. The almost contemporary will of John of Gaunt, for example, includes a rich vestment said to have been purchased from a London 'brouderer'.[70] By working as a female brouderer during his stay in Oxford, therefore, Rykener was knowingly exposing himself to a clerical or a wealthy clientele.[71]

Whilst in Burford, Rykener was employed as a tapster (barmaid) at the Swan. The later medieval tapster was invariably seen as sexually promiscuous. Of Absolon, the amorous clerk in Chaucer's near-contemporary 'The Miller's Tale', it is said that

> In al the toun nas brewhous ne taverne
> That he ne visited with his solas
> Ther any gaylard tappestere was.[72]

A century later the tapster was specifically equated with the sex worker in a Coventry ordinance.[73] Indeed the pub was often understood as a place where assignations might be made and female employees might double as sex workers.[74] Perhaps there is also significance in the inn's identity. The Swan, a common enough name that, unlike the more explicit Cardinal's Hat, has remained popular, may yet be suggestive.[75] Hieronymus Bosch's 'The Wayfarer', otherwise 'The Prodigal Son', which dates to circa 1500, depicts an inn that clearly symbolises debauchery — a man conspicuously gropes a woman carrying a vessel for ale or wine in the

'Women's Work in a Market Town: Exeter in the Later Fourteenth Century', in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. by B. A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 145–64 (p. 154).

69 Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, p. 152; Karras, *Common Women*, p. 54.

70 *Testamenta Eboracensia, or, Wills Registered at York*, ed. by J. Raine, Publications of the Surtees Society, 4, 30, 45, 53, 79, 106, 6 vols (London: Nichols, 1836–1902), I, 227.

71 We have here perhaps a resonance of a contemporary anxiety about the usefulness of some kinds of luxury production. This is most bluntly articulated in the last of the nearly contemporaneous Lollard *Twelve Conclusions*, which names the crafts of the goldsmith and the armourer as two examples of such 'nout nedful' occupations, citing 1 Timothy 6:8 to imply that in contrast victualling and clothing were 'nedful' trades. The Rykener case, a product of the same era and intellectual climate, is not, however, a Lollard text and its targets may be wider. As a product of London civic administration it may echo the fissures between the victualling trades and the non-victualling trades, including goldsmiths, drapers, and mercers, that at times polarized City politics in the later fourteenth century. Foreign merchants, including Lombards, may also be an implicit target since they monopolized the supply of silk thread and gold wire, necessary materials for the brouderer's craft. The primary target, however, was the royal court. The medieval crown was expected to manage from the revenues of the crown lands and raise taxes only at time of war, but in the early 1390s Richard II endeavoured to raise funds by various means whilst pursuing peace with France: *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by Hudson, pp. 28–29; Bird, *Turbulent London*; C. M. Barron, 'Richard II and London', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. by A. Goodman and J. L. Gillespie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), pp. 129–54 (pp. 141–49).

72 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 68–71 (p. 70), ll. 334–36.

73 The contemporary marginal annotation reads 'For Tapsters & harlattes': *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. by Mary Dormer Harris, Early English Text Society, o. s. 134–35, 138, 146, 4 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1907–13), 545.

74 Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 71–72; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, pp. 116–17.

75 The cardinal's hat suggests the engorged corona of the male phallus. It may be that the swan suggests the male genitalia.

open doorway; the inn sports a sign of a swan.[76] At much the same date one of the stews of Southwark that had its sign painted on the front of the building facing the river was the Swan.[77] The implication of Rykener's lodging at the Swan in Burford in the capacity of a tapster is that John Clerc knowingly engaged him as a sex worker.

It is in the context of his time at Burford that Rykener related not only the number of clients he had, but something of the payments he received. The Franciscan John Barry gave him a gold ring, but it is the monetary payments made by three of six anonymous foreign (*extranei*) men and a Carmelite friar that are of especial interest. As a clothing community in the heart of the Cotswold wool country, Burford attracted merchants, including Italian wool merchants, so Rykener may well have been tapping into such a clientele.[78] Rykener claims that he received variously 12d., 20d., and 2s. (= 24d.). These are not trivial sums, but probably not exceptional either. Karras cites a later example of a Lombard paying 12d. for sex with a woman in London, but otherwise her analysis indicates a considerable range of rates. No doubt the price reflected both the services demanded and the market that a sex worker operated within; Karras suggests that payments of 1d. 'were probably typical of the lower end of the trade'.[79] We can find numbers of examples of women who specialized in offering sexual services to priests or religious and Rykener is reported as claiming that 'he more often took priests than others because they liked to give him more than other men'.[80] Foreign merchants, however, were another market that probably paid well.[81] In identifying clergy, religious, and Lombards as clients and clients for gay sex, however, the text tapped into a current discourse. For example in 1376 Parliament had been petitioned to expel all Lombard brokers since they practiced usury and had introduced 'un trop horrible vice qe ne fait pas a nomer'.[82] In 1387 a former Austin friar and Lollard enthusiast provoked rioting by preaching at the London church of St Christopher le Stocks that friars were murderers, traitors, and sodomites. He subsequently turned these charges into a bill which he attached to the doors of St Paul's cathedral.[83] In 1395, and only a couple of months after the Rykener case, the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions* attacked clerical celibacy since it 'inducith sodomie in al holy chirche'.[84]

It should now be apparent that, regardless of the underlying historicity of the persons or events described, the Rykener narrative works to reference overlapping contemporary concerns with governance — a theme also reiterated in the Walpole case enrolled immediately

[76] The painting is in the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. D. Wolfthal, *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 88–90.

[77] *A Survey of London by John Stow*, ed. by C. L. Kingsford, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), II, 55.

[78] T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 51–53; G. Holmes, 'Lorenzo de' Medici's London branch', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England*, ed. by R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 273–85 (pp. 281, 283); Catchpole et al, *Burford*, pp. 40, 42.

[79] Karras's discussion is derived primarily from late fifteenth-century London evidence: Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 74, 79–80.

[80] Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, p. 152; Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 75, 79.

[81] Karras, *Common Women*, 78; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, p. 154.

[82] *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1275–1504*, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson and others, 16 vols (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), II, 332; H. A. Kelly, 'Law and Nonmarital Sex in the Middle Ages', in *Conflict in Medieval Europe: Changing Perspectives on Society and Culture*, ed. by Warren Brown and Piotr Górecki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 175–94 (pp. 188–89 and n. 67).

[83] Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. by H. T. Riley, Rolls Series, Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores, 28, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863–64), II, 157–59.

[84] *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by A. Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 25, 150.

after — and with dishonest trading, foreigners, incontinent clergy, the royal court, gender and sexuality. In this context, sodomy functions as a metaphor for a range of social evils that may have had particular resonances from a magisterial and metropolitan perspective. I shall now try to locate the events of the case within the larger chronological context of the thwart relationship between the city of London and Richard II.

Two years before the Rykener case in June 1392, Richard II had suspended the City's liberties and imprisoned the then mayor and sheriffs on account of the City's alleged misgovernment which had resulted in rioting. According to (partisan) London chroniclers, a servant of the Bishop of Salisbury stole a loaf of horse bread in Fleet Street and stabbed the baker's man when he tried to snatch the loaf back. The thief then ran for shelter in the bishop's London residence of Salisbury Inn just yards away down Salisbury Alley. As one later chronicle puts it, 'then rose the streete, namely the youth' and tried to break into the Inn, threatening to burn it down, and not desisting until the mayor and aldermen had been summoned and ordered people to return to their homes.[85] Meanwhile word of the disturbance reached the bishop, John Waltham, the Treasurer, at Westminster who, supported by Archbishop Thomas Arundel of York, the Chancellor, complained to Richard II.

Waltham's plaint prompted the imprisonment of the mayor, the imposition of Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, builder of Bodiam Castle and a trusted courtier, as warden, and the appointment of a commission to investigate the alleged misgovernment.[86] Only when the City agreed to pay £10,000 were its liberties, conditional on good governance, restored. This restoration was elaborately enacted in August of that year.[87] The ceremony is described by Richard of Maidstone, in a contemporary letter, and in London chronicles. It saw Richard greeted on Tower Bridge and led into the heart of the City.[88] The culmination of the ceremonial, in which the City was likened to a bridal chamber, the citizens to a bride, and Richard to a bridegroom, was on Cheapside. Here a beautiful young woman (*formosaque virgo*) wearing a

[85] *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, ed. by F. W. D. Brie, Early English Text Society, o. s. 131, 136 (London: Oxford University Press, 1906–8), I, 345–46; *Grafton's Chronicle; or, History of England* (London: [n. pub.], 1809), pp. 458–59; Bird, *The Turbulent London of Richard II*, pp. 105–7; Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', pp. 180–84.

[86] Prominent members of this commission were the Duke of York, whose daughter was married to Thomas Despenser, and the Duke of Gloucester, who was married to Eleanor or Alianor de Bohun: Bird, *The Turbulent London*, pp. 102–4, 107–9; Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', pp. 184–88.

[87] *CPR 1391–96*, p. 226; Bird, *The Turbulent London*, p. 104; Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', pp. 194–95. Barron notes further smaller contributions by Londoners over the next couple of years. These included a gift of a large ornamental bird with a very wide gullet for Queen Anne and a boy upon a dromedary for Richard. It is tempting to read meanings into these outré Christmas presents. The boy might stand for the king. Paul Strohm argues that the bird was a pelican symbolic of the Queen's self-sacrificing sympathy for the City, but this does not obviously fit contemporary depictions of pelicans nor does the chronicler simply use the Latin word '*pelicanus*'. Perhaps the wide gullet indicates an insatiable appetite: ibid., pp. 195–96; *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis*, ed. by J. L. Lumby, Rolls Series, Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores, 41, 9 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865–86), IX, 278; P. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 106–7: *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*, published electronically at http://bestiary.ca/ (accessed 8 March 2011).

[88] Richard Maidstone, *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)*, trans. by A. G. Rigg and ed. by David R. Carlson, TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University for TEAMS, 2003), <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/carlson-and-rigg-maidstone-concordia>; H. Suggett, 'A Letter Describing Richard II's Reconciliation with the City of London, 1392', *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), 209–13; *The Brut*, ed. by Brie, pp. 347–48. The ceremonial was partly modelled on the 1377 coronation: Barron, 'Richard II and London', pp. 150–54.

crown, accompanied by a young man dressed as an angel (ll. 275–316), gave golden crowns to the king and queen.[89]

The payment of £10,000, the restoration of the City's liberties, and the election of a new mayor and sheriffs did not fully restore the status quo ante. The ceremonial was a staged charade that merely patched the relationship between the City and the king.[90] The terms of a statute of 1354, invoked to justify the earlier suspension of the City's liberties on the grounds of misgovernment, still applied. It must have seemed to Londoners and to the mercantile elite who ordinarily governed the City that Richard was moved not by a failure of civic government, but rather by his desire for money and his frustration that, immediately prior to the events of 1392, London merchants had proved unwilling to lend to him.[91] After 1392 Londoners felt compelled to furnish the king with money, however uncertain the prospect of repayment, lest Richard should again annul the City's constitution. This was the context for a loan of 10,000 marks (£6,666 13s. 4d.) by the City in December 1394.[92] In fact the December loan was repaid the following year, but this could hardly have been anticipated. It was in this context of impotence in the face of arbitrary royal government, fear of providing Richard with an excuse for renewed attack on the City's constitution and governors, anger at his repeated demands for money, frustration that there seemed no way out, but also a strong sense of the injustice of the events of 1392 that the account of the Rykener case was entered into the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London. Once again coincidence begins to appear more than coincidence. The loan was paid on Saturday 5th December. Britby and Rykener were supposedly arrested on Sunday 6th December.

The climate of fear that prevailed in London between 1392 and June 1397 when a charter confirming London's privileges in perpetuity was granted, albeit only after the payment of a further 10,000 marks, is illuminated by the case of Peter Mildenhall.[93] Before his death, Mildenhall had said that Richard II 'was not able to govern any realm' and had wished 'that he were in his *gong* (latrina), where he might stay for ever without further governing any'.[94] Mildenhall had also expressed a desire carry the king off, which he said would be easy because Richard regularly travelled from Sheen to the City with only a light guard. We know this only because his son was made to appear before Chancery for having concealed his father's

[89] This is Paul Strohm's reading, though the self-representation of the City as '*thalamus*' is clearly signalled in Maidstone's sexually charged account. Indeed as Richard returns to his marriage chamber, the citizens signify that they yield their bodies 'Et regat ad libitum regia virga suos' (ll. 207–14): Maidstone, *Concordia*; Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 105–11. The pageantry is further discussed in the first chapter of S. Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages*, Medieval cultures, 36 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Of Maidstone's account of the marriage of Richard to London seemingly brokered by Richard's queen, Federico comments (p. 25) 'competing with the poem's portrayal of a just and good husband and king is the image of a sexual deviant, even a criminal'. Two other chronicle accounts indicate that the angel or angels were boys and specify that Richard was actually crowned by an angel: *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–94*, ed. and trans. by L. C. Hector and B. F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 502–7; *The Brut*, ed. by Brie, pp. 347–48.

[90] Caroline Barron refers to the events as a 'pantomime': 'The Quarrel of Richard II', p. 190.

[91] Distrust of making loans to Richard was the legacy of the former mayor Nicholas Brembre, whose policy of lending to Richard and encouraging other Londoners to lend was intended to secure the king's favour. Brembre's support of the king made him a target of the appellants who early in 1388 had him tried for treason. Richard singularly failed to support his ally despite the weakness of the appellants' case and Brembre was consequently executed: A. Prescott, 'Sir Nicholas Brembre (*d.* 1388), Merchant and Mayor of London', in *ODNB*.

[92] Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', p. 196.

[93] Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II', p. 199.

[94] *CCR 1389–92*, p. 527. *Dong* is a Middle English term related to the modern English *dung*, but from the Latin gloss presumably functions here as a colloquial term for a privy.

defamatory words. Such comments may have been commonplace, but only when voiced circumspectly. They will hardly ever enter the written record. Even in the case of Mildenhall we are told that 'he spake many other disrespectful words disparaging the king's person', but these words are left undocumented, as if too pernicious to be made textual.[95] Towards the end of Richard's reign, after the city's constitution had been fully restored, Londoners were, according to Jean Froissart, a little more openly critical, 'they hated hym so sore'.[96]

The issue supposedly at the heart of the rift between Richard and the City was that of good governance. The charge of misgovernment levelled in 1392 seems particularly to have rankled with the civic governors. The issue can be seen to have been played out symbolically. In answer to an earlier petition regarding the butchering of meat, Richard had ordered the cleansing of the River Thames between the Palace of Westminster and the Tower. A writ to that effect dated February1393 is recorded in the City Letter Books.[97] The City asserted its own act of moral cleansing later the same year, requiring that 'proclamation be made, that no man, freeman or foreigner, shall be so daring as to go about by night in the City of London, or the suburbs thereof, after nine of the clock' unless he were 'a lawful man' about 'some real cause' and carrying a light. An earlier curfew of eight o'clock was declared for aliens. The ordinance goes on immediately to reiterate long-standing rules relating to prostitution:

> whereas many and divers affrays, broils, and dissensions, have arisen in times past, and many men have been slain and murdered, by reason of the frequent resort of, and consorting with, common harlots, at taverns, brewhouses of huksters, and other places of ill-fame, within the said city, and the suburbs thereof; and more especially through Flemish women, who profess and follow such shameful and dolorous life: — we do by our command forbid, on behalf of our Lord the King, and the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, that any such women shall go about or lodge in the said city, or in the suburbs thereof, by night or by day.[98]

The supposed encounter on Cheapside between John Britby, a visitor to London from Yorkshire, and John Rykener, a man in a woman's dress, between eight and nine o'clock on the night of Sunday 6 December 1394 begins to take on a new depth of meaning within the context just outlined. Most immediately it is an assertion of the good governance of the City: malefactors are swiftly detected and promptly brought to answer for their misdeeds. More specifically it is a demonstration of the City's vigilance in rooting out and suppressing 'the frequent resort of, and consorting with, common harlots', the cause of 'many and divers affrays, broils, and dissensions', even murders.

[95] There is a slight chance that such speech may be recorded or reported as in defamation actions or in depositions. In 1356 in the ecclesiastical Court of York, John Jordan undermined one William Theker, a key witness for the opposing party, claiming that Theker had said he would be willing to offer a halfpenny to St Mary of Lincoln if the saint would ensure the king had ill fortune in his activities: York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, cause papers, CP.E.70. For a useful discussion of slander against Richard II see M. Hanrahan, 'Defamation as Political Contest during the Reign of Richard II', *Medium Aevum*, 72 (2003), pp. 259–76.

[96] G. B. Stow, 'Richard II in Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 333–45 (quoting p. 341). We may note here a tradition of veiled criticism of the crown and leading magnates in the more public form of chronicle writing: P. Maddern, 'Weather, War and Witches: Sign and Cause in Fifteenth-Century English Vernacular Chronicles', in *A World Explored: Essays in Honour of Laurie Gardiner*, ed. by Anne Gilmour-Bryson (Parkville: University of Melbourne, History Dept., 1993), pp. 77–98 (pp. 84–90).

[97] *Parliament Rolls*, ed. by Given-Wilson et al., III, 317; *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H*, ed. by Sharpe, p. 392; Barron, 'Richard II and London', pp. 143–44.

[98] *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. by Riley, pp. 534–35.

A further context that may be tapped into is that of storytelling. There are elements of the Rykener narrative that are reminiscent of the fabliaux genre, but it is actually to chronicles that I now wish to turn. Four different chronicle sources from Danzig, Linköping, Lüneburg, and Hannover, tell the story of the anonymous hermaphrodite of Lübeck. The narratives are dated variously to 1382 and 1384 and were patently circulating within Hanseatic trading routes and so were very likely known in London around the same period.[99] Quite possibly we are tapping into a strong element of urban mythology; the anonymity of the hermaphrodite, the absence of documentation from Lübeck itself, and the uncertainty of date render the historicity of the case profoundly doubtful, but the tale is striking. The narratives tell of a hermaphrodite who by night dressed as a woman and sold sex to male clients from a wooden booth. Her/his undoing, however, was that by day s/he practiced as a priest and celebrated mass. One day one of her/his clients from the previous night entered the church in which s/he was celebrating and was shocked to recognize the person with whom they had had sex the previous night. Together with a friend he followed him/her back to the booth and subsequently discovered his/her male genitalia when having sex with him/her that evening. The authorities were summoned and the unfortunate hermaphrodite prostitute-priest was arrested, condemned, and subsequently burnt dressed in her/his women's clothes. The resonances with the Rykener case — cross dressing, dishonesty, the close association of priests with homosexual activity, and the eventual intervention of the city authorities — are highly suggestive and may have helped shape the Rykener account.[100]

I wish now to make an imaginative leap — one that no doubt not all will find convincing — and consider the Rykener narrative as political satire and what early modern scholars have dubbed 'political pornography'. (Medievalists may be uncomfortable with this usage and certainly the Rykener text itself is only pornographic in the technical sense that it is writing about one who sells sex commercially.) The actors in the narrative stand in for or allude to real personages who exercise political power or influence. Much political pornography of the French Revolutionary era, for example, targeted the clergy, the royal court, the queen, and even the king. Equivalent material from the reign of Charles II of England also satirized the king.[101] The Rykener text is highly critical of the clergy. It specifically alludes to the royal court in the person of Sir Thomas Blount and perhaps indirectly to Thomas Despenser and the late Robert de Vere by the mention of Burford and Oxford respectively. It also makes allusions to the events of 1392. Perhaps the most startling satirical reference – and the one most obvious to Londoners at the time — lies in Britby's initial encounter with Rykener. Britby we are specifically informed was from the county of York. Yorkshire, the city of York, and the house of York had particular and negative resonances for Londoners at this date. At the height of the crisis from June 1392 until January 1393 Richard had removed the major offices of

[99] 'Lübeck 1382/1384: Ein anonymer Falschpriester und Hermaphrodit', in *Quellen zur Verfolgungs und Alltagsgeschichte der 'Sodomiter' (Homosexuellen) im späten Mittelalter und der Reformatorischen Frühzeit*, published electronically at http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/Portal_BUH/index.htm (accessed 5 March 2011).

[100] A parallel phenomenon is suggested by Noël James's study of wardship in medieval culture. She demonstrates how on the one hand romance literature is informed by a knowledge of the law and on the other Church court depositions seem to resonate with narrative strategies derived from romances: N. J. Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship in Romance and Law* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2001).

[101] L. Hunt, 'Pornography and the French Revolution', in *The Invention of Pornography, 1500–1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone, 1993), ch. 9; M. McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 303–12; R. Weil, 'Sometimes a Sceptre is Just a Sceptre: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England', in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. by Hunt, ch. 3.

government to York.[102] Yorkshire was also associated with some of the major office holders of the day. One such was Bishop Waltham, whose appeal to Richard over the attack on his London inn precipitated Richard's seizure of the City's liberties. He was the then Treasurer and so was no doubt seen as complicit in Richard's money raising ventures, but had very close connections to Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire.[103] Bishop Waltham was supported in his appeal by the Chancellor, Thomas Arundel, the then archbishop of York. A key player in the inquiry into the City's supposed misgovernment was Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, who also happened to be the father-in-law of Thomas Despenser.

Once we begin to read the Rykener narrative as political satire, the critique of misgovernment contrasted to the good governance of the City of London — remember the events of 1392 were predicated on the City's supposed misgovernment — becomes sharper. The sodomy repeatedly committed without any sanction in the seigniorial borough of Burford, whose lord was Thomas Despenser, in the university borough of Oxford, where the mayor's authority was repeatedly eclipsed by that of the Chancellor of the university as a result of royal intervention, at seigniorial Beaconsfield, and in the royal liberty of St Katherine's contrasts with the immediate and decisive intervention of civic officers once Britby and Rykener were detected within the City. The sodomitical encounter in the lanes behind St Katherine's has already been shown to be a reference to the corruption at the very heart of the royal palace.

Within this satirical discourse, some of the names in the entry purporting to describe the proceedings against Britby and Rykener begin to take on new meanings. The aristocratic name of Alianor or Eleanor adopted by Rykener when dressed as a woman may have called to mind Alianor or Eleanor de Bohun, the wife of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester and uncle to the king, who may also be alluded to by reference to the Bohun badge of the Swan.[104] The deceased Anna or Anne, the whore, who was associated with the employee of Sir Thomas Blount who first instructed Rykener to practice anal sex now more plausibly fits a political pornographic rhetoric as a reference to Richard's recently deceased queen. Rykener, whose name means not so much teller of tales, but counter of money, and who turns tricks for cash, may well borrow the identity of an actual royal clerk, but it is hard not to notice the resonance of Ryk and Rick, a diminutive form of Richard. We have here a strong hint that Rykener is to be read as a parody of Richard.[105]

In Maidstone's prolix Latin encomium of the reconciliation ceremonial of 1392, Richard, accompanied by his queen, is invited to enter his *thalamus* or marriage chamber — itself symbolic of London, rhetorically described as the king's chamber — where we are told

[102] W. M. Ormrod, 'Competing Capitals: York and London in the Fourteenth Century', in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. by S. Rees Jones, R. Marks and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 75–98 (pp. 97–8 and p. 81, table 1).

[103] R. G. Davis, 'John Waltham (*d.* 1395), Administrator and Bishop of Salisbury', in *ODNB*. There was an established tradition of men from the diocese of York, especially southern Yorkshire, including the East Riding, finding positions as royal clerks, some achieving senior offices in royal government: J. L. Grassi, 'Royal Clerks from the Archdiocese of York in the Fourteenth Century', *Northern History*, 5 (1970), 12–33 (see especially p. 26).

[104] A. Tuck, 'Thomas [Thomas of Woodstock], duke of Gloucester (1355–1397)', in *ODNB*; n. 56 above.

[105] Cecil Ewen noted that the name Richard is associated with such derivatives as *Rickard*, *Rickart*, *Rickert*, *Ricard*, and *Ricart*, and such pet forms as *Dick*, *Hick*, *Higg*, *Hitch*, *Hytche*, *Rich*, and *Rick*: C. L. Ewen, *A Guide to the Origin of British Surnames* (London: Gifford, 1938), p. 70. *Rykener* is not itself a derivative from *Richard*, but it is sufficiently analogous to derivatives then current that a contemporary audience could have made this link. Since Richard may have been Dickon to his friends, it follows that an allusion to Richard related to Rick would not have the same resonances of friendship.

Londoners were ready to yield their bodies and be directed by the regal rod ('*regia virga*').[106] The climactic moment, took place on Cheapside. Here an angel and a virgin leant down from a celestial tower to present crowns to the king and his queen. The Rykener narrative offers a parodical mirror of this central moment. Rather than being offered a crown by an angel on Cheapside, Rykener is instead solicited by the lustful Britby. Instead of consummating his relationship with London in a bridal chamber, enabled no doubt by his royal rod, Rykener is instead buggered over a stall in a side street.

The text, as a fiction, necessarily incorporates contemporary understandings of the sex trade that are surely rooted in informed knowledge of late fourteenth-century London.[107] Similarly, the ideology of gender that underpins this text is a late fourteenth-century metropolitan ideology. The text constructs gender as performative because that was the understanding of the creators. It follows that to read this text as a source for gender and sexuality has some justification; Rykener may not be an example of practice, but he does speak to contemporary ideology. This, however, is to miss the text's rationale which was to offer a kind of samizdat criticism of King Richard on the part of people very close to the heart of the government of London.

We can locate the Rykener text within a broader contemporary tradition of critique of the king, which plays on the unmanliness and effeminacy of the court and its beardless and childless king and even presents Richard as, to use anachronistic terminology, a homosexual. Both Walsingham, who wrote of his 'indecent familiarity' with Robert de Vere, and the Evesham chronicler imply as much.[108] Walsingham further characterized Richard's favourites in 1387 as 'more soldiers of Venus than of Bellona … more likely to defend themselves with their tongues than their spears' and blames these men for their influence over the king.[109] Londoners in 1399, Jean Froissart records, 'could hardly mention his name without adding, "Damn and blast the dirty bugger!" '[110] But we must beware of putting too much trust in evidence that was often written retrospectively after Richard's deposition. Nor should we

[106] Maidstone, *Concordia*, ll. 207–14; C. D. Liddy, 'The Rhetoric of the Royal Chamber in Late Medieval London, York and Coventry', *Urban History*, 29 (2002), 323–49.

[107] Cf. Karras, *Common Women*. It is likely that London as a major city and port provided a range of specialised sexual services including transvestite male prostitution such as is found in a number of historical (and contemporary) contexts. For London three centuries after the Rykner case see R. Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution. Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 6–8.

[108] 'Tantum coluit at amavit eundem … familiaritatis obscoenae': E. B. Keiser, *Courtly Desire and Medieval Homophobia: The Legitimation of Sexual Pleasure in 'Cleanness' and its Contexts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 150; J. M. Bowers, *The Politics of 'Pearl': Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), pp. 173ff. Most criticism necessarily and inevitably dates to after his deposition, but as Sylvia Federico observes, by no means all: S. Federico, 'Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England', *Medium Aevum*, 79 (2010), 25–47.

[109] *'Chronica Maiora' of Thomas Walsingham*, trans. by Preest, p. 248. Cf. W. M. Ormrod, 'Knights of Venus', *Medium Aevum*, 73 (2004), pp. 290–305. Mark Ormrod tellingly remarks in another essay that 'Edward III's own apparent determination to render the notion of the sodomitical king as uncompromisingly subversive … contributed … to the increasingly hostile public attitude to homosexuality that has often been seen as a feature of fourteenth-century culture, and thus gave additional negative force to allegations of sodomy when they recurred in the context of political opposition to Richard II in the 1390s': W. M. Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. by G. Dodd and A. Musson (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2006), p. 47.

[110] Cited in Bowers, *The Politics of 'Pearl'*, p. 173.

assume that all Londoners were hostile to the king given, as Caroline Barron has pointed out, the extent of Richard's patronage of London merchants and specialist manufacturers.[111]

Christopher Fletcher has observed 'Richard's critics began with the themes of inconstancy and vice in condemning his unmanly morals'.[112] Richard/Rykener fully fits this model. He is unmanly. Indeed he even wears a dress and performs women's work. Though he engages in heterosexual sex 'as a man,' he also has sex with men 'as a woman' having been taught by one Anne, who may herself now be dead. He lacks all honesty or trustworthiness. He makes his money by his dealings with clergy, including the mendicant orders, and with foreign merchants.[113] These are two regular targets of hostility in later medieval London, but they have particular topicality in respect of the events of 1392.[114]

This then is a text fabricated by the Latin-literate clerks who serviced the mayor's court, who had access to and were versed in the diplomatic of the Plea and Memoranda rolls, and would have been unusually well informed in current events and the affairs of the city. Here we may see parallels with, for example, the Bazoche, the association of law clerks employed by the Parlement of Paris, who from the fifteenth century came to be famed for their public performance of satirical — and invariably misogynistic — farces. One particular farce from the end of the century even used dark humour around sodomy to target the monarch.[115] The earlier Rykener narrative, however, is an altogether much riskier document, certainly not for public performance, even for bill posting or more conspicuous record in the City's Letter Books. It was essentially for internal consumption among the clerks who serviced the mayor's court and perhaps not even the civic magistrates in whose name the court functioned.

In presenting the case of John Rykener as if the minutes of a real case, however, the authors may have been consciously courting danger. One matter left unresolved after the conditional restoration of London's constitution was whether royal courts could demand to see the actual records of cases heard in the city courts or, as the city asserted, merely hear an account of the proceedings by the Recorder. So long as this remained unresolved, there was a theoretical possibility that a royal court could demand access to the roll on which the Rykener case is entered. That this was in the compilers' minds is suggested by the fact that the anomalous

[111] C. Barron, 'The Deposition of Richard II', in *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. by J. Taylor and W. Childs (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), pp. 133, 139–40.

[112] C. Fletcher, 'Manhood and Politics in the Reign of Richard II', *Past and Present*, 189 (2005), pp. 3–39 (p. 8). Fletcher's own thesis is that Richard's masculinity was in many ways very conventional and that contemporaries did not tend to present him as effeminate: C. Fletcher, *Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377–99* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Cf. D. Rubery, 'The Five Wounds of Melibee's Daughter: Transforming Masculinities', in *Masculinities in Chaucer*, ed. by P. G. Beidler, Chaucer Studies, 25 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), pp. 157–71 (pp. 164–65).

[113] Helmut Puff, noting that instances of clergy convicted of sodomy are rare in Northern Europe before the later fifteenth century, comments that 'the "priest and sodomite" is not a pre-established social being. This type of marginal personality is first of all a discursive entity; it figures largely in defamatory literature of both lay and clerical origin, but comes to life in certain conflict situations'. This observation appears to fit the Rykener case remarkably well: Puff, 'Localizing Sodomy', p. 171. For a recent discussion of Chaucer's near-contemporary treatment of the friars see R. Epstein, 'Sacred Commerce: Chaucer, Friars, and the Spirit of Money', in *Sacred and Profane in Chaucer and Late Medieval Literature*, ed. by Robert Epstein and William Robins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 129–45.

[114] Cf. S. McSheffrey, 'Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens: Law, Morality, and Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval London', in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by N. L. Jones and D. Wolf (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 50–70.

[115] P. Crispin, 'Scandal, Malice and the Kingdom of the Bazoche', in *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, ed. by A. Harper and C. Proctor (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 154–72 (esp. pp. 162–63); S. Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 45, 77ff.

case of John Walpole that appears immediately after had in fact prompted this constitutional dispute just a month before Richard stripped the city of its liberties.[116]

The Rykener text is not as elegantly written, but is in many ways a more interesting text than *Fanny Hill*. Cleland's fiction was created as an exercise in refined pornography and offers a (slightly tame) critique of the bourgeois values and morality of the nascent consumer society of mid eighteenth-century London.[117] The Rykener text was created in much more charged circumstances. It is a much angrier text. This is no elegant satire of the hypocrisy of bourgeois society. Rather it is a biting and dark parody of Richard II and the events of 1392. Unlike Cleland's creation, it uses a satirical discourse of sexual promiscuity not to titillate, but to give vent to suppressed anger and to pour scorn on Richard's rule.[118] Rykener's circuitous travels to Oxford, Burford and back via the lanes behind St Katherine's may be read as mimicking in duration, though not in location, Richard's itinerary during June to August of 1392.[119] A far cry from Maidstone's panegyric Latin verse, it is perhaps a more authentic response to the elaborate ceremonial of August 1392. The key moment of the ceremonial in Cheapside, located between the Conduit and the newly built Little Conduit which brought a supply of fresh water through the streets of the city, is here reduced to a sordid and clandestine encounter.[120] Rather than the City being symbolically cleansed, it is here polluted. Instead of Richard being welcomed into London as royal bridal chamber, Rykener retreats to a bare, wooden stall. Whereas at the culmination on Cheapside of the 'pantomime' fantasy of August 1392, Richard is crowned, at the apogee of the 1394 pornographic fantasy of poetic justice that masquerades as trial record, Rykener, the parody Richard, who practices the unmentionable vice of sodomy, is himself buggered.[121]

[116] Walpole tried to bring an action against the keeper of Ludgate Prison in the mayor's court, but claimed he had been badly advised in the drawing up of his written plaint or bill. He subsequently asked to be allowed to amend his original bill, but the mayor demurred and asked the Recorder to decided on the matter as a point of law. The Recorder subsequently ruled against Walpole, who consequently lost his case, but Walpole appealed to the royal justices sitting at St Martin le Grand. The justices then queried the custom on which the decision to reject Walpole's bill had been made. In May 1392 the Recorder answered in person that it had always been the custom of the City where bills were defective. In March 1393, however, the justices demanded to see the records of the case: *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H*, ed. by Sharpe, pp. 168, 374, 392–93.

[117] It is also a satirical response to Richardson's *Pamela*, likewise an epistolary novel that consciously contrived to convince its early readers of its supposed factual nature: Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (London: Rivington and Osborn, 1740).

[118] Federico observes that 'recent studies of Ricardian poetry have shown, the broadness of the category "sodomy" lent it an impressive metaphorical power that was used by several writers to talk about things even more disturbing, such as the violation of the body politic by the monarch or by treasonous advisers': Federico, 'Queer Times', p. 26. Cf. M. Hanrahan, 'Speaking of Sodomy: Gower's Advice to Princes in the *Confessio Amantis*', *Exemplaria*, 14 (2002), 423–46.

[119] N. Saul, 'Richard II, York, and the Evidence of the King's Itinerary', in *The Age of Richard II*, ed. by James L. Gillespie (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), pp. 71–92 (pp. 72–73).

[120] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 256–57.

[121] The timing of Rykener's supposed encounter with Britby and the payment of the 10,000 mark loan the previous day may suggest that the text was invented as imaginative wish fulfilment in which the City solicits Richard for the value of the loan and shortly after gets to bugger him.