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**"He Ys A Swyre of Worchyp":  
Articulations of Masculinity In The Paston Correspondence**

by

Andrew C. Hall

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
through the Department of History  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the gendered experience of the fifteenth-century provincial gentleman through the letters of the Paston family. On the whole, the men of the gentry did not consciously ponder their identities as men. However, in their articulations of daily social concerns, these men often engaged in discussions about masculinity and male sexuality. To contextualize an analysis of men in the later Middle Ages a study of the numerous competing discourses on male sexuality and masculinity is provided. In their missives men discussed with other male associates ideas of male sexuality and defined their own sexualities in moral or more earthly and carnal terms. Moving from the sexual to the more social aspects of masculinity, this study illuminates the masculine ideology of aspiring gentry families which emphasized men's participation and willingness to engaged in ostensibly "masculine" activities, such as protection and providing. Individuals, men and women, by participating in a discussion of what constituted masculine identity and activity, engaged with and manipulated masculine ideologies to gain personal power. Exercising personal choice, men either accepted and reinforced their identities according to the class-based gender standards or affiliated themselves with other masculinities despite their family's derision. Despite their agency as individuals, the men and women of the provincial gentry were subject to cultural ideologies which shaped how they articulated ideas of male gender identity.

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For Janet and Fred Pegg



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

For too long, the study of men as gendered beings has been neglected. It is only since the late 1980s and 1990s that masculinities and male sexualities have stimulated the interest and imagination of the practitioners of history, sociology, literary criticism, and philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The study of men in history stems from feminist historical analyses which developed the idea that both genders must be examined to create a more complete interpretation of sex-gender systems. To counterbalance the amount of work focused on women and to inform the larger historiographical vista, historians are now endeavoring to unpack the meanings of what it meant to be man. This investigation into the men of the fifteenth-century provincial gentry is similarly motivated.

The Paston Letters is a collection which contains more than eight hundred dispatches, petitions, and legal documents from Paston family members, friends, retainers, and associates. The correspondence of several other families, too, are extant, but none is as multifarious as the Paston collection. By the late fifteenth century this wealthy English gentry family held local political offices and diverse estates which generated considerable income. The men of the Paston family wrote numerous letters and, in these missives, they articulated a wide range of thoughts and ideas. These articulations provide the historian with evidence to investigate how men of the provincial gentry thought about their identities, sexualities, other men, and women.

The historical context is crucial to understanding the gentry and the meanings of their letters. This introductory section sketches the social, political, and religious milieus of fifteenth-century Norfolk. Equally important, the practice of letter-writing and fifteenth-century Middle English are subjects of examination because they lead to a more

complete understanding of letter collections as primary sources. Concluding, this section sets forth how the larger examination of masculinities and male sexualities develops, and argues that both men and women partook in the creation of the masculinities of the provincial gentry.

### **The Historical Context**

In the second half of the fifteenth-century England was an anxious island. By 1453, the English had given up their protracted war with France, retaining only Calais and the Channel Islands.<sup>2</sup> While some men, like Sir John Fastolf, an important Paston patron, amassed great fortunes during their French campaigns, many of the common soldiers came home with military experience, violent tendencies, and the will to put their warlike skills to ill use. In Kent and in Cornwall common men, too, like Jack Cade, rose up against the taxation and poor administration in the waning years of the Hundred Years' War. The Wars of the Roses, a collection of intermittent aristocratic struggles between the Houses of Lancaster of York which destabilized politics and society between 1459 and 1485, were of immediate importance to the Pastons. John Paston I, John II, and John III were all aware of the tentative political situation and they hazarded their futures by associating with and switching factions. In actuation, the fifteenth century witnessed a considerable amount of political and social turmoil.

Did this turmoil indicate that later medieval England was violent? Philippa Madden has recently argued that, in some senses, East Anglia, the home country of the Pastons, was probably not a violent society and "the knights and gentry may have been more warlike in appearance than in fact."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, violence and its threat were tools, like the law,

that maintained social order. Instances of violence against servants and women are not calculable because they were rarely reported. Indeed, the question of whether late medieval England was violent is subjective; there were socially acceptable expressions as well as transgressive ones.<sup>4</sup> The question, more finely honed, which adds to this investigation, is: "Were violent clashes between groups of aristocracy, gentry, and their retainers frequent occurrences in the fifteenth century?" According to Maddern they were uncommon, and there are only infrequent references to violent engagements in the Paston correspondence.

Fewer men and women succumbed to wounds received in conflict than to "natural" causes. The bubonic plague devastated English populations in the fourteenth century, and re-emerged sporadically in the fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup> John Paston II, working in London during an outbreak in November 1479, perished from the infection.<sup>6</sup> The economic, social, and cultural products of the plague were numerous. A net outcome was that people enjoyed a higher standard of living because there were fewer mouths to feed.<sup>7</sup> Images and allusions to death demonstrate a later medieval preoccupation with mortality. The appearance of cadaver tombs, images of the Danse Macabre, and Caxton's 1490 printing of The Arte and Crafte to Knowe Well to Dye bear witness to the plague's morbid stimulation of European culture.<sup>8</sup> The plague and the consequent mass depopulation had an important influence on how late medieval Europeans, specifically the English, understood their relationship to God.

It was not only the sheer number of deaths which caused people to rethink their spirituality and the efficacy of the Church. After more than one hundred years of institutional turmoil, beginning with Avignonese papacy and ending with resolution of the Great Schism in 1417, it is hardly surprising that individuals appeared who, to some degree, resisted the authority of the Church. The Lollards, the

followers of John Wyclif, rejected ecclesiastical hierarchy positing instead that the true church was constituted by a community of believers. This movement began in the late fourteenth century and it dropped out of view with the emergence of the English Reformation.<sup>9</sup> Mystics like the orthodox Julian of Norwich and the enigmatic Margery Kempe emerged in the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth century. Despite their professed support for the institutional, they, like earlier mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, and Dorothea of Montau<sup>10</sup>, subtly challenged the role of priests as spiritual intercessors by communicating with God directly.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in response to the perception that the clergy generally were tainted with the vices of avarice and lust, a mood of anticlericalism developed in later medieval England<sup>12</sup>. The nobility, the gentry, and the gentlemen-lawyers exhibited a disdain for the clergy, and the gentry for the most part displayed a lukewarm acceptance of the Church and its officials.<sup>13</sup> Because individuals questioned the institution of the Church, many chose to express their spirituality through lay religious guilds and confraternities.<sup>14</sup> The fifteenth century was a crucial period of ferment before the Reformation, and some people were active in rethinking Christianity while others were less-concerned with spirituality.

### **The Gentry**

The Pastons and their contemporaries, the Stonors, Plumpton, and even the Celys, a family of aspiring merchants, were all part of the fifteenth-century English gentry. The term "gentry" is a term of class distinction and many historians have explored what sort of people constituted this group. Most agree that the gentry were above the

yeomen, or affluent small farmers, and below the lesser nobility on the social scale.<sup>15</sup> The traditional members of this group were knights and esquires.<sup>16</sup> In the course of the fifteenth century the term "gentleman", first used in 1413, began to include lawyers, bureaucrats, household administrators, and established merchants.<sup>17</sup> Although it is reasonably clear that the upper limit of the gentry was the lesser nobility, it was less clear who were to be admitted into the expanding class at the lower, more ambiguous boundary.<sup>18</sup> By the time of the Paston correspondence at the latter end of the century, the term "gentleman" referred to extremely well-off men such as Sir John Fastolf, wealthy parvenu lawyers such as the Pastons themselves, estate managers such as their bailiff Richard Calle, and the knighted, semi-dependent family chaplain, Sir James Gloys.

Although historians have demonstrated the heterogeneity of the gentry, nevertheless, the problems presented by the social and economic diversity have elicited considerable social historical query. Previous examinations of the gentry have suggested that its upper-class members and the relative newcomers from the yeoman and merchant classes were separated by a social gulf. The Paston family's failure to accept the marriage of their daughter Margery to Richard Calle, a retainer and a lesser gentleman, indicates that such a class separation may have existed. More convincingly, recent historians have argued to the contrary that, on a daily basis, the upper gentry and their social inferiors shared the same community and very often acted cooperatively.<sup>19</sup> Daughters were often married to men of lower rank because the woman's family recognized the suitor's economic potential. The Suffolk gentleman John Hopton appears to have preferred the company of his retainers and lesser members of his class to the fellowship of his social equals or betters.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the Pastons, the best known of the fifteenth-century gentry families, were constantly involved with all

members of their multifaceted social group although they might have been prejudiced against its lesser members.

The Paston family of the later fifteenth-century were the descendants of Clement Paston, a yeoman from Paston, Norfolk. Clement invested in his eldest son's education in law. This son, William Paston I, was a successful lawyer and Justice of the Peace whose marriage to Agnes Berry brought several estates and social prestige to the Paston name. William I's first son, John I, was a successful lawyer and, like his father, he married a wealthy heiress, Margaret Mautby. John and Margaret gave birth to several children; the most important for this study are John II, John III, Edmond II, Margery, and William III. The interactions of these two later generations are amply illustrated in the correspondence.

The letters of the Paston family best illuminate a forty-year period between 1444 and 1485. During this time the Paston family derived its income from land rents from their numerous estates. Despite agricultural problems, fertile soil, sophisticated cultivation practices, and the well-established wool and cloth-manufacturing industry all made property in Norfolk very valuable.<sup>21</sup> Through marriage and inheritance, the Paston family brought together various estates from across Norfolk and the legal struggle for one of these, Sir John Fastolf's Caister, was perhaps the most crucial test of Paston effort. The dispute over Caister Castle successively brought John I, John II, and John III into legal and occasionally armed conflict with the Duke of Norfolk and his agents. Indeed, the Pastons' efforts to regain Caister jeopardized the lives of all three of these patriarchs. Following the death of the 4th Duke of Norfolk in 1476, the Pastons recovered Caister thus dramatically increasing the family's property holdings and income.<sup>22</sup> The attainment and maintenance of land were central preoccupations for Paston men and women.

The Stonors, like the Pastons, owed their fortunes to preceding generations of successful lawyers.<sup>23</sup> This family, however, was well-established within the country gentry by the early fourteenth century and their collected correspondence extends into the late fifteenth century. Over this long period the Stonors possessed estates in six counties including Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Devonshire, and Kent.<sup>24</sup> In the fifteenth century, the men of the family frequently served as Members of Parliament and Sheriffs of Oxfordshire. The Stonors drew their incomes from the wool industry, and they solidified their place within the provincial gentry by making beneficial marriages.

The third largest collection of letters from the provincial gentry is that of the Plumpton family of Yorkshire. This family was well-ensconced in the landed classes, being recognized in 1066 as retainers of the prominent Percy family.<sup>25</sup> When he died in 1480, Sir William Plumpton, an ambitious, lascivious, and scandalous patriarch, was receiving an annual income of more than 200£ from his estates in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire.<sup>26</sup> Like the Stonors and some of the Pastons, the Plumpton men commonly occupied important local political positions, were constantly involved in legal disputes, and were part of the provincial elite.<sup>27</sup>

The correspondence of the Cely family is also a readily available source. Although the Celys were not "provincial", like the Pastons or Stonors, they were prosperous wool-merchants who should be considered part of the urban lesser gentry.<sup>28</sup> Their preoccupations were not the legal struggles over property rights and tenants, but their social ambitions and pretensions to the gentle classes allow for comparison with their provincial counterparts.



## Letters and Language

The letters of the Pastons, Stonors, Plumptons, and other families did not spontaneously appear in the fifteenth century. In fact, the study of letter-writing, the *ars dictaminis*, was a cultural legacy of the Graeco-Roman world, and it was reintroduced in the late twelfth century by Italian rhetoricians. Unlike France and Italy, England had less sustained contact with the *ars dictaminis*. Although formal letter-writing treatises taught theories of writing, urging writers to vary their rhythms, word choice, and sentence structure, these were never widespread in England. However, the *cursus* of letter-writing became quite popular and was widely adopted by English authors.<sup>31</sup> The *cursus*, or course of writing, established a protocol for the organization of an epistle. This convention posited a series of sections beginning with a *salutatio*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio*, and ending with the *conclusio*.<sup>32</sup> The *cursus* provided a framework for all medieval letter-writers and its influence is evident in the correspondence of the Pastons and their contemporaries.<sup>33</sup>

A critical problem in reading the letters of the provincial gentry is interpreting the conventionalized format of the letters and the expressions of individuality which appear in the letters. The English epistolary genre was heavily influenced by Italian rhetorical styles which stressed the practical purposes of letter writing and de-emphasized leisurely and more frivolous exchanges.<sup>34</sup> The Paston and Stonor letters, written in the Middle English vernacular, are representative of a breakthrough period when private letters were becoming more intimate and less formal.<sup>35</sup> One of the tasks of the historical interpreter is to understand the differences between formulaic writing and truly individual articulations.

There are other considerations when reading the letters of the provincial gentry. Each correspondent has his/her own idiosyncrasies, frequently spelling words and using expressions in anomalous or complex ways.<sup>34</sup> Caxton printed his first book in 1476 and it would be years before there were standardized spellings of words.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the idiosyncrasies of the individual writer, the historian must also be cognizant of shifts in the meanings of words in this period. For example, as Norman Blake has demonstrated, by the late fifteenth century the second person pronoun *thou* was losing its place to *ye* and becoming archaized.<sup>36</sup> In Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, *ye* is used to express familiarity while *thou* reflects the speaker's sense of social difference and superiority. Since the meanings of words were constantly in transition, the reader must be alert. Missing letters and other lacunae in the correspondence also hinder the historian's access to past events and individual experiences. Even more important, there are textual problems with epistolary evidence. According to Suzanne Fleischman, "the language of medieval documents is essentially a spoken language, it is at the same time exclusively a 'text language'. This raises the issue of the gap that separates the performance from the manuscript, the voice from the text."<sup>37</sup> The gap that Fleischman suggests can be bridged by a combination of evidence and informed historical imagination. The poststructuralist challenge to the interpretation must be met with the practical realism of the new historicism.

The collections of correspondence left for practical purposes and posterity are invaluable sources for social historians.<sup>38</sup> They reveal how individuals understood, felt, and discussed *inter alia* their lives and identities, their relationships with others, their social and cultural worlds.<sup>39</sup> By serving as point of entry to the world of the

fifteenth-century English provincial gentry, these letters facilitate an examination of masculinities and male sexualities.

## **Development**

The letters of the Pastons, and to a lesser extent the collections of correspondence of the other families, are rich sources for the historian who wishes to investigate men's experience in the later Middle Ages. To situate this study, the second chapter examines modern theoretical perceptions of masculinities and the multiple and competing discourses on male sexuality that coexisted throughout the medieval period. Focusing on the letters of all of the gentry families, chapter three explores how men articulated and understood their sexualities, and identifies two general sexual ideologies which men and, collaterally, women experienced. Moving away from sexuality, the fourth chapter submits that the Paston men operated within and outside a class-based dominant masculine ideology that stressed a man's diligent and successful service to his family and friends. The fifth chapter takes the discussion of the dominant masculine ideologies further, observing that Paston men, women, and retainers participated in masculine discourse in order to exert influence over others or to achieve a degree of personal power. As a result, this study provides new ways to understand men and their experiences in later medieval England.

## Notes

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16. Ibid, 34; Christopher Dyer, Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200-1520 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1989), 21.
17. D.A.L. Morgan, "The Individual Style of the English Gentleman," in Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval England, ed. Michael Jones. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 16.
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34. Roger Lass thoroughly examines the variations in Middle English in this later period. See Roger Lass, "Phonology and Morphology," in Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume II, 1066-1476, ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992), 142.
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38. Diane Watt argues that the Pastons collected their letters to build up a file which could serve as proof in future legal confrontations. See Diane Watt, "'No Writing For Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," Dear Sister, 123.
39. Camargo, Ars Dictaminis, 58.

## Chapter Two

### Medieval Connections Between Masculinity and Sexuality

In order to examine the masculine ideologies of the fifteenth-century provincial gentry, it is essential first to survey the primary sources and the secondary interpretations that have focused on masculinities and male sexualities. Any credible examination of masculinities owes a debt to feminist scholarship and theory. Lina Eckenstein, Georgina Hill, and Eileen Power pioneered the studies of medieval women but their prewar male contemporaries were generally dismissive of their subjects of study.<sup>1</sup> Although scholars conducted research into the medieval family and childhood earlier in the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> it was not until the mid-1970s and 1980s that, inspired by feminist concerns, historians resumed their analyses of medieval women. Advocating the validity of analysis on women, historians set women's history against "men's history", the more traditional interpretations of history which were dominated by a masculine and privileged voice. Postmodern textual analysis, explicitly incorporated into feminist theory and articulated by Joan Wallach Scott's gender analysis, questioned the hegemony of the masculine narrative of history by regarding it as one of many cultural discourses which vied for ideological power and dominance. This poststructuralist revelation destabilized the perception that traditional history represented the experience of all men, from all classes, all races, all age groups, all sexualities. Men's history, which had previously masqueraded as the history of the universal male, now required the same attention that feminist historians had focused on the multifarious experiences of women in the past.<sup>3</sup>

Feminist analysis, informed by postmodern theory, has also shaped

how historians think of the relationships between gender (social and cultural construction) and biological sex. Nancy F. Partner put forth the term "sexuality"

to acknowledge the developmental negotiations of mind with world which produce men and women who tend to be recognizable to others of their same sex (and class, society, etc.) when regarded collectively, but yet are quite distinct and individual seen 'close up'.<sup>4</sup>

While emphasizing the agency of individuals in the creation of and participation in the discourses on gender and sexuality, Partner's conception of sexuality does not dismiss social determinism's impact on individuals within society. Recently, historians of medieval sexualities have argued that medieval conceptualizations of masculinity cannot be discussed or understood separately from discussions of male sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Instead, masculinity and medieval sexuality should be discussed on a continuum, thereby explicitly expressing and considering a relationship between the two. This framework also recognizes the dominant medieval discourses which subsumed discussions of a man's sexuality and gender identity into a discussion of his masculine nature.<sup>6</sup>

This historiographical exercise relies on the masculine paradigm of man as protector/impregnator/provider advocated by David D. Gilmore and utilized by Vern J. Bullough.<sup>7</sup> Gilmore's triad is a useful tool in the interpretation of the scattered fragments of late medieval masculinity because it evokes constructions of gender identity, gendered activity, and sexuality from cultural discourse. This paradigm corresponds to recent theoretical and historical discussions which argue that sexuality and gender cannot be separated and therefore must be discussed relationally.<sup>8</sup> Gilmore's model, however, has recently received criticism from social scientists and historians who argue that this triad sets apart as deviant those who fail to measure up to the socially acknowledged criteria.<sup>9</sup> Don Conway-Long has argued that



Gilmore's study discussed masculinity in the singular sense, failing to discuss masculinity as a plurality of co-existing processes.<sup>11</sup> These criticisms are well-taken and appropriate, if a little harsh; Gilmore was not explicit about the variability of masculinities but he did not rule out a study of masculinity in more than one variant construction. Furthermore, the critics of Gilmore did not question his connection of masculinity with male sexuality, and his triad of masculinity is still a relatively untarnished and productive device for historical exploration.

It is useful to address the relationship between masculine gender and male sexuality by placing them on a continuum.<sup>12</sup> As a methodology, the continuum facilitates an examination of a wide range of questions pertaining to men: from the ideas of male sexuality in theological and medical discourse through to the often dubious examinations of masculinity and sexuality by modern literary critics. The continuum will not only provide a sense of order to these varying discourses on male sexuality, but the position of each theme reveals where the subject fits between ideologies of masculinity and sexuality. This framework is not a quantitative instrument but an abstract guide which demonstrates the fluid and open transactions between male sexuality and the more social aspects of masculinity such as provisioning and protecting. Examinations of secular regulations on sex, sexual anxieties such as impotence and wet dreams, alternate sexual sensibilities, and the sexual symbolism of fashion trends and masculine activities all fit into this continuum.

In addition to the problems facing an understanding of medieval masculinities and sexualities, nearly all of the primary sources surveyed in this chapter were written in Latin by men, specifically by a learned male elite who discussed such things as religion and medicine. Perhaps what they have bequeathed, as products of an educated elite, is not representative of popular medieval attitudes.<sup>13</sup> This proviso is

especially applicable to a discussion of medieval conceptualizations of male sexual organs and desire.

While Galen and Oribasius discussed male sexuality in antiquity, it was not until the eleventh century that a text specifically about sexuality was introduced into Western Europe.<sup>13</sup> Constantine the African's De Coitu, a compilation of Greek and Arabic medical thought, focused almost entirely on the male genitalia and conception. Appetite, spirit, and humour were essential to the act of coitus. The act of intercourse began "When appetite arises in the liver...the heart generates a spirit which...fills the hollow of the penis...and makes it hard and stiff." A humour is then drawn from the brain to the testicles and is emitted into the female via the penis.<sup>14</sup> Dysfunction, sex drive, and production of male or female children were reduced to a study of the pathology of the testicles. Cold was equated with effeminacy, warmth with masculinity; dryness of the testicles was linked to a lack of desire, moistness with lust. De Coitu also argued that sex could be beneficial in specific cases, but temperance was stressed because "frequent intercourse dries out the body and makes it slack."<sup>15</sup> Constantine also prescribed performance enhancing and sperm producing foods such as figs, brains, and egg-yolks.<sup>16</sup> Elements of De Coitu probably percolated into medieval popular medicine; Chaucer described January's use of the "cursed monk's" aphrodisiac recipes in "The Merchant's Tale."<sup>17</sup> Constantine's treatise provided medieval medicine with an authoritative understanding of the physiology of male sexuality, but little provision was made for factors such as the mind of the individual which others, like Hildegard of Bingen, considered.<sup>18</sup>

Nearly a century after De Coitu was written, Hildegard's Book of Compound Medicine offered a very different interpretation of the physiology of human sexuality. Hildegard of Bingen, being outside of the traditional discourses on sexuality and apparently unfamiliar with

Constantine the African's work, held views which differed sharply from contemporary medical theories. For the Abbess of Rupertsberg, sexual desire was controlled by winds which, when aroused, met in the genitals of the male. These winds filled the testicles, functioning as a bellows to erect the penis.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, due to the relative narrowness of the penis as compared with the female genitalia, "a man's passion is more focused...[with] men having stronger and more violent sexual impulses than women."<sup>20</sup> Regardless of her innovations, Hildegard's arguments for the superior strength of male desire and the functions of the winds of desire never managed to exert a significant influence on medieval theories of male sexual physiology.

Theoretical discussion of male sexuality continued between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. While these texts were probably not as influential as Constantine the African's work, they do reveal something of medieval scientific views of male sexuality. Male children were equated with the sexual prowess of the father<sup>21</sup>, the penis was the most vulnerable part of a man's body<sup>22</sup>, and the size of a man's testicles and his level of physical fitness determined which sex of children he would produce.<sup>23</sup> These discussions of male reproductive capacity clearly linked a man's virility to his physical and sexual abilities.

Co-existing with the medical and scientific discourses on sex and the body were theological and ecclesiastical perspectives on the nature of men, women, and lust. Unlike Constantine the African's theory that God made sex pleasurable to continue the species, Christian moralists tried to curb sexual urges because they took one away from the contemplation of God.

In the fourth century Jerome and Ambrose linked the act of sex itself with original sin. Despite this assertion, Augustine, the most influential of the Latin fathers of the Church, argued that it was not

the sex act but the disobedience and the submission to lust that had brought on the expulsion from paradise.<sup>24</sup> As a result of the original sin of Adam and Eve, humanity was punished with the loss of human control over desire and sexual organs.<sup>25</sup>

In response to this loss of control Augustine proposed an ascetic form of male sexuality which was defined in aggressive opposition to lust. By becoming a "mind without sex,"<sup>26</sup> Augustine was attempting to return to a prelapsarian state that was nearer to God.<sup>27</sup> His fight to gain mastery over sexual desire was set in opposition to the act of submitting to lustful weakness. Augustine's notion of a continent male sexuality was tied by its language to a hierarchy of virtue. Those who fought the appetites were superior, and therefore masculine, in comparison to the inferiors and effeminate who were slaves to lust.<sup>28</sup> This conflict between flesh and spirit was described as unrelenting; the ascetic man was perpetually fending off concupiscence.

As the object of the battle against desire, Contenance was more than just an abstract virtue. She was an allegorical woman, "honestly alluring me to come and doubt not; and stretching forth to embrace me, her holy hands full of multitudes of good examples."<sup>29</sup> Augustine's use of the language of battle, mastery, and masculinity demanded a chaste form of sexuality. Chastity and "the hoarding of seminal fluid became the practice and the paradigm for an integrated life, a life which...was successful and enormously productive."<sup>30</sup> By creating a female Contenance as the object of battle, Augustine defined ascetic male sexuality within the boundaries of heterosexuality. However, by presenting women as the objects and causes of male concupiscence, Augustine continued to objectify mortal women as a tempting Eve, the progenitor of weakness.

In slight contrast to the Christian ascetic sexuality, Jewish moralists favoured circumcision of the penis as a means to curb sexual

desire in males. In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides argued that by weakening the power of sexual excitement, men would be more moderate in their lust, and temperance of earthly desires would lead to the perfection of men and maintenance of the social order. This alteration of the male body to achieve the upper hand in the battle against lust was viewed not only as an unfair advantage by some Christian moralists<sup>31</sup>, but also as an attempt to improve upon the human body created by God.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to religious and medical thinkers, secular authorities also participated in the construction of male sexual ideologies. Temporal governments only sporadically punished sexual offenders, and provided outlets for illicit expressions of male sexuality through institutionalized prostitution. Rape, the abduction and the sexual violation of women were common and inconsistently punished across Western Europe. In late medieval Venice, the punishment matched the relative social class of the violated woman. For the rape of a lower class woman, a wealthy offender might simply reimburse his victim a small sum of money for the inconvenience, while a sexual assault on a noblewoman could result in a fine and a jail term of some length.<sup>33</sup> Raping women under the age of "innocence" (about 14 years) might also bring harsh punishment.<sup>34</sup> According to certain Scandinavian laws, rape was a crime of violence and not simply one of property violation. According to the Konungsbok, a rapist or attempted rapist could be killed without trial if he were caught committing the crime.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, in twelfth-century France, Andreas Capellanus went so far as to instruct men how to manipulate and then freely rape a peasant woman they fancied.<sup>36</sup> While many of the punishments appear severe, these rape laws applied to a relatively small number of female victims who were able to bring suit successfully against their offenders.

Despite the fact that rape was prohibited by secular and canon

law, it was rather difficult to convict an assailant.<sup>37</sup> The onus was chiefly on the victim to prosecute,<sup>38</sup> and if there were no conviction, the accused could then sue the alleged victim for damages. Deterrents such as these discouraged prosecution, allowing male sexual aggression a considerable degree of liberty. Rape was an accessible outlet for male sexual desire, allowing men to exert force over women of lower rank with relative impunity.<sup>39</sup>

Prostitution offered an outlet for the illicit impulses of male sexuality. Brothels and bathhouses were common in medieval France but less so in England.<sup>40</sup> The profession of prostitute was loathed by members of the supposedly moral elite, such as Andreas Capellanus.<sup>41</sup> Prostitution, however, was condoned, originally by Augustine and later by Aquinas, as a necessary social evil.<sup>42</sup> In France, municipal governments often sponsored brothels which were frequented by journeymen, apprentices, and general labourers who were without the means to marry.<sup>43</sup> In fifteenth-century France, no stigma was attached to a man who visited a brothel.<sup>44</sup> While prostitutes were sanctioned in the French cities as safety valves for male sexual desire, the use of their services was sometimes prohibited to soldiers. During the Hundred Years War, English military officials attempted to restrict their soldiers' access to French prostitutes in Normandy. The commanders argued that sexual activity was not only physically draining, but it distracted the mind and made the soldier effeminate and cowardly in combat.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the medieval period, prostitution was a diversely applied social control on male sexuality. By sponsoring it, the French municipal governments attempted to pacify their male labour force. By restricting access to prostitutes, military commanders believed they were maintaining the army's vigour by not letting soldiers weaken their bodies or spirits by sex.

Examples of explicit male sexuality are not only found in legal

records. Medieval secular literature, while prone to exaggeration and fictionalizing, offers considerable insight into the sexual practices of the period. The Norse sagas and histories explicitly describe sexual practices with a pre-Christian lack of shame. Cathy Jorgenson Itnyre has argued that sexual behaviour is treated as morally neutral in the sagas.<sup>46</sup> To early medieval Scandinavians, a man's infidelity was not a moral issue but an economic one. In Egil's Saga it was perfectly legitimate for a wife to be purchased from her father with an ounce of gold.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, sexual relationships among other early Germanic dynasties such as the Merovingians<sup>48</sup> were not strictly monogamous. According to Jenny Jochens, the Christianization of Scandinavia and its dominions did not initially constrain Norse marriage practices.<sup>49</sup> While kings married for political reasons, they chose their mistresses for their comeliness and youth.<sup>50</sup> It was not until the late eleventh century that Scandinavian polygynous activities began to contract. Male sexuality among the early medieval Scandinavians, like other Germanic groups, was not tightly restrained by Christian morality. Later in the medieval period, womanizing and polygyny were limited by a morality based on Christian teaching which opposed pre-Christian sexual activity.

Perhaps the most vivid descriptions of a moralistic male sexuality are found in Peter Abelard's letters to Heloise. In response to a previous letter from Heloise, Abelard described their sexual relationship as a battle of wills, Heloise's being the "weaker", only submitting to Abelard's lust after his use of physical force.<sup>51</sup> Despite the seemingly violent coercion of Heloise, the two exhibited a deep affection for one another, and were apparently adventurous in their explorations of the sex act.<sup>52</sup> Abelard's sexual explorations and lust for his pupil were burdened by an intense sense of his own guilt and immorality. In his forced castration, Abelard considered himself cleansed according to Divine Will.<sup>53</sup> Peter Abelard's tangible struggle

between morality and his sexual urgings stands in sharp contrast to the amoral treatment of sexual behaviour in Norse sources and the callous murdering of wives in The History of the Franks.<sup>54</sup>

Explicit sexuality was presented in the French *Fabliaux* of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. These bawdy tales, while they were fictional and meant for amusement, were written in the Old French vernacular, more accessible and understandable to common folk than any Latin text would be. The language used by the authors represents an aggressive male sexual desire. The active male role was described in terms of 'pricking', 'giving justice', and 'taking of maidenhood'. The word *vit* was equivalent to penis; lance, tool, staff, club, and horn also vividly described the male organ.<sup>55</sup> Despite the violence of the language, the sex act was described as pleasurable for both participants.<sup>56</sup> In the *fabliaux*, male sexual activity appears heterosexual. Homosexuality was only mentioned as an insult, and sodomy was seldom mentioned.<sup>57</sup> The content and the language of these vernacular poems contrasts sharply with the Christian morality taught by the Church. The sexual acts should not be viewed as mirroring those of middle class French culture of the high Middle Ages. Instead, the attitudes of the *fabliaux* suggest "quite a real stratum in medieval sensibility, one that coexists with...courtly purity and Christian puritanism."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the *fabliaux* were a humorous part of the secular discourse on male sexuality.

Where the *fabliaux* were intended for a cross-section of medieval society, Andreas Capellanus' Art of Courtly Love was directed at the nobility and the upper middle classes.<sup>59</sup> According to Capellanus, it was the man's responsibility to pursue and win the favour of a woman of virtue.<sup>60</sup> A lascivious woman was to be disregarded because she could not love one man, and her reputation would certainly be low.<sup>61</sup> In



opposition to this art of love and pursuit, Capellanus finished his work with "The Rejection of Love". In this he illuminated the woeful consequences of love on man and society, and engaged in a diatribe against the vices and evil character of all women.<sup>62</sup> The contradictory nature of The Art of Courtly Love suggests that Capellanus was providing a social outlet for unmarried nobles and knights, but at the same time setting narrow and moral Christian boundaries for courtly conduct.

In the middle of this continuum of explicit and implicit discussions of sexuality in the literature of the time reside the anxieties and dysfunctions of the medieval male. Impotence, castration, sexual insults, lovesickness, nocturnal emissions, and warnings of *penis captivus* were all explicitly sexual, and questioned the "quality" of the man's sex drive. However, by questioning the male's sexuality, his identity as a masculine, virile, and potent individual was scrutinized.

According to medieval reasoning, impotence was either natural, due to defect or injury, or the result of witchcraft.<sup>63</sup> Guibert of Nogent's father's seven-year impotence was attributed to a disgruntled woman's sorcery, as was Hrut's problem in Njal's Saga.<sup>64</sup> The ensorcelled organ, however, was not permanently rendered useless; it could be restored with time.<sup>65</sup> After revealing his condition the male was subject to the scrutiny of his family, wife, and peers. The wife could sue for annulment if the marriage had not been consummated.<sup>66</sup> The levying of charges against a male for his impotence or frigidity was serious, and because it was not easy to disprove, the man could be subject to manual testing of his genitalia.<sup>67</sup> Impotence questioned not only the sexual ability of a man, but his masculinity and social identity as well. By scapegoating witches and hostile female relatives, the burden of fault was removed from the male, thus weakening the social perception of his emasculation.

Where impotence had made a man less manly, castration, by removing sex organs and drive, made a man less complete. Some medieval scholars argued that the removal of the testicles made a man's complexion feminine.<sup>68</sup> In Gregory of Tours's History of the Franks, a castrated man dressed in nun's clothing, was found living with an abbess. After questioning, it was found that the eunuch was harmless and need not be expelled from the community.<sup>69</sup> The near complete loss of masculine identity and the acquisition of a more feminine one was a source of intense anxiety. Shame, misery, indignation were some of Abelard's emotional responses to his mutilation.<sup>70</sup> Beyond these personal implications of castration, there were societal ones as well. There was no definite place in society for a eunuch in the Latin West. Unable to carry out his sexual functions, the eunuch became a marginal figure, separated from most expressions of male sexuality and estranged from standard ideas of masculinity.<sup>71</sup>

Insults that questioned the male sexual and social identities of men were also sources of anxiety. To Scandinavian males, *nith* were sharp insults which involved allegations of passive homosexuality or bestiality.<sup>72</sup> To assume a passive role in sex was to be equated with effeminacy and cowardice.<sup>73</sup> These sexual jibes not only appear in the family sagas of the Norse, but also in Scandinavian laws where they were treated seriously.<sup>74</sup> In *Gragas*, an old Icelandic lawbook, if an insult about a man's sexuality was severe enough, he was allowed to kill the other man in an attempt to redeem his reputation.<sup>75</sup> Sexual insults in Norse and probably in other early Germanic cultures threatened the foundations of masculine identity in their attacks on the active male ideal.

Lovesickness, the inordinate direction of male desire towards a specific woman, also jeopardized a man's masculine identity. In the

late sixth-century, Isidore of Seville argued that "love beyond measure among the ancients was called 'womanly love', *femineus amor*."<sup>75</sup> If a man was too much in love, he was considered to be one who was effeminate and mentally ill. There was a general consensus among writers of literary, medical, and religious texts that men who lived lives of leisure were more likely to succumb to the malady of lovesickness.<sup>77</sup> Capellanus described the lovesick man derisively, regarding him as mad, servile, fearful, and undignified.<sup>78</sup> In the mid-thirteenth century, Peter of Spain, a professor of medicine in Sienna and later Pope John XXI, argued that men were less susceptible to *femineus amor* than women. Despite their resistance to it, men, once affected, suffered more acutely and for a longer duration because "the impression in the brain of a man is deeper and more difficult to eradicate."<sup>79</sup> Lovesickness was recognized by cultural authorities as a danger to the mind of the individual, but also to his identity as a man in society. Through inordinate sexual desire and love, a man jeopardized his masculine identity.

While problems of lovesickness and sexual insults were nominally secular, nocturnal emissions created considerable anxiety within the walls of the cloister. Augustine had regarded nocturnal emissions as sinless because reason could not resist in sleep.<sup>80</sup> John Cassian, a contemporary of Augustine, argued that nocturnal emissions, while not sinful themselves, revealed imperfect chastity.<sup>81</sup> Pope Gregory the Great described reasons for emissions, some sinful and some not,<sup>82</sup> and into the thirteenth century there was considerable debate as to whether the offender was culpable and if so, to what degree.<sup>83</sup> In addition, by the thirteenth century, moralists were linking nocturnal emissions with the unnatural sin of masturbation. At the same time, this clerical preoccupation was being projected onto secular society. For the

moralists and lay society, "The male body increasingly was perceived to be uncontrollable, a reflection of the irrational and unconscious desires lurking beneath the holiest facade."<sup>4</sup> In addition to the man's spiritual guilt stemming from his inability to control his emissions, the lack of control over one's body countered masculine ideals of mastery over carnality.

A man's lack of control over his own sexuality and body was a source of considerable anxiety. This distress can also be found in the few medieval literary and religious accounts of *penis captivus*, the temporary fusion of male to female in a sexual position.<sup>5</sup> Instances of *penis captivus* appear in classical literature, but also emerge in moralist literature between the early twelfth and late fourteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> In medieval stories, a man and a woman would be found adhered in a coital position on consecrated ground by a third party. Tales of *penis captivus* were meant to serve as warnings, and they should be viewed critically,<sup>7</sup> but these incidents represented a perceived threat to male sexuality and potency. The male found joined to a female would be the subject of public humiliation, becoming not only a social but also a religious outcast. Therefore, *penis captivus* not only threatened masculine social identity, but it also rendered the male sexually useless. Unable to control his bodily impulses, the man was viewed as carnal and feminine.

Medieval high fashion tended to eroticize the sexualized parts of the male body. *Poulaines*, shoes developed in the late eleventh century, were long, pointed shoes which symbolically emphasized the size of the wearer's penis. In the fourteenth century short jackets displayed the outline of a man's genitalia, and closely fitted pants emphasized the musculature of the legs.<sup>8</sup> Genital decoration, and later the codpiece, which developed in the fifteenth century, were of the most blatant

symbols of male sexuality, virility, and potency.<sup>89</sup>

Beside their emphasis of the male body, eroticized clothing could be used politically, as metaphorical statements of intent. It has been argued that these fashions, especially the codpiece, were used symbolically in the intergenerational conflict of young men against an older, more conservative patriarchy.<sup>90</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler's analysis of the portrait of young Guidobaldo II describes him asserting his male sexuality, in the form of an oversized codpiece, against his father, who vehemently opposed his son's romance with a woman of a rival family. The codpiece is only one symbol among many in the painting, but it reveals more: "Guidobaldo...may also have been pointing out to his father that the della Rovere family was dependent on the contents of Guidobaldo's codpiece."<sup>91</sup> Fashion progressively sexualized the male body, but its purpose was more than to emphasize unbounded potency. Sexual fashion had a shock value, and this shock value could be wielded symbolically and politically.

The symbolism of male sexuality was not limited to the wearing of tight pants and phallic shoes. Hunting in the medieval period was pursued primarily as a masculine activity. While the purveyance of meat affirmed a man's social worth, the hunter's quarry also conveyed meaning about the hunter's sexuality. The boar, for instance was associated with a bestial and lustful aspect of male sexuality and the man who successfully hunted this creature could assert a claim to the superiority of his manhood.<sup>92</sup> Poaching deer allowed a man, through the exercise of cunning, subterfuge, and bravery, to flaunt the law and his freedom from authority.<sup>93</sup> This matching of wits between forester and poacher was a form of masculine competition. The foresters were made ineffective by the poacher's capture of their horns which were their badges of office, thus depriving them of their symbolic and actual potency.<sup>94</sup> A second symbolic act involved a poacher's placing of a

distaff in the mouth of a buck's head in the middle of a clearing facing the sun. By placing a feminine symbol in the mouth of an animal closely identified with masculinity, they were directly insulting the foresters, and also the authority which employed them. Poaching and the act of hunting were expressions of masculine identity, but as the literary tradition has indicated<sup>95</sup>, there was a metaphorical connection of hunting with the active role in sex.

Symbolic connections between male activity and sexuality are also noted in modern criticism of medieval literary sources. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's examination of masculinity in the decapitation scenes of *Gawain and the Green Knight* teaches not only the protagonist but also a "young, male audience...the proper construction and assertion of a properly masculine, heterosexual identity."<sup>96</sup> However, Cohen provided no evidence to support his assumption that the audience would be young and male, or that anyone would interpret these symbols as sexual. Furthermore, his survey is steeped in the Freudian analysis of symbols, an approach which is not transcultural, but fused to Freud's immediate culture.<sup>97</sup>

These failings are not particular just to Cohen's analysis of medieval literature. Rosen falls into similar Freudian traps, arguing that the Green Knight was symbolically representative of the phallus.<sup>98</sup> Once again, who was the audience interpreting these symbols? For a symbol to function it must convey the desired meaning, and certainly the symbolic meanings David Rosen finds are vague and supported only with a literary critic's generalizations. While the study of medieval literature is somewhat useful in defining ideas of medieval masculinity and male sexuality, criticisms of medieval literature are problematic. Cohen, Rosen, and others<sup>99</sup> transport modern symbolic interpretation into an audience of purely speculative consistency, arguing that

readers/listeners at least implicitly understood the constructions of "correct" sexuality.

In summary, this survey of historical discourses of medieval male sexuality has established a continuum from the explicit and direct descriptions of sexuality in medical and theological treatises to more symbolic representations of sex in literary sources. The medical theories of Constantine the African and Hildegard focused explicitly on sexual physiology. Blended with discussions of procreation were their ideas of masculinity. Augustinian theology also dealt explicitly with male sexuality in its discussions of Christian sexual limitations, but established the sexual struggle as an expression of masculinity. Competing with Augustinian ascetic sexuality is the discourse surrounding rape and prostitution. While there were laws of church and state that ostensibly controlled these vices, they had little control over actual practice, especially of the rich and powerful. Discussions of overt male sexuality in secular sources, such as Abelard's letters to Heloise, betray a sexuality fraught with moral dilemmas, while Northern Germanic sexual proclivities leaned toward amorality even into the early Christian period. The fabliaux and Andreas Capellanus revealed an intricate connection between sexual expression and what was considered 'properly' male.

In the middle of this continuum, hovering between ideas of male sexuality and masculinity, are found the various sexual anxieties of the medieval man. Impotence, castration, sexual insults, lovesickness, nocturnal emissions, and warnings of *penis captivus* questioned not only the man's sexual function, but also conflicted with ideas of masculine potency and the ability to exert this power, virility, and social identity.

Sexual symbolism, being more ambiguous, deals more directly with ideas of masculinity than overt sexuality. Fashion, while explicitly

representing sexual potency and ability, also served as a construction of male identity and a metaphorical weapon against an older generation of males. Despite the sexual symbolism in poaching and hunting, the activity more directly emphasized masculine qualities of provisioning and personal autonomy. At the far extreme of the spectrum resides the unreliable interpretation of sexual symbolism in medieval literature by modern literary critics.

The continuum between sexuality and masculinity, between the explicit discussion and the symbolic representation, demonstrates a historical correlation between a man's sexuality and the perceptions of his social identity. This examination shows how closely the medieval mind linked sexual prowess to masculine identity and power, with no apparent distinction between the man's physical identity and his social and emotional identity. It was in this cultural setting that men of the fifteenth-century gentry understood themselves as men.



## Notes

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17. Geoffrey Chaucer, The Portable Chaucer (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), 291; Maurice Bassan's, "Chaucer's 'Cursed Monk', Constantinus Africanus," Medieval Studies 24 (1962), 127-40, argued that De Coitu was quite widely known, and his description of its author as 'cursed' refers to Constantine's listing of aphrodisiac recipes which allowed men like January to consider sexual relations at an advanced age. Also of interest is Paul Delany's "Constantinus Africanus and Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," Philological Quarterly 46 (1967), 560-66. Delany argued that the reference to Constantine as "cursed monk" was not Chaucer's condemnation but the narrator's.
18. Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988), 120.
19. Joan Cadden, "It Takes All Kinds: Sexuality and Gender Differences in Hildegard of Bingen's 'Book of Compound Medicine'," Traditio 40 (1984), 157-8.
20. Ibid, 158.
21. Helen Rodnite Lemay, "William of Saliecto on Human Sexuality," Viator 12 (1981), 171.
22. Helen Rodnite Lemay, "Some Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Lectures on Female Sexuality," in International Journal of Women's Studies 1 (1978), 395.
23. Helen Rodnite Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius and Medieval Gynecology," in Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honour of John H. Mundy, ed. Julius Kirshner (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 333; Vern J. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," in Sex, Society, and History, ed. Vern J. Bullough (New York: Science History Publications, 1976), 55.

24. Peter Brown, The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 404; John W. Baldwin, "Five Discourses on Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Northern France around 1200," Speculum 66 (1991), 801.
25. Augustine, The City of God, trans. David Knowles (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967), 582.
26. Augustine, The Confessions of Saint Augustine, trans. Edward D. Pusey (New York: Random House, 1949), 69.
27. Erin Sawyer, "Celibate Pleasures: Masculinity, Desire, and Asceticism in Augustine," Journal of the History of Sexuality 6.1 (July 1995), 5.
28. Ibid, 28.
29. Augustine, Confessions, 165.
30. Margaret Miles, Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991), 98.
31. Terrence Kardong, "John Cassian's Teaching on Perfect Chastity," American Benedictine Review 30 (1979), 261.
32. Eve Levin, Sex and the Orthodox Slavs, 900-1700 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989), 202.
33. Guido Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros. Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 103.
34. Ibid, 150.
35. Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre, "A Smorgasbord of Sexual Practices," in Sex in the Middle Ages, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 147. For a literary example of the severity of punishment see Grettir's Saga, trans. Denton Fox and Hermann Palsson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), Chap. 19, 43-44.
36. Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), 150.
37. For a thorough discussion of the development of rape laws see James A. Brundage, "Rape and Marriage in the Medieval Canon Law," in Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1993), 62-75.
38. Stephen P. Pistono, "Rape in Medieval Europe," Atlantis 14.2 (Spring 1989), 40.
39. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 313, 530.
40. Ruth Mazzo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England," Signs 14.2 (1989), 401-3.
41. Capellanus, Art of Courtly Love, 150.

42. Vern J. Bullough, "The Prostitute in the Early Middle Ages," in Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 36. James Brundage's "Prostitution in Medieval Canon Law," Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church, provides a thorough discussion of the ambivalence and tolerance of the canonists for prostitutes.
43. J.-L. Flandrin, "Repression and Change in the Sexual Life of Young People in Medieval and Early Modern Times," Journal of Family History 2.3 (1977), 199.
44. Jacques Rossiaud, "Prostitution, Sex and Society in French Towns in the Fifteenth Century," in Western Sexuality, Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times, eds. Philippe Aries and Andre Bejin, trans. Anthony Forester (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985), 79.
45. Ann Curry, "Sex and the Soldier in Lancastrian Normandy, 1415-1450," Reading Medieval Studies 14 (1988), 23.
46. Cathy J. Itnyre, "A Smorgasbord of Sexual Practices," in Sex in the Middle Ages, 146. Women did not have equivalent sexual liberties as men did in early medieval Scandinavia. There is also evidence which suggests that a wife was more respectable than another woman whom a husband had as a sexual partner.
47. Egil's Saga, trans. E.R. Eddison (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 10.
48. Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, trans. O.M. Dalton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
49. Jenny Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction," American Historical Review 92.2 (1987), 332.
50. Ibid, 334.
51. The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 147.
52. Ibid, 67.
53. Ibid, 149.
54. Gregory of Tours, 138.
55. Charles Muscatine, The Old French Fabliaux (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1986), 112.
56. Ibid, 124; Alexandre Leupin, Barbolexis: Medieval Writing and Sexuality, trans. Kate Cooper (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989), 89-90.
57. Muscatine, Old French Fabliaux, 125.
58. Ibid, 151. For a similar evaluation see Sidney E. Berger, "Sex in the Literature of the Middle Ages: The Fabliaux," in Sexual Practices & The Medieval Church, 175.

59. See Simon Gaunt, "Marginal Men, Marcabru and Orthodoxy: The Early Troubadours and Adultery," Medium Aevum 59.1 (1990), 55-72. Gaunt has discussed male peer and power relationships in courtly love literature. He follows R. Howard Bloch's thesis that women 'served as adjuncts to men' and were not individuals themselves, 68.
60. See also Richard A. Koenigsberg, "Culture and Unconscious Fantasy: Observations of Courtly Love," Psychoanalytic Review 54 (1967), 30-50. Koenigsberg argued that courtly love "represented the beginning of a radical change in the cultural attitude toward the female. Man's love for women...was given expression in a system of social relations.", 48. This seems only partially correct considering the extreme misogyny found in Book III, which seems to be a continuance if not an exaggeration of a sense of gynophobia.
61. Capellanus, Art of Courtly Love, 148, 193.
62. Ibid, 198-209.
63. Huguccio did not agree with this explanation for impotence. He argued that it was caused by mental incapacity, physical incapacity, or a combination of the two. See James A. Brundage, "Impotence, Frigidity and Marital Nullity in the Decretists and Early Decretalists," in Sex, Law, and Marriage in the Middle Ages (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1993), 415.
64. Guibert of Nogent, Self and Society in Medieval Europe. The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent (1064?-c.1125) (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 64, 67. While Hrut's problem is not impotency but a penis too large to allow him to consummate his marriage, for the purposes of this discussion the effect of witch is the same. See Njal's Saga, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1960), 49.
65. Heinrich Institoris and Jakob Sprenger, Malleus Maleficarum, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1970), 6.
66. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, 201-3, 243, 512.
67. Jacqueline Murray, "On the Origins and Role of 'Wise Women' in Causes for Annulment on the Grounds of Male Impotence," Journal of Medieval History 16 (1990), 241, 245; Jacquart and Thomasset, 170-1; James Brundage, "The Problem of Impotence," in Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church, 136.
68. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," 51.
69. Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, 449.

70. The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, 75; Mathew S. Kuefler, "Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages," in The Handbook of Medieval Sexuality, eds. Vern J. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 289. In addition, Guibert of Nogent described with vivid detail the mutilations of the prisoners of Thomas of castle Marle. According to Guibert, "he hung them up by their testicles, and as these often tore off from the weight of the body, the vitals soon burst out...Others were suspended by their thumbs or male organ itself, and were weighed down with a stone placed on their shoulders." Guibert of Nogent, Self and Society, 185.
71. Mathew Kuefler, in his essay examining the primary source references to eunuchs in the early medieval period, argued that medieval thinkers associated castrated men with femininity's pejorative characteristics. Due to the nascent state of research into castration and medieval eunuchs, Kuefler limited his discussion, suggesting that castrated men were viewed with uncertainty. See Kuefler, "Castration and Eunuchism," 292. In Walter Stevenson's examination of eunuchry in antiquity, the author traced two important views of the castrated men. Although a dominant discourse on eunuchs considered them effeminate, a second view regarded them as sexually and politically threatening. See Walter Stevenson, "The Rise of Eunuchs in Greco-Roman Antiquity," Journal of the History of Sexuality 5.4 (1995), 495-511. Furthermore, the problems of impotence directly relate to problems of castration. See Brundage's "The Problems of Impotence," in Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church. Judaism also had no place for the eunuch; he was unable to marry and "of no use". Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, trans. M. Friedlander (New York: Dover Books, 1956), 379. See also Terrence Kardong, "John Cassian Teaching on Perfect Chastity," American Benedictine Review 30 (1979), 261.
72. The Saga of Gisli, trans. George Johnston (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), chap. 2, 4; Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," Representations 44 (Fall 1993), 8.
73. Ursula Dronke, The Role of Sexual Themes in Njal's Saga (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1980), 11. Sexual insults, insinuating passive homosexual behaviour, are also found in the fabliaux. See Muscatine, 125.
74. Thorkil Vangaard, Phallos: A Symbol and its History in the Male World (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), 76.
75. Folke Strom, Nith, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973), 6. In Preben Meulengracht Sorenson, The Unmanly Man. Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society, Joan Turville-Peter, trans. (Odense: Odense UP, 1983), a full discussion of the non-literary sources for nith laws is provided. The penalties seem to have varied, and the license to kill the offender was the most extreme of them. More commonly the nith-hurler was forced to pay a weregild or was outlawed.
76. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," Medieval Masculinities, 33.
77. Mary Frances Wack, "The Measure of Pleasure: Peter of Spain on Men, Women, and Lovesickness," Viator 17 (1986), 179.

78. Capellanus, Art of Courtly Love, 190.
79. Wack, "The Measure of Pleasure," 185.
80. Augustine, Confessions, 228. See also Jacqueline Murray, "Men's Minds, Men's Bodies: Seminal Emissions and Sexual Anxiety in the Middle Ages," Annual Review of Sex Research 8 (Forthcoming 1997). In the unpublished form, see p.6.
81. Terrence Kardong, "John Cassian's Teaching on Perfect Chastity," American Benedictine Review 30 (1979), 254; David Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," Journal of Early Christian Studies 2.4 (1995), 447.
82. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, eds., Bede's Ecclesiastical History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 102-5.
83. James A. Brundage, "Wet Dreams, Sexual Guilt, and the Right of Privacy: the Views of the Decretists" (Unpublished paper, 1995).
84. Murray, "Men's Bodies, Men's Minds," 31.
85. J.D. Rolleston, "Penis Captivus: A Historical Note," in Sex in the Middle Ages, 232-7.
86. Rolleston, "Penis Captivus," 233-236. See also M.Y. Orford, ed., The Book of the Knight of the Tower, trans. William Caxton (London: Oxford UP, 1971), 59-60; C. Grant Loomis, "Three Cases of Vaginism," in Sex in the Middle Ages, 217-219.
87. Dyan Elliot, "Sex in Holy Places. An Exploration of a Medieval Anxiety," Journal of Women's History (Fall 1994), 6.
88. Lois Banner, "The Fashionable Sex, 1100-1600," History Today 42 (April 1992), 37-38.
89. Patricia Simons, "Alert and Erect: Masculinity in Some Italian Renaissance Portraits of Fathers and Sons," in Gender Rhetorics. Postures of Dominance and Submission in History, ed. Richard Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 170. See also George Rattray Taylor, Sex in History (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1954), 21.
90. Banner, "The Fashionable Sex," 42; Lyndal Roper, Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 1994), 119; Simons, "Alert and Erect," 172; Konrad Eisenbichler, "Bronzino's Portrait of Guidobaldo II della Rovere," Renaissance and Reformation 24 (1988), 28.
91. Eisenbichler, "Bronzino's Portrait," 28.

92. Joyce E. Salisbury, The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 39-41, 48, 52, 80. Salisbury evoked the connections between animals and male sexuality and masculinity within the context of hunting and also within a discussion of animals as property. According to the author, animals such as horses and dogs could be constructed as symbolic statements of the owner's sexuality and masculine identity.
93. Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Men's Games, King's Deer: Poaching in Medieval England," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 18.2 (1988), 175-6. David D. Gilmore describes the need for autonomy of individual action as a fourth characteristic of masculinity in Andalusia (Gilmore, 48-51).
94. Hanawalt, "Men's Games," 190.
95. Ibid, 191.
96. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Decapitation and Coming of Age: Constructing Masculinity and the Monstrous," in The Arthurian Yearbook III, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 187.
97. Ibid, 178, 186.
98. David Rosen, The Changing Fictions of Masculinity (Chicago: university of Illinois, 1993), 48-9.
99. Gary Ferguson, "Symbolic Sexual Inversion and the Construction of Courtly Womanhood in Two French Romances," The Arthurian Yearbook III, 203.



## Chapter Three

### Sexuality and the Provincial Gentleman

Discussions of sexuality and male desire appear infrequently in the letters of the Pastons, Stonors, Plumpton, and Celys. Late medieval women and men usually reserved letter writing for practical purposes, and convention limited expressions of individuality. Still, ideas about sex appear explicitly and implicitly within these correspondences.<sup>1</sup> The task of uncovering the sexual attitudes of these men of upwardly aspiring families focuses on sexual activity and discourse. This study first examines sexuality, anxiety, and emotion illustrated in discussions of courtship and marriage. Following this we explore the connections between masculine sexual identities and the fathering of male heirs. A final section addresses the transgressive aspects of sexuality which appear in the discussions of premarital fornication, adultery, bastardy, and rape.

The men of the provincial gentry were involved as individuals in negotiating their way within and along the boundaries of competing sexual ideologies. Jean-Louis Flandrin has argued that a moral and religious code of sexuality coexisted with a secular ideology. This worldly code allowed men to disregard the individuality of women and justified expressions of male sexuality deemed sinful in the moral stratum.<sup>2</sup> By working within the boundaries of these two ideologies, men could present their sexuality as justifiable.

The correspondence which discusses courtship and marriage arrangements evinces the urgency and individual awareness of men's sexual needs and frustrations. In 1470, John Paston III, aged 26, urged his unmarried older brother, John II, to quickly arrange a marriage for him: "I pray get vs a wyfe somwher, for `melius est nubere in domino

quam vrere'. [It is better to marry than to burn.]"<sup>3</sup> His sexual impulses urging him, John III expressed his interest in sexuality within a moral framework. Unlike his older brother, John III did not enjoy a similar sexual outlet and spent much of his life managing the family estates in Norfolk. With the death of his father John I, John III relied on his older brother to conduct his marriage negotiations. Under similar circumstances, Thomas Staunton wrote to his elder brother-in-law, William Stonor, hoping a marriage would be arranged for him. Staunton referred to the period of his life before marriage as full of sin, for which he repents and God punishes him. For Staunton, wedlock was the key to controlling his urges and focusing them.<sup>4</sup> Both men, John Paston III and Thomas Staunton, echoed the Pauline and Augustinian views of sexual activity. According to Paul, the proper place for sexual activity was within marriage, yet his view of sexual activity was not exclusively procreative. Augustine took this further, arguing that sex in marriage was not culpable when desire was "tempered by procreative intent or by the intention of 'rendering the debt' exacted by one's spouse."<sup>5</sup> Only within the confines of marriage could sexuality be sinless.

Staunton and John III present us with two very different views of male sexuality. John, the younger, conveyed the sense of anxiety and frustration of a man attempting to adhere to Christian sexual ideologies. In contrast, Thomas claimed he was plagued with the guilt of committing the sins which marriage would make less culpable. While both men appealed to this dominant moral and sexual code, their appeals reveal a dichotomy of continence and sexual frustration, fornication and guilt. In comparison with Staunton's frequent mentions of illicit sexuality, the moral anxiety of John III is notable for its adherence, superficial or not, to the Church's teachings on sexuality.

For men like John III and Thomas Staunton, marriage legitimized

sexual activity thereby removing the moral and social stigmas attached to a lascivious bachelor.<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to heal the widening rift in the marriage negotiations between William Stonor and a Mistress Blounte, Thomas Mull attempted to spice up the arrangement with promises of hot sex. Mull wrote to William Stonor: "wher as shee may revolve at her lyberte withoute controlllyng every thyng that longeth to loves daunce, though the fflame of the ffyre of love may not breke oute so that it may be seyn, yet the hete of love in yt self is never the les, but rather hootter in yt self."<sup>7</sup> Mull regarded William as a "muser and a studier"<sup>8</sup> who needed to be prodded into action. By playing upon the supposed sexual anxieties and longings of his younger cousin, and by emphasizing the sexual passion of his mistress, Mull sought to secure this marriage.

Courtship, marriage arrangements, and social interactions with women were sources of uncertainty and self-doubt for men. Men such as John Paston III and Thomas Staunton discussed their marital aspirations in terms of sexual access, anxiety, and frustration. Certainly, late marriage and the moral compunction to contain sexual impulses were in good part responsible for male sexual anxiety.<sup>9</sup> The many attempts and failures to negotiate a marriage on behalf of John III were sources of uneasiness for the young bachelor.<sup>10</sup> Compounding the frustration of his moralistic and self-restricted bachelorhood, John III suffered rejection by several potential mates before wedding Margery Brews. His elder brother and marriage negotiator, realizing his brother's disheartenment, attempted to console John III and build up his confidence.<sup>11</sup>

The sexual anxiety of a man trying to maintain continence is also evident in the Plumpton correspondence.<sup>12</sup> Rivalry over a prospective bride could heighten this unease. Competitive courtship called into question the competitor's masculine identity. John Paston III wrote his elder brother asking him to deal with a rival for the affections of a

lady, threatened by his wiliness and unpredictable behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Courtship and negotiations for marriage were sources of anxiety for men, holding expressions of male sexuality, as well as his economic ambitions, in a protracted state of limbo. This uncertainty was aggravated by the failure of negotiations or competition from other suitors.

In the context of non-romantic man-woman relationships, anxiety and sexuality can also be found. A comment by John Paston II to the Duchess of Norfolk caused him considerable concern about how she and his fellow courtiers viewed him. John remarked that the duchess would be happy with "a lordys soon in hyre belye, fore she cowde cheryshe itt and dele warlye wyth it".<sup>14</sup> He continued, commenting on her physical traits which would facilitate childbirth, but this did not seem to go over well with her. Quite clearly John II's language was too intimate, conjuring up images of her having sex and pointing out sexualized features of the female form.<sup>15</sup> John II realized that he probably crossed the bounds of decency and his comments to his younger brother John reflect his uncertainty. He wrote: "Also I praye yow feele my lady off Norffolkys dysposicion to me wardys, and whethyre she toke any dysplesure at my langage, ore mokkyd ore dysdeyned my wordys whyche I hadd to hyre at Yarmothe."<sup>16</sup> Discussions of sexuality were reserved for those who shared a close association. Between men and women, discussions of sex were reserved for those involved intimately with each other. In this instance, John went beyond these limits and opened himself up to ridicule and perhaps to charges of impropriety and incompetence.

Within the context of courtship and interactions between men and women, male sexual identity was subject to threat, self-doubt, and uncertainty. While some expressions of sexuality were aggressive and insensitive, caring, sensitivity, and love are also evident. John I and Richard Calle, in their responses to their wives, revealed differing depths of emotional attachment. Although John I displayed limited

amounts of marital affection in his early letters to Margaret, in his last days John I's correspondence with his wife became more tender and warm.<sup>17</sup> The letter of Richard to his wife, Margery Paston, reveals a strong bond of emotional attachment which would see the couple through the opposition of a hostile Paston clan and years of forced separation.<sup>18</sup> In 1469 Richard wrote to Margery,

Myn owne lady and mastres, and be-for God very trewe wyff, I wyth herte full sorowfull recomaunde me vnto you as he that can not be mery nor nought schalbe tyll it be otherwise wyth vs thenne it is yet; for thys lyff that we lede nough is nowther plesur to Godde nor to the worle, concederyng the gret bonde of matrymony that is made be-twix vs, and as on my parte neuer gretter.<sup>19</sup>

Equally tender is the letter from the Stonor correspondence of Thomas Betson to Katherine Ryche. In his adolescence Betson wrote fondly to Ryche,

And yff ye wold be a good etter off your mete allwaye, that ye myght waxe and grow ffast to be a woman, ye shuld make me the gladdest man off the world, be my trouthe: ffor whanne I remembre your sadde loffyng delynge to me wardes, ffor south ye make me eveneray glade and joyous in my hart.<sup>20</sup>

The language of love in these letters exhibits a mutual emotional dependence by the two loving partners. The notions of a harsh, manipulative, and conspiratorial male sexuality are softened when set against men's tender correspondence with their lovers. Indeed, these men were not bound to an ideology which dismissed a woman's individuality, disregarded her personality, and perceived her as a sinful temptation. The personal letters of these men to their paramours demonstrate their genuine love and a degree of independence from misogynist views of women.

Although sex was a feverish pursuit of many of these men, within and without marriage, the ultimate desired results were legitimate children, especially male heirs. While MacFarlane concedes that a slight preference for male children was demonstrated in this period,

there is ample evidence to support men's strong preference for sons.<sup>22</sup> While masculine sexual potency became explicit in the bearing of sons, the virility of the father would be proven if his offspring were male. John Paston II's story of the Turk connects this person's numerous, handsome sons with his general virility and incredible sexual capacity. This description is perhaps the most unusual and seemingly out of place accounts in the Paston correspondence. Squeezed between a discussion of the king's impending foray into Lincolnshire and the recent treaty between William Yelverton and the Pastons, John II discussed the Turk in explicitly masculine terms:

a wele vysaged felawe off the age xl yere, and he is lowere than Manuell by an handfull and lower then my lytell by the scholderys, and more lytell above hys pappe. And he hathe, as he seyde to the Kyng hym-selffe, iij or iiij [sonys] chyldre, iche on off hem as hyghe and asse lykly as the Kynge hym-selffe. And he is leggyd ryght j-now, and it is reported that hys pyntell is asse longe as hys legge.<sup>23</sup>

On the surface, the Turk was facially handsome yet diminutive. There is no indication that his lack of height was connected to any sense of fragility. The legs, described by John II as good and long compared to the rest of the Turk's body<sup>24</sup>, were considered sexually attractive and indicative of a man's physical capability, masculine and sexual.<sup>25</sup> The identity of this fellow is anchored in his progeny, three or four handsome and tall sons. His male offspring, regarded as socially and politically valuable, were evidence of his sexual potency and manliness,<sup>25</sup> and they warranted mention by John II for these very reasons. John II's description of the Turk's penis being as long as his leg further augmented his masculine identity. The connection between several strong and handsome sons and the size of his member follow a scientific course of thought which correlated a man's sexual prowess with the sex of his children.<sup>26</sup> Not only was he manly in the production of strapping sons, but he was also easily able to satisfy women and make

men speak of him with awe.

The gossip regarding the Turk did not have any direct relevance to the Paston interests. Although correspondence was usually reserved for practical matters, John Paston II included this anecdote for the sake of wonder and amusement, believing that his sexually anxious brother would be equally entertained by the account. Contrary to Alan MacFarlane's claim that there is little mention of the association of social prestige with the number of sons a man had, the reputation of the Turk and the evaluation of his sexual prowess and masculine identity were directly tied to his masculine and virile offspring.<sup>27</sup> Finally, this anecdote also reveals a forum in which a man's sexual identity could be discussed and evaluated. The fact that the Turk's penis was reported to be as long as his leg is indicative of an evaluative space in which men contemplated sexual and masculine identity.<sup>28</sup>

Other evidence from the Paston letters indicates that male children were the anticipated and valued issue. Upon the birth of John III's short-lived son Christopher, John II remarked, "I praye God send you many sons if it be his pleasure."<sup>29</sup> Again, John II's awkward compliment of the Duchess of Norfolk forecast her with her "lordys soon in hyre belye."<sup>30</sup> Besides the social and sexual identity conferred by siring a son, nouveau riche families like the Pastons depended on male offspring to continue the patrilineage. Joel Rosenthal has argued that "in terms of patrilineage, as the basic element from which the molecules of patriarchal continuity were constructed, there is only the first circle, the world of the son and/or, if need be, his son."<sup>31</sup> By resorting to female heirs, the patrilineage would end and the patrimony would be fractured. Aspiring to higher things, families like the Pastons, the Stonors, and the Celys would not wish someone a female child but rather a male. While male heirs represented familial and political needs, the birth of a son confirmed and rooted a man's

virility, serving as a public recognition of his masculine sexual potency.

Not all men limited their sexual appetites to the conjugal bed. It was fairly common for men of the provincial gentry to engage in both fornication and adultery. In terms of a hierarchy of sexual sins, canon law treated adultery more severely than fornication. Indeed, the laity scarcely considered fornication a crime.<sup>32</sup> The numerous references to fornication in all the collections of correspondence also indicate its relative social acceptance. Fornication and premarital sexual intercourse played a role in the lives of many of the men of the Paston, Cely, Stonor, and Plumpton families. The letters between men and their mistresses, and men and their male friends and associates provide ample evidence of this casual attitude.

John Paston II had an active romantic and sexual life. A letter from Thomas Daverse to John II at one point focused on John's pursuit of a Lady Anne P. Both men served as courtiers and were engaged in an alliance of mutual service.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, John had previously communicated to Daverse a sexual interest in this woman. Responding to a previous request from John for Ovid's De Arte Amandi Daverse suggested that the De Remedio would be more useful "yef ye purposed to falle hastily in my Lady Anne P. lappe, as white as whales bon, &c."<sup>34</sup> Ovid's De Remedio is a lengthy poem which urges a man to pursue a career in politics and war, among other interests, in order to free himself from his preoccupations with an unworthy mistress.<sup>35</sup> Daverse's recommendation is a clear warning that John Paston II should not become overly enamoured with Lady Anne P. In the medieval period, lovesickness was equated with insanity, servility, and was properly defined as *femineus amor*, "womanly love".<sup>36</sup> Men of upper-class origins, especially, were believed to be more vulnerable to lovesickness because of the relative comfort and softness of their lives.<sup>37</sup> Daverse's admonition sought to temper but not



restrict John II's sexual interest and activity. Indeed, Ovid, in The Art of Love, recommends sexual intercourse for a man to demonstrate his masculinity.<sup>38</sup> In this instance Daverse acknowledged and encouraged a recreational pursuit of sex just as long as John did not become smitten and servile.

Historians such as Colin Richmond, Roger Virgoe, and Keith Dockray have characterized the environment in which courtiers such as John II and Daverse conducted themselves as "seedy and soiled". A man's immersion in this sexually charged setting could begin when he was relatively young.<sup>39</sup> John II's life as a courtier began at age nineteen, when he was sent to the King's court in London. In 1463, at twenty-one years of age, he was knighted. In his time at court John had several mistresses but only a few are mentioned directly.<sup>40</sup> A letter to John from Cecily Daune, which Davis has dated between 1463-1468, indicates that the two shared some sort of romantic attachment.<sup>41</sup> A bastard daughter named Constance was also mentioned in Margaret's will of 1484.<sup>42</sup> Compounded with his pursuit of Lady Anne P. and his betrothal to Lady Anne Haute in 1469, there is considerable evidence that John was active and aggressive in the pursuit of sexual relationships.<sup>43</sup> Daverse confirmed this with his observation of John that he "be the best cheser of a gentellwoman that I know, &c."<sup>44</sup> John I was irritated by his son's behaviour and described him as living a dissolute life.<sup>45</sup> The "soiled and seedy" environment of the king's court allowed courtiers and, by extrapolation, certain ladies a degree of sexual freedom. This allowance was uncommon to those men and women living under the family's roof and/or working hard for their livelihood. Being nineteen when he arrived at the court and spending a major part of his adult life in that setting, John and his upper class fellows exercised their sexuality with little parental or moral restraint.

Courtiers and court life aside, men from the Cely and Plumptre

families discussed premarital sexual intercourse as well. Richard Cely II, with a splash of humour to temper the stickiness of the situation, confessed to his "ghostly brother", George, that he had impregnated Em.<sup>46</sup> This woman was apparently a servant of either George or their mother.<sup>47</sup> Although nothing else was mentioned of Em, the situation complicated the ongoing marriage arrangements for Richard II. In an attempt to reassure a brother no doubt frustrated by his jeopardizing of the negotiations, Richard offered to "fynd a meyn to sawhe awl thyng cler[e] at yowr comyng".<sup>48</sup> He did not elaborate further on how this would be done. Compelled to speak about his sexual relationship with Em because of the potential problems it might have presented, Richard Cely II was unconcerned with the moral implications. He was more concerned with the material costs of his transgressions than the spiritual ramifications.

Direct evidence of adulterous fornication in the correspondences of these families is nearly non-existent. Adultery, although theoretically a graver sin and crime than simple fornication, was seldom punished.<sup>49</sup> The Cely letters provide a fleeting glimpse at the extramarital affairs of George Cely. He worked on the continent and was away from his wife for considerable lengths of time. During these extended absences he cultivated extramarital sexual relationships. His first mistress was a French woman known as Clare. Her letter to George was replete with amorous sentiment and reveals a mutual romantic attachment.<sup>50</sup> Although no children resulted from the affair, their letters convey a sense of playfulness and rapport between the two. Additionally, George had a high opinion of his mistress, regarding her as a teacher and addressing her as a lady.<sup>51</sup> No reason is provided for the termination of this relationship but it appears George quickly moved on to another. He maintained a long-lasting relationship with Margery, a cook of Calais. During their association Margery gave birth to two of

his children, the first of whom died in infancy. Although there are only two references to this woman, it is reasonable to assume that their liaisons occurred within a span of at least two years. Furthermore, the only people who were privy to discussing George's adulterous relationships with him were a close business associate and his brother. George Cely needed to keep a tight rein on this sort of discussion; if his extramarital dalliances became public knowledge, his identity and sexual reputation would be subject to public scrutiny and disapproval.<sup>52</sup>

Adultery and premarital sexuality are made most explicit in the appearance of illegitimate children in the literature. Their presence confirms that men, to some degree, were sexually active before marriage or outside of it. John II's illegitimate daughter Constance and William Plumpton's two bastard sons William and Robert were all acknowledged in family correspondence.<sup>53</sup> They indicate that men wanted and sought sexual intercourse beyond the bounds of a moral system that ostensibly restricted such behaviour. Acknowledgement and flagrant disregard for moral limits combined with public discovery of illegitimate children could, and in the case of William Plumpton, did result in public scrutiny and a reputation for immorality. In an attempt to mollify official and popular anger, Plumpton claimed that the mother of his two sons was his clandestine spouse.<sup>54</sup> Bastard children explicitly identified a man with his sexual immorality. Richard Cely II, George Cely, and William Plumpton all attempted to conceal their transgressions and each needed a degree of complicity from their male associates and family members.<sup>55</sup>

The extramarital and premarital sexual dalliances and the long-term relationships of these men reveal several important issues pertaining to their conception of male sexuality. The men who engaged in these practices did not, in most cases, discuss their sexual activity in terms of morality and immorality. Only when their illicit activities

were publicly scrutinized did they attempt to address the moral repercussions of their actions. It is also important to recognize a shared acknowledgement of male sexual impulse as frequently being transgressive and not always subject to rational control. These discussions of morally transgressive sexuality were a space for men to understand one another's sexual and masculine identities. The men who conducted adulterous affairs and premarital fornication discussed them with their peers, male family members, and close associates. They believed that the recipients of their letters would understand and condone their activity. Jean-Louis Flandrin's argument for a dualistic interpretation of sexual ideologies is particularly applicable to this analysis. He argued that alongside a moral and religious code which defined fornication as a transgressive action, a cultural tradition operated, providing some justification for these assertions of male sexuality. In their relationships between trusted friends, men had a space for discussing their sexuality without the moralism of an ostensibly dominant and generally repressive code of male sexuality.

Since the fifteenth century was the "golden age" of medieval prostitution, this discussion of male sexuality requires at least a cursory examination of the sex industry. In most English towns prostitution was still legally prohibited.<sup>56</sup> However, in Southwark, outside London's city limits and jurisdiction, brothels and bathhouses were publicly regulated.<sup>57</sup> The public regulation of the brothels reflects the recognition of this secular sexual ideology. This regulation allowed men to visit municipal brothels and bathhouses without shame or dishonour.<sup>58</sup> There is no direct evidence from the correspondence of the Pastons, Plumpton, Stonors, and Celys that the men of these families visited brothels or prostitutes. Nevertheless, it is fair to speculate that men such as George Cely and John Paston II, among others, given their keen interest and appreciation for sex, may

not have been averse to soliciting prostitutes. Alas, due to the absence of any strong evidence, this line of analysis must be put aside.

The most violent expressions of male sexuality found in the correspondence of the Pastons involved cases of rape. James Brundage, in his exhaustive work Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe, did not discuss rape without discussing the abduction of the female victim. Canon law established criteria for the charge of *raptus*: violence, abduction, and coitus without the free consent of the partner.<sup>59</sup> He noted that both rape and abduction were quite commonly reported in England in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and a disproportionate number of these implicated upper-class men as the perpetrators.<sup>60</sup> In the cases of rape examined herein, the writers used the verb *ravish*, sometimes accompanied by the explicit and sexually connotative verb "swive", to refer to crimes of *raptus*. Brundage's distinctions between rape and ravishment are not clearly defined, indicating the overlapping meanings of the two terms.<sup>61</sup> Regardless, the two terms were intimately connected and frequently implied unwanted sex and abduction.

In the Paston letters three discussions of rape cases appear but the contexts of each one are very different.<sup>62</sup> Therefore each must be discussed separately if the subtleties of meaning are to be interpreted. These three incidents appear connected on three levels. First, the three instances of rape were directly relevant to the material interests of the men discussing the cases. Second, their discussions also reflected an insensitivity towards the immediate victim. Finally, and most important, the male writers acknowledged the force of male sexual impulses, tacitly accepting the results of their mismanagement.

The earliest mention of abduction and ravishment is found in John Paston I's July 20, 1452 letter to Richard Southwell, a fellow lawyer.

According to Paston, Jane Boys, possibly related to Lady Sibyl Boys and of some means,<sup>43</sup> was abducted by a yeomen named Lancastrother.<sup>44</sup> Paston described the abduction:

thes be prouis that Jane Boys was rauschid  
ageyn her will, and not be her own assent:

On is that she, the tyme of her takyng whan she  
was set upon her hors, she revylid Lancasterother and  
callid hym knave, and wept and kryid owte upon hym  
pitowsly to her, ...she (cried) and callid him fals  
traytur that browth her the rabbettis.<sup>45</sup>

During the course of her abduction, Boys made several efforts to let witnesses see her in hopes that they would rescue her. At the time of John's draft, Boys was still in captivity and Lancastrother was planning to marry her.<sup>46</sup>

John Paston I pressed Southwell to take up the case of Jane Boys in order to serve more personal and political motives. Those who sought to punish Lancastrother, namely John I and Richard Southwell, could make claim to the virtue of justice, the honour of successful prosecution, and heightened prestige.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Paston recognized that by arguing the case for Boys against Lancastrother, both he and Southwell stood to gain the favour of the Boys family. The Boyeses' advocates, although their motivations were primarily monetary<sup>48</sup>, sought to strengthen their social identities as enforcers of the dominant code of male sexuality. Paston's attitude towards this case can be characterized as exploitative and opportunistic, giving rise to comparisons to the twentieth-century stereotype of an ambulance-chasing lawyer. It is doubtful that Paston and Southwell would have been eager to pursue charges of a rape for a family of minimal means and influence. John recognized the opportunities for social advancement provided by this case and encouraged his fellow lawyer to pursue these as well.

John Paston was reasonably sure of the case's tenability, but he reserved doubt about the credibility of the victim.<sup>49</sup> This doubt was

fuelled by the gaps in the account of the raptus and John's belief that this lady had a history of exaggerating and telling untruths.<sup>70</sup> Since the onus was on the victim to prosecute, suspicion of insincerity could seriously jeopardize an already difficult procedure.<sup>71</sup> Throughout the medieval period a powerful current of thought regarded women as replete with lust and, even in the act of rape the woman still partook in a small degree of pleasure.<sup>72</sup> Failed cases of rape could result in countersuits, accusing the alleged victim of sexual defamation and requiring the victim to pay restitution.<sup>73</sup> The prosecution of a rape case was an uphill battle, yet legal success, if not justice, could be had.

While John did see this ravishment as a "gret oryble dede" which needed punishing, he was specific that this case was not to be taken up for Jane Boys. Paston made this clear to Southwell, arguing that "if the mater were laborid forth-not for her sake but for the worchepe of the estatys and other that have laboryd therin,"<sup>74</sup> both he and Southwell would benefit. John Paston did not view Jane Boys as the immediate victim. Instead, he considered the parents of Boys to be the wronged party who required redress, specifically financial compensation. In the early and high Middle Ages, and also into this later period, rape was considered to be a crime against the family and less so against the person raped.<sup>75</sup> The failure to protect its own female members damaged the identity of the patriarch and male family members. Paston's interpretation of Boys's ravishment in terms of an assault against family honour and his disregard for her suffering, fits within a broader medieval context of viewing women as property of their male guardians.<sup>76</sup>

In his letter to Southwell, Paston did not characterize Lancastrother as a menace or a criminal. Although he regarded the action as horrible, the victim was portrayed in more negative terms than the perpetrator. Jane Boys's verbal assault on Lancastrother worked to

compound Paston's unfavourable opinion of her. The insults and derision which Boys piled on Lancastrother while he was abducting her certainly went beyond the boundaries of respectable protest, demonstrating her ability to threaten the social and sexual identity of her abductor. Indeed, as Martin Ingram and J.A. Sharpe argue, even in the late fifteenth century, men and women were becoming more conscious of their sexual reputations.<sup>77</sup> Such consciousness manifested itself in growing and considerable numbers of sexual defamation and slander suits. Boys's reviling of Lancastrother conjured up images of immaturity and treachery, the latter bearing implications of femininity.<sup>78</sup> Her verbal unmanning of Lancastrother partially removed the culpability of his actions. Indeed, among the middling and lower classes of the sixteenth century, it was not uncommon for slanders such as these to be met with a violent reaction by the offended party.<sup>79</sup> Although rape cases required protest and demonstrations of unwilling participation by the victim, Paston regarded her protestations as transgressive and, to a degree, culpable.

A second account of rape, which occurred nearly twenty years later, better illustrates a level of sympathy for the man who succumbed to the temptations of a woman.<sup>80</sup> Edmond Paston II, managing the manor at Mautby, wrote to John Paston III regarding the illicit sexual practices of Gregory, a capable Paston servant. Edmond described the situation to his elder brother John: "Yt happyd hym to haue a knavys loste, in pleyne termes to swyve a quene; and so did in the konyner-closse [rabbit warren]."<sup>81</sup> Two ploughmen, seeing Gregory with the woman, also wanted to rape her. Gregory obliged them but required that they take the woman to their own barn. Margaret Paston, somehow hearing of Gregory's illicit activity, required Edmond to release this servant from service at Mautby. Edmond's description of the encounter and his reaction to Margaret's request illuminate several aspects of perceptions



of male sexuality and sexual transgression.

Edmond considered Gregory's action little more than an indiscretion, a minor lapse of sexual restraint that should not require a punishment more severe than a scolding. He considered Gregory to be a 'true man' and highly valuable servant and, if he had to let him go, he hoped his brother John III could utilize his talents.<sup>82</sup> The fact that Edmond thought that John III would consider accepting Gregory into his service indicates that this sort of sexual action could be overlooked. Unlike Margaret's moralistic view of Gregory's actions, Edmond allowed and even understood the lapse, appreciating his servant's discretion of keeping the illicit activity outside Mautby manor and outside of immediate Paston purview.<sup>83</sup> Gregory's encounter with this woman in the rabbit-warren is similar to a section in twelfth-century writer Andreas Capellanus's De Arte Honeste Amandi. Largely inspired by Ovid and troubadour poetry, this text instructed the gentleman who lusted after a peasant woman to find a convenient place and rape her with seeming impunity.<sup>84</sup> Although Capellanus's work was not as popular in England as it was on the continent, its instructions and language were also found in literature popular with the English gentry.<sup>85</sup> With access to Malory, Ovid, and courtly literature, such sexual aggression directed at women of lower station could have been justified or at least excused.

Gregory's conduct had very real consequences which Margaret sought to remedy. The fact that Margaret learned of the incident indicates that the victim's family or the victim herself had means to redress her grievances. It is not known if she wept, wailed, or protested the actions of Gregory and the two ploughmen. It is probable that she did, considering the growing importance of sexual reputation to both women and men of this period.<sup>86</sup> Edmond described the ploughmen as his mother's and the woman working was probably also a servant of the Mautby estate. Nothing more was said of the victim of Gregory's impulses and

Edmond was not concerned with the consequences which befell her. By allowing the rape of a servant by a higher ranking one, the family jeopardized its reputation for responsible lordship. Her Christian convictions also urged Margaret to support the wronged party who could not otherwise seek redress. For these reasons Margaret had Gregory expelled despite her son's resistance to this action.

The co-operation of Gregory and the two ploughmen is also of interest to this study. Edmond described the meeting of Gregory and the two workers: "Yt foretunyd hym to be a-spyed be ij plowemen of my modrys, whyche werene as fayne as he of that matere, and desyerd hym to haue parte; and as kompany requereyd, seyde not nay."<sup>87</sup> Gregory passed the woman on to the ploughmen provided that they take the woman back to their own barn. Gregory, by turning his victim over to others, participated in a gang rape and corporate action similar to that experienced in urban France of the same period.<sup>88</sup> This joint undertaking supported a system of male sexual privilege and dominance. Jacques Rossiaud has also connected corporate action in rape as confirmation in masculine sexual identity by others at the expense of the victim's sexual integrity.<sup>89</sup> The lack of disbelief or shock in Edmond's account of the abduction indicates a tacit acceptance of, if not ideological participation in, this type of co-operative behaviour and sexual camaraderie.

Although allowances could be made for servants and friends of the Pastons, their adversaries did not receive any degree of sympathy. In 1478, John II wrote to the younger John regarding charges of rape against a family foe, William Brandon. Brandon was charged with the rape of an "old gentlewoman", her daughter, and the attempted rape of another daughter, and was sentenced to be executed.<sup>90</sup> John II, smugly relishing the turn of events, quipped of Brandon, "he wolde ete the henne and alle her chekynnys."<sup>91</sup> Brandon's disaster was aggravated by

the age and status of his victims. Throughout the medieval period, the rape of a woman of high status was commonly punished more severely than that of a woman of low or middling rank.<sup>32</sup> The old gentlewoman was also a widow. As such she had legal and property rights nearly identical to a man's, enjoying a considerable degree of freedom in everyday life as well.<sup>33</sup> To compound the gravity of Brandon's offense, the daughters of this gentlewoman may also have been considered children, although their ages cannot be determined.<sup>34</sup> Their close proximity to their mother may betray their unmarried status, but to speculate on their sexual reputations would be going too far. The rape of a high status widow alone brought on the most severe application of legal punishment on William Brandon: death. As a response to such a breach of social order the king himself was said to be overseeing Brandon's trial. John must have felt some real satisfaction knowing that his enemy's sexual offenses brought about his downfall. Any degree of acceptance and sympathy with William Brandon was coloured by the opportunity and benefit presented by his opponent's removal.

A fourth incidence of probable rape which involved the Pastons does not appear in the correspondence but rather in a reference in the Commissary Court of the diocese of London Act Books.<sup>35</sup> In 1483, Henry and Alica Pele accused Mawde Nesche, the daughter of Galfridus and Matilda Nesche, of committing adultery with William Paston.<sup>36</sup> The Peles alledged that "Mawde Nesche is a stronge hore and a stronge strumpet for Master William Pastone schuld live in a voutry [adultery] with hyr and had a do with her in her howse and sent hys menys down to kepe the dore and pepyt [kepyth] her in a howse in seynt Georgys fyld as a stronge hore and harlot as sche ys." In this instance, Mawde appears as more of a victim of William Paston than as an equal partner in adultery. William's use of his retainers to guard the house doors and keep Mawde in and others out resembles abduction, an important element in medieval

legal definitions of rape. If William Paston did 'have a do' with Mawde then the legal definition of rape would be complete. Since no other records have been located which corroborate this charge and no comments on it appear in the letters, little can be said conclusively. Given the previous evidence of the forcible confinement of the victim of Gregory and the ploughmen, Mawde's rape is quite plausible and not an anomaly.

The letters from John Paston I, and his sons John II and Edmond II depict several masculine reactions to cases of rape. Of immediate interest to these men were the more secondary consequences of sexual violence, as opposed to the primary sufferings of the victims. In the case of Jane Boys, John Paston I saw an opportunity to increase his prestige by advocating the Boys family's claim. John Paston III, regarding Gregory's rape of the farm woman, was clearly interested in keeping this valuable servant in the family despite his sexual offense. Finally, John Paston II recognized the benefits for himself in Brandon's rapes, relishing them while treating the sufferings of the victims very lightly. Their dismissive treatment of rape victims gives support to the notion of "an enduring tradition of limited concern for protecting a woman's sexuality and personality."<sup>27</sup> A lapse of sexual restraint which resulted in abduction and ravishment was not something of great import to the Pastons unless it touched the family's reputation. Although women such as Margaret were intolerant of such behaviour, the Paston men did not share an equally intense religious and moral commitment to the prosecution of rape.<sup>28</sup> The Paston men's disregard for the immediate victims of rape and leniency towards its perpetrators is not remarkable. The prosecution of rape was extremely difficult for women of the lower and middling classes, and it was punished frequently by monetary fine. Also, certain literary traditions, specifically those found within courtly love, played a role in justifying and culturally embedding the sexual aggression of upper-class men against those of lower rank.<sup>29</sup>

Once again, this conclusion recalls Flandrin's argument for the coexistence of moral and secular sexual ideologies in later medieval and early modern society.<sup>130</sup> It is through the operation of this secondary ideology, which Flandrin refers to as a secular code, that men could excuse and accept violent expressions of male sexuality, profit by these, disregard female sexuality and individuality, and still act within culturally acceptable confines. The moral ideology, on the other hand, was more concerned with women's lives and spirits in addition to the welfare of men.

The bulk of the evidence on male sexuality from the family correspondence reveals a masculine acceptance and acknowledgement of transgressive sexuality and sexual impulses. Most of the discussions of rape, adultery, and fornication did not express these actions in moral terms but rather in reference to immediate material concerns. In addition, male comaraderie provided for a special space in which close friends and associates believed they could express and comprehend each other's sexual impulses and identities. In this space men were able to discuss sexuality openly and with little worry of being judged by their fellows.

The evidence for sexual and moral anxiety, and for the existence of tender and romantic relationships between men and women, reveal that this transgressive and conspiratorial male sexuality was neither universal nor monolithic. As their confessions of love to their wives and paramours indicate, men did establish warm and loving relationships with women which could survive considerable time and distance apart. Expressions of affection, of course, were very limited due to the epistolary tradition's emphasis on practicality and function.

The analysis of these collections of correspondence also supports a conceptual link between a man's progeny and his sexual identity. Although bastard children identified a man as sinful and dissolute,

legitimate children could bolster and anchor a man's sexual and social identity. In the letters, specifically those of the Pastons, a strong preference for male children is recognizable. A man's sons were directly associated with the valuation of his sexuality and social identity. In the case of the Turk, the sexual and socially-valued physical qualities were testaments to the foreigner's virility.

In summary, men engaged in an active dialogue and interest in morally transgressive sex practices. In this communicative space men acknowledged sexual impulses, excused transgressions, and evaluated one another's sexual identities. This ideology was hostile to women; it denied them individuality and personality, and presented women as obstacles to be overcome if men were to reach their sexual, political, and material goals. Co-existing with this was a moralistic view of sexuality which frequently arose during episodes of anxiety and in letters of affection for wives and lovers. In contrast to the secular sexual ideology, this moral stratum placed men and women on more equal terms, facilitating communication and partnership between the sexes. These men acted within the vague boundaries of the moralistic and secular sexual ideologies.

## Notes

1. Diane Watt, "No Writing for Writing's Sake": The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre, eds. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 122.
2. Jean-Louis Flandrin, Le Sexe et L'Occident: Evolution des Attitudes et des Comportements (France: Editions du Seuil, 1981), 251.
3. Norman Davis, ed., The Paston Letters of the Fifteenth Century, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 and 1976), vol. 1, no. 339, p. 555, ll. 50-1.
4. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, ed., The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483, 2 vols. (London: Office of the Society, 1919), vol. 1, no. 153, p. 158.
5. Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," Journal of Medieval History 3 (1977), 100.
6. Bachelors like John II had dalliances with women and were relatively unrestrained by moral prohibitions. According to an influential medical discourse, men who overindulged in sex were effeminate and slavish. In addition, while Christianity taught that extra-conjugal sex was sinful, the bachelor also was an anomaly within a patriarchal system that depended on men to marry.
7. Kingsford, Stonor Letters, vol. 1, no. 123, p. 126.
8. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 124, p. 128.
9. Alan McFarlane, Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840 (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 278-9.
10. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 236, p. 396-7, ll. 7-27; Ibid, no. 248, p. 413, ll. 23-29; Ibid, no. 287, p. 278, ll. 1-7; Ibid, no. 288, p. 480, ll. 1-32; Frances and Joseph Gies, Marriage and the Family in The Middle Ages (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 258-9.
11. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 236, p. 397, ll. 18-27.
12. Thomas Stapleton, ed., Plumpton Correspondence, (London & New York: AMS Press, 1968), no. 97, p. 125.
13. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 375, p. 606, ll. 2-7.
14. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 269, pp. 449-50, ll. 12-32.
15. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 269, pp. 449-59, ll. 17-18, 21-25.
16. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 269, pp. 449-50, ll. 12-15.

17. The introduction to the last extant letter by John I to his wife demonstrates a remarkable shift from earlier letters. In it, John demonstrated warmth and affection, writing: "Myn owne dere soueryn lady, I recomaund me to yow and thank yow of the gret chere thatye mad me here...Wret the vigill of Sent Math[ew] be yowr trew and trusti husbond, J.P." See *Ibid*, vol. 1, no. 77, p. 140, ll. 1-2, 191-2.
18. *Ibid*, vol. 2, no. 861, pp. 498-500.
19. *Ibid*, vol. 2, no. 861, p. 498, ll. 1-7.
20. Kingsford, *Stonor Letters*, vol. 2, no. 166, p. 7.
21. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, 53.
22. Davis, *Paston Letters*, vol. 1, no. 248, p. 415, ll. 104-110.
23. *Ibid*, vol. 1, no. 248, p. 415, ll. 106-7.
24. Lois Banner, "The Fashionable Sex, 1100-1600," *History Today* 42 (April 1992), 40-42.
25. Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 770.
26. Constantinus Africanus, "Constantinus Africanus' *De Coitu*: A Translation," trans. Paul Delany, *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 57-58; Helen Rodnite Lemay, "Some Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Lectures on Female Sexuality," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 1 (1078), 395; Lemay, "William of Saliceto on Human Sexuality," *Viator* 12 (1981), 171; Vern J. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," in *Sex, Society, and History*, ed. Vern J. Bullough (New York: Science History Publications, 1976), 55.
27. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, 59-60.
28. This assertion is supported by Martin Ingram's argument that gossip about sexual reputation was endemic in early modern English society. Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1987), 305.
29. Davis, *Paston Letters*, vol. 1, no. 312, p. 511, ll.1-4.
30. *Ibid*, vol. 1, no. 269, p. 450, l. 18.
31. Joel T. Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 32-33.
32. James Brundage, "Adultery and Fornication: A Study in Legal Theology," in *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, eds. Vern J. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 131.



33. This connection between Daverse and John II is clear in Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 745, p. 379, ll. 2-17.
34. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 745, p. 279, ll. 18-22.
35. Ovid, "Remedia Amoris" in The Art of Love and Other Poems, vol. 2 of 6, trans. J.H. Mozley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1985), 179, 189.
36. Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1959), 190; Vern J. Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages" in Medieval Masculinities. Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 38.
37. Mary Frances Wack, "The Meseure of Pleasure: Peter of Spain on Men, Women, and Lovesickness," Viator 17 (1986), 178.
38. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," 38. Bullough cites Ovid's Art of Love for this assertion yet does not refer to where he found it.
39. Colin Richmond, "The Pastons Revisited: Marriage and the Family in Fifteenth-century England," London University-Institute of Historical Research Bulletin v.58, no. 137 (1985), 27. Keith Dockray's characterization of the environment of the London courtier is less harsh than Richmond's but, nevertheless, he conveyed a similar opinion. See Dockray, "Why Did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?" Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval England, ed. Michael Jones (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 74. See also Roger Virgoe, ed., Private Life in the Fifteenth Century: Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family (New York: Toucan/Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1989), 119.
40. Roger Virgoe posited that John II had several mistresses and Daverse's remark in no. 745 that John was "the best cheser of a gentlewoman that I know." Richmond's assessment of the permissiveness of the courtier's lifestyle concurs with Virgoe's. See Virgoe, Private Life, 263.
41. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 753, pp. 389-90.
42. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 230, p. 388, ll. 174-6.
43. Colin Richmond is laconic and reserved when speculating about John II's romantic life. "We know nothing," he writes, "...of his women, apart from his skill at choosing them and a letter from one of them." Richmond chose not to analyze John II's sexuality, despite the considerable amount of circumstantial evidence which permits extrapolation. See Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1996), 165.
44. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 745, p. 379, ll. 21-22.
45. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 73, p. 132, ll. 6-24.

46. Alison Hanham, The Cely Letters, 1472-1488 (London: Oxford UP, 1975), no. 169, p. 156, ll.1-16; Hanham, The Celys and Their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 269. Hanham argues that Richard referred to his brother George as his "ghostly brother" because he "was punning on 'ghostly father', which was the common term for a confessor."
47. Hanham, The Celys and Their World, 269.
48. Hanham, Celys Letters, no. 169, p. 156, ll. 12-13.
49. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 519; According to the canonists, adultery applied to men and women and, if found, it might be used as a justification for divorce.
50. Hanham, Cely Letters, no. 54, pp. 49-50; Hanham, The Celys and Their World, 49.
51. Hanham, The Celys and Their World, 13.
52. J.A. Sharpe, Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York (York, UK: University of York, 1980?), 23.
53. Stapleton, Plumpton Correspondence, lxxiii.
54. Joan W. Kirby, "A Fifteenth-Century Family, the Plumptons of Plumpton, and Their Lawyers, 1461-1515," Northern History 25 (1989), 114. Kirby's information comes from the Coucher Book which is held in Leeds City Archives.
55. Stapleton, Plumpton Correspondence, lxxiv.
56. Ruth Mazzo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England," Signs 14, no. 2 (Winter 1989), 407; Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, 528.
57. Karras, "Regulation of Brothels," 414.
58. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, 529.
59. James Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in Medieval Canon Law," Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), 143.
60. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, 530.
61. Ibid, 532-3.
62. I have not found any incidents of rape or coercive fornication in the letters of the Stonors, Plumptons, or Celys.

63. Jane Boys's mother is mentioned in no. 45 and Davis did not connect her with Lady Sibyl Boys. However, Jane Boys's family seems to have been of some means and influence since Paston and Southwell were interested in gaining their favour. To posit that Jane and Lady Boys were kin is not too extreme. For Lady Sybil Boys see Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 25, p. 38; no. 140, p. 241. The fact that Boys, in her cries for help, "lete people wete whos dowtyre she was" also indicates that her family was of some influence and honour. See Ibid, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70, l. 35.
64. Lancastrother seems to have had little influence and nothing more is said of him in the correspondence. See Ibid, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70, l. 28.
65. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70, ll. 22-28.
66. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70, ll. 39-41, 47-48.
67. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 45, pp. 71, ll. 52-52.
68. Jacques Rossiaud, Medieval Prostitution, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 12; Shulamith Shahar, The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages, trans. Chaya Galai (New York: Routledge, 1984), 16.
69. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 69, ll. 12-14, 52. Martin Ingram, regarding early modern England, argued that the credibility of the witness/victim and their sexual reputation needed to be assessed in cases of sexual defamation. See Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, 307. The importance of the character/credibility of the victim is also discussed in John Marshall Carter, Rape in Medieval England: An Historical and Sociological Study (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 156 and in Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, 531.
70. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 69, ll. 12, 16-21.
71. For a thorough discussion of the development of rape laws see James A. Brundage, "Rape and Marriage in the Medieval Canon Law," in Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1993), 62-75.
72. Shahar, Fourth Estate, 16.
73. Carter, Rape in Medieval England, 153; J.A. Sharpe has argued of the early modern period, that the middling classes, of which Lancastrother was likely a part, were considerably sensitive to accusations of sexual impropriety. See Sharpe, 17.
74. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70-1, ll. 17-20, 52-55.
75. Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, 209, 249.
76. Shahar, Fourth Estate, 5-6, 92-3.
77. Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, 295; Sharpe, Defamation and Sexual Slander, 22.

78. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 70, ll. 24-28. Appellations of traitor and cowardice betrayed feminine qualities in men. See Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," Representations 44 (fall 1993), 1-2.
79. Sharpe, Defamation and Sexual Slander, 23.
80. Colin Richmond has described the action between Gregory and the woman as fornication but this an uncritical assessment. Since the woman or her family brought this to the attention of Margaret, she probably did not consent to sex. This should clearly be viewed as raptus in the medieval sense because the victim was abducted and subject to unwanted sexual intercourse. See Colin Richmond, "Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman," in The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Barrie Dobson (Gloucester/New York: Alan Sutton/St. Martin's Press, 1984), 195.
81. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 635, ll. 3-9.
82. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 636, ll. 20-27.
83. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 635, l. 9.
84. Capellanus, Art of Courtly Love, 149.
85. Ibid, 22.
86. Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, 292.
87. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 635, ll. 4-7.
88. Rossiaud, Medieval Prostitution, 22-25; Carter, Rape in Medieval England, 155.
89. Rossiaud, Medieval Prostitution, 25.
90. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 312, p. 512, ll. 31-37.
91. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 312, p. 512, l. 35.
92. Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, 530, 469.
93. Shahar, Fourth Estate, 95-97.
94. Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, 531; Guido Ruggiero, The Boundaries of Eros. Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 96.
95. Commissary Court of the Diocese of London Act Books, MS 9064/3 (1483) fol. 179v. A transcription of the manuscript record of this case was kindly provided by Shannon McSheffrey.

96. William Paston II was about forty-seven years old in 1483, while Willaim III, John I's younger son, was around twenty-four. It is more likely that the offender was the elder William for several reasons. William's men and at last a few retainers, apparently guarded the door while he "had a do" with Matilda Nesche. William II was quite independent of the John I's family, having a fair amount of property and political power as Member of Parliament. Furthermore, William II was rarely mentioned in the Paston correspondence of this period, and when he does appear, he is usually causing problems for his nephews, John II or John III. In addition, the elder William divided his time between Norfolk and London during this period. Conversely, the younger William was just beginning his career and would probably have been more concerned with the repercussions of such a crime as rape. Nevertheless, in 1503-4, the Earl of Oxford found William III 'crazed in the mind' and perhaps he was mentally unbalanced enough to abduct and rape Matilda. William III's involvement in the rape is less likely considering the fact that, by 1481 or just after, he was fighting for the Fastolf inheritance in London with his older brothers.

Although the evidence does not rule out William III's involvement it is more probale that William II is the "Master William Pastone" mentioned in the record. See Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1: lvii-lviii, lxiii.

97. Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 108.

98. Richmond, "Religion and the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman," 195.

99. Stephen P. Pistono, "Rape in Medieval Europe," Atlantis 14.2 (Spring 89), 39.

100. Flandrin, Le Sexe et L'Occident, 251.

## Chapter Four

### Dominant Masculine Ideology and Male Performance

An investigation into the masculinity of the Pastons poses one straightforward question: How were men supposed to act? To answer this question, it is necessary to focus on the connections between gendered behaviour and masculine identity. Although the context of the Paston evidence varies from letter to letter, a dialogue of proper and improper modes of gendered activity emerges in the correspondence between the generation of John Paston I, Margaret, William Paston II, and Sir James Gloys, and the generation of John II and John III, and their siblings. The elder generation, in their advice, warnings, and counsel to their children, attempted to reproduce a gendered behaviour in their male offspring. By operating within a masculine ideology established by their elders, this younger generation conformed to the dominant masculine ideology for social identity as men. The present investigation of male activity, on a superficial level, echoes earlier historical inquiry into "sex roles" and "separate spheres".<sup>1</sup> Aware of the transhistorical and essentialist tendencies of these approaches, this analysis brings to the fore the widespread discourse on manliness and masculine activity.

To arrive at any understanding of the relation between dominant masculine ideology and male psyche, it is necessary to address the relationship between personal identity and social standing. In her examination of service relationships in fifteenth-century English society Rosemary Horrox argued that social standing and the perception of a man's honour, frequently termed "worship" in the letters, were crucial to his sense of identity. This exterior identity, if questioned or maligned, could be internalized causing anxiety.<sup>2</sup> While such a view of identity seems simplistic, it provides a window into the workings of

personal identity and the individual experiences of men.

Anthropology provides comparative information which can inform analyses of men and identity. Since honour, reputation, and "worchep" were important concerns for the men of the provincial gentry, the material written on honour facilitates an understanding of male culture. First, the notion of honour hovers as an intangible much like a conception of identity. Early masculinist explorations of honour regarded it as a static construction and discussed gender in terms of role, function, and opposition. These efforts, especially those of Julian Pitt-Rivers, provided foundations for further discussion. For Pitt-Rivers, honour was a valuation of a person's personal and social identity.<sup>3</sup> His functional assessment of honour regarded it as a code of conduct and a measurement of man's place in the social hierarchy. He observed, "honour commits men to act as they should...validating the realities of power."<sup>4</sup> According to Pitt-Rivers, honour encourages men to act in a particular fashion in order to achieve social prestige and influence.

David Gilmore's understanding of a dominant masculine ideology is remarkably similar to Pitt-Rivers's conception of honour: "Manhood ideologies force men to shape up on penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death."<sup>5</sup> The Pastons, like other ambitious nouveau riche families, stressed competition for influence and standing, and the protection from assaults on family wealth and status. According to Gilmore, manhood is important in all societies in which men are required to be active agents. In the context of the Pastons, a man's social identity was dependent on his action and achievement. Depending on his transgression against the dominant masculine ideal, the man could be associated with childishness and femininity. Such associations were potential sources of masculine anxiety. In sum, a man's honour was equivalent to his social identity,

and his identity was tied to his performance of gendered action.

One of the most directly relevant examinations of honour and gender is Philippa Maddern's 1988 essay "Honour Among the Pastons: Gender and Integrity in Fifteenth-Century English Provincial Society". Her insightful work argues that both sexes could make claims to honour through the performance of gendered action. Maddern focused on the importance of the more mundane and everyday forms of honour maintenance and augmentation. According to her interpretation, physical defense and protection were not critical aspects of the gentry's masculine identity.<sup>6</sup> Despite this short shrift, Philippa Maddern excels in bringing together the everyday gendered activity of Paston men and women, which contrasted with more chivalric and literary forms of honourable masculine behaviour.

By reading the letters carefully, with the frequent references to men and work, the nuances of the dominant masculine ideology become clear. Evident in the correspondence of the Pastons is a work ethic that required men to demonstrate diligence, endurance, self-sacrifice, and efficiency. Protection, too, was an important function of the Paston men. There were two types of protective activity which the masculine ideology of the provincial parvenus emphasized. By exploring the connections between a man's ability to manage and maintain family fortunes and his identity as a "worchepfull" socially-valued male person, the powerful social pressure of the dominant masculine ideology becomes discernible. Finally, an examination of service and patron-client associations shows the importance of these relationships to the maintenance and perpetuation of dominant masculine ideologies. What emerges from the Paston evidence is a masculine code that required a "real man" to be active and assertive in service of his own and his family's interests.

A cornerstone to the identity of the Paston men was their ability



and willingness to work. Patriarchs and matriarchs gauged the worth of a man by what he could do to increase the family's holdings, influence, and status. A man's tendencies towards inaction received harsh rebukes and cool treatment. The frustration of John Paston I with his eldest son brought to the fore his negative evaluation of his offspring's worth as a man. John I regarded the incipient courtier "as a drane amonge bees which labour for gaderyng hony in the felde and the drane doth nought but takyth his part of it."<sup>7</sup> The head of the family connected his son's general idleness and failure to establish himself within the King's court with his very identity. As a punishment, and incentive for young Sir John to become effective, John would not allow him to return to the Paston and Mautby manors until he "can do more thanne loke foorth and make a fase and countenans."<sup>8</sup> John I's frustration and discontent with his eldest son set the scene for his views on how an adult should act. John stated,

...I kan thynk he wold dwell ageyn in yowr hows and myn, and ther ete and drink and slepe...Euery pore man that hath browt vp his chylder to the age of xij yer waytyth than to be holp and profitid be his childer, and euery gentilman that hath discrecion waytyth that his ken aand seruantis that levith be hym and at his coste shuld help hym forthward.'

Sir John's inaction and ineffectiveness jeopardized his identity, associating him with childlike dependence and a lack of masculine identity. Inaction and inefficiency were grave transgressions against the dominant masculine ideology on which the Paston fortunes were founded. John II's temporary failure in the male dominated world of politics at Court reflected poorly on his masculine identity, thereby diminishing Paston family honour.

Similar to John I's criticism of his eldest son, although less harsh, was the concern about William Stonor's inaction in 1472. Thomas Mull wrote to Thomas Stonor about the latter's brother's failure to assert his intent in regards to his marriage negotiations with Mistress

Blounte. Mull evaluated young William as "a musyr and a studyer, which remembreth and breketh that as much as ye may."<sup>10</sup> For Mull, William's delay and inaction identified the prospective suitor in childlike terms, someone who still required to be watched and coached.<sup>11</sup> In these letters also, a man's inaction could be associated with childishness. Action and assertiveness were associated with masculine identity; laziness and hesitation weakened a man's perceived identity.

If inaction, hesitation, and delay were associated with immaturity in the letters of the provincial gentry, men frequently distanced themselves from those transgressions by emphasizing the fact that they were very busy.<sup>12</sup> In their role as maintainers and purveyors of the family livelihood, the patriarchs John Paston I, John II, and John III found the burdens of their responsibilities extremely taxing. Certainly the physical toll of their labour could prove fatal, as indeed it did for John Paston I. In her letter to John Paston II, Margaret attributed the death of her husband to his overwork in attempts to secure the Fastolf lands for his descendants.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing the potential danger to life that this work ethic could entail, Margaret warned her eldest son and the new male head of the family of its perils. Despite her counsel, John Paston II later committed an act of self-sacrifice, opting to stay in London during an outbreak of plague in order to petition patrons in his dispute against his uncle William. Emulating earlier patriarchs, John Paston III also adopted the language of self-sacrifice. He wrote to his mother telling her that he 'would not fear death more than shame' regarding his attempts to maintain the family livelihood against the immediate threat of competing interests.<sup>14</sup> This evidence indicates that men, in language and in action, accepted their own self-sacrifice for the sake of their family, and for their own identities. Gilmore recognized a similar trend in dominant masculine ideologies to accept and even encourage male expendability in the face of external

threat and group need.<sup>15</sup> Despite the protestations against overwork by Margaret and Agnes<sup>16</sup>, the extreme exertions, and the willing acceptance of these, served to identify these Paston men as "real men", fit and able to brandish patriarchal authority.

The efficiency of the Paston men was occasionally compromised by physical illness. John I, II, and III suffered from various ailments and exhaustions at different periods in their lives and these are mentioned in their correspondence with close family members. Considering the relative fragility of life and the early deaths of John I and John II, any news of health, good or ill, was of import.<sup>17</sup> In his letters John II frequently complained of his various aches and pains. John III vividly described his elder brother's battles with ague, commending his strength, perseverance, and willingness to carry on.<sup>18</sup> Whether complaining of aches and pains, or fighting some ailment, men were to bear illness and continue serving family and their own personal interests. When suffering sickness, men were not required to endure it stoically. Philip Berney, one of Margaret's kinsmen, who was considered by a few Paston men to be a liar and a coward, clearly did not die quietly. Agnes, the Paston matriarch, remarked that Berney "passyd to God...wyt the grettes peyn that evyr I sey man," and did not view his display of agony as shameful.<sup>19</sup> By relating their sufferings and complaining about their maladies, these men emphasized their sacrificial behaviour and reinforced their identity as masculine providers/protectors acting within established patterns.

Although there are few references to mental illness, provincial society viewed the gentleman so afflicted as less masculine than the man suffering from a physical malady. For example, a tenant farmer, Roger Foke, is described as being sick with fear following the intimidations and predations of a rival family's retainers. Margaret described Foke as a valued client who deserved his patron's aid. "Roger is so aferd,"

Margaret wrote to her eldest son, "that his drede makyth hym so seke that but if he haue sokowr sone it is lyke to ben his dethe."<sup>22</sup> His fear was not subject to reproach, there is an absence of feminized language, and Margaret did not describe him in overly childlike terms. In contrast to this is a letter, written in 1503 to John III, regarding his younger brother William III's service to the earl of Oxford. Oxford wrote:

And where as your broder William, my seruaunte, ys so troubelid with seknes and crasid in his myndes that I may not kepe hym aboute me, wherfor I am right sorry, and at this tyme sende hym to you; praying especially that he may be kepte surely and tendirly with you to suche tyme as God fortune hym to be bettyr assurid of hym-selfe and his myndes more sadly disposid.<sup>23</sup>

There is a note of affection and regret for William's condition in Oxford's letter, yet there is little tolerance of it. Oxford sent him home because he was no longer useful. William required care and nurturing, the attentions paid to invalid and children and not to men capable of independent action. William does not seem to have recovered from his sickness and within a few years was dead.<sup>24</sup>

While both Foke and William III were disabled by their psychological/psychosomatic maladies, William's illness stigmatized him as ineffective and childlike, thus detracting from his identity as a socially-valuable man. Margaret did not question Foke's identity because he was not subject to the masculine ideology of the gentry as was William III. Roger Foke was of a lower social class, perhaps a middling yeoman, and his exaggerated sufferings did not reflect poorly on the family's health and stability. Foke's identity as a man was not Margaret's concern. Instead, the ultimate responsibility for Foke's incapacity was on John I, who was obliged to protect his dependents from harassment. Despite the limited amount of evidence, the dominant masculine ideology of the Pastons viewed men of the provincial gentry

who suffered from mental illness as childlike, ineffective, irrational, and, consequently, less masculine.

The correspondence of the Pastons also indicates a close association between the identity of men and their usefulness to their family. John Paston I and Margaret constantly reminded their sons, specifically John I and John II, of their actions and how these reflected on them. The work ethic stressed diligence and assertiveness, and discouraged sloth and hesitation. The Paston men staked a claim to their social value and masculine identity by admitting that their exertions were physically and mentally taxing. Those who did not live up to this standard of male action associated themselves with childishness and dependence.

In the Paston letters, the men of the family frequently engaged in activity of a defensive and protective nature. Their capacity to perform such action directly reflected upon their reputation. On a daily basis, as Philippa Maddern has observed, defensive action usually required men to resort to legal measures. The Paston family fortunes, as well as the Stonor's, were founded on the legal profession and were defended by the same means. It was through legal channels that the Pastons secured the Fastolf estates and firmly established themselves as members of the provincial gentry. For this family, the law was a tool that was crucial to family longevity and advancement.

By the mid to late fifteenth century legal practitioners were regarded as gentlemen. Recognition as a lawyer brought with it a level of prestige which men actively sought.<sup>23</sup> In a time when the differences between yeomen and gentlemen were vague and frequently indistinguishable, legal service conferred honorific and tangible benefits.<sup>24</sup> From Justice William Paston I onward, the need for Paston men in the legal profession was clear. Agnes wrote to her son Edmond Paston I, "I gret yow wel, and avyse yow to thynkke onis of the daie of

yowre fadris conseyle to lerne the lawe; for he seyde manie tymis that ho so euer schuld dwelle at Paston schulde have nede to conne defende hymselfe."<sup>25</sup> The law, like a sword, was a means of defending a man's personal and familial interests and gaining prestige and victory. For the architects of the family livelihood, training and success at law defined a man as capable, socially-valued, and "real".<sup>26</sup>

Although women like Margaret Paston possessed a degree of legal acumen, men were the primary actors in this arena.<sup>27</sup> Philippa Maddern has argued that legal recourse was the fundamental source of identity for Paston men, and that "provincial honour was thus divorced from the concerns of chivalry, and tied to ordinary daily routine."<sup>28</sup> John Paston I's letter to fellow lawyer Richard Southwell, concerning litigation against a man charged with abduction and rape, demonstrates the connection between legal "labouring" and success and augmented social and personal identity. Paston explained to Southwell, "And dowt not, what so euer falle of the woman, well or evel, my lord and my lady shall have worchep of the mater if it be well laborid; and also ye shall auayl therof."<sup>29</sup> Since the alleged assailant had little means and few influential friends, his animosity to Southwell and Paston posed only a minimal threat. The suing of loyal friends, however, could stain the family's reputation and bring disrepute to the plaintiff. Such a result was recognized by Margaret and she warned John III against suing James Gresham, a long time family ally suffering from an illness.<sup>30</sup> While the law provided a venue for men to act within the dominant masculine ideology and augment their reputations, it was governed by certain considerations. Callous legal actions could lead to a loss of face for a man's family and himself.

Masculine social identity was also bound to the defensive litigation in which Paston men engaged. Although John II and III did not have the formal legal education of their father, John I, and

grandfather, William I, they were quite adept at using the law to their benefit.<sup>31</sup> The protracted legal wranglings over the Fastolf inheritance were the result of John Paston II's dogged defense against the multiple, competing claims of the old knight's other clients. Throughout this extended period of time, John II petitioned the courts through legal channels while appealing to men of influence to work on his behalf. By 1477 John II had secured Caister through legal channels, but in the process he relinquished claims to other Fastolf estates.<sup>32</sup> In a very real sense, legal acumen was realized as defensive ability and hence masculine identity.

Though wealth and landholding were cornerstones of a patriarch's and a family's prestige, an assault on the integrity and gentility of the Paston lineage was also a matter of masculine protection. John Paston I wrote to his wife remarking on Sir Miles Stapleton's claim that the Pastons were descended from common stock. This `knavish knight's' challenge to Paston gentility roused its patriarch and John asserted that "be that tyme we have rekned of old dayes and late dayes myn shall be found more worchepfull thanne hys and hys wyfes."<sup>33</sup> As *nouveaux riches*, it was important for the Pastons to divorce themselves from their more humble origins. Such connections could undermine their claims to gentility and stimulate claims to property and status from rivals and enemies. These attacks on family lineage posed real threats to parvenus like the Pastons. A man's knowledge of the law was essential to defend against assaults of this kind.

Legal protectorship was the most common way in which Paston men preserved their own and their family's livelihood and estates. The success of such defensive activity had direct implications on how a man was perceived by society and family. Although it was resorted to infrequently, physical defense and the willingness to engage in

defensive combat served to underpin notions of masculine identity. This assertion runs somewhat contrary to Maddern's findings that chivalry and specifically its more warlike values, were alien to Paston men's experience.<sup>34</sup> In the turbulent times of the second half of the fifteenth-century<sup>35</sup>, a powerful substratum of masculine ideology equated manliness with bodily vigour and armed combat.

Bravery and the willingness to engage in physical combat were important ideological touchstones for Paston men. For Sir James Gloys, chaplain and counsellor to John Paston I and Margaret Paston, valour in the face of violence was integral to the definition of a "manly" man. Gloys's opinion of Philip Berney, a Paston kinsman from the Mautby side, was tainted by this fellow's cowardice and shirking of martial responsibility. In order to avoid riding with Gloys to the defence of Gresham against Lord Moleyns, Berney hatched a seemingly believable, if embarrassing, fiction. Gloys wrote to John Paston I:

And with-in a sevenygt after my Master Berney sent Dauy to my mastres and prayd my mastres that she wold hold his master excusyd. For he had hurt his owyn hors that he rode vp-on, and he dede Dauy sadillyn an-oder hors, and he stode by and mad water whill he sadyllled hym; and as Dauy shuld a kyrt the hors he slenkyd behynd and toke his master on the hepe suyche a stroke that neuer man may trust hym after, and brake his hepe.<sup>36</sup>

Gloys quickly discovered Berney's lie but urged Paston not to tell his wife Margaret of her kinsman's transgression. He was not trying to hide Berney's cowardice for Berney's sake. Instead, Gloys wanted to avoid any discomfort in his relatively close relationship with Margaret.<sup>37</sup> Berney's prevarication and its revelation heaped shame on himself and would cause Margaret a degree of shame as well. According to Gloys, a man shirking his duty to protect family members and holdings compromised his identity and brought disrepute to his kin.

A second letter by Gloys to John Paston illustrates a connection between masculinity, physical capacity for combat, and the willingness



to engage in it. Sir James Gloys had a warrant for the arrest of a man known as Bettles, but was prevented from serving it by another gentlemen, Gonnore. In response, Gloys planned to ambush and abduct Bettles. However, his ploy was thwarted by Gonnore's spies and Gonnore, Bettles, and several retainers escaped due to this advanced warning. Gloys interpreted Gonnore's evasion as an act of cowardice. Associating his foe with an earlier one, John Wyndham, Sir James discredited Gonnore by writing,

and he remembered Wymdhams manhood, that iij swyft fete were better than ij handes, and he toke his hors with the spores and rode to Felbrygge Hall as fast as he myght rydyn; and I suppose he lay there all that nyght.<sup>40</sup>

Gloys interpreted his previous confrontation with Wyndham as a personal success despite indications to the contrary,<sup>39</sup> and Wyndham's masculinity was linked to his flight and cowardice. Gonnore's flight, like Wyndham's, served to reinforce Sir James's sense of his own masculine identity. Although his interpretation of manhood and its connection to chivalric values is not common in the Paston evidence, his views of courage and masculinity could not have been alien to John Paston I and Margaret. His reflections on manliness and valour reflect popular currents of courtly romance literature and treatises on honourable knightly action and duty.<sup>40</sup>

Sir James Gloys was not alone among the Paston men in his willingness to defend physically family interests. Both John I and John III accepted bodily risk and asserted their role as protector of family, servants, and familial holdings. John Paston I's retaking of Gresham manor in February of 1451, while unmarred by violence, was an action which incurred direct physical risk. Lord Moleyns knew of Paston's entry and was planning to retake the manor by force.<sup>41</sup> More exaggerated than the travails over the Gresham estate, the assaults on Caister also illustrate the connection between physical defense and masculine

identity.

John III persisted in Caister with only a few men-at-arms, scant provisions, and dwindling ammunition. Margaret requested John II to send aid in men and in supplies to Caister. She counselled her eldest son,

make no lengere delay; for thei must nedes hasty socour that be in the place, for thei be sore hurt and haue non help. And if thei haue hasty help it shall be the grettest wurchep that euer ye had, and if thei be not holpen it shall be to you a gret diswurcheþ, and loke neuer to haue favour of your neybores and frendes but if this spede wele. Ther-fore prend it in your mend and purvey ther-fore in hast, how so euer ye do.<sup>42</sup>

Although John II's expected role in the defense of Caister was not overtly military, his identity, according to his mother, hinged on his reinforcement of his brother's defensive efforts. John II recognized the situation as an urgent one, stating that the lives of the defenders and the rescue of the castle depended on his action.<sup>43</sup> The surrender of Caister in September of 1469 reflected poorly on John Paston II's identity, while his brother's remained unblemished and even enhanced, by his resolute defence of Caister. John III, frustrated, wrote to his elder brother, "Wryttyl promysyd me to send yow the serteynte of the apoyntment. We wer, for lak of vetayll, gonepoudyr, mens hertys, lak of suerte of rescwe, dreuyn ther-to to take apoyntement."<sup>44</sup> As John II was ultimately responsible for the logistics of the defense of Caister, his failure resulted in a blemish to his identity as protector, provider, and man.

An earlier incident of military protection and resistance involved Margaret Paston directly as her sons were too young and John I was in London, far from the besieged manor of Gresham. On January 28, 1449, Lord Moleyns and his retainers expelled Margaret and twelve servants from the estate, carrying John I's wife out bodily.<sup>45</sup> In his petition against Moleyns to Henry VI, John I complained of the "grete and

outrageous hurt of your seid besechere" and the continuing violent harassment of Paston friends and servants.<sup>46</sup> John's appeal to the king reflected his anger over the loss of the property and the danger to his wife and associates. His own masculine identity was not John's major concern. At this time John was in London, and Margaret, still young and vigorous, was accompanied by several trusted and capable Paston male retainers. John's holdings and reputation may have suffered, but he would probably not have been viewed as irresponsible and inattentive to the protection of his family and property. As Maddern has argued, it was honourable for a woman, specifically a matriachal figure, to defend a besieged estate.<sup>47</sup> If the male defender was unavailable, he would not lose face because, in his absence, his wife functioned as a deputy husband to protect family possessions.<sup>48</sup> This situational element to masculine protection, which depended on the man's ability to get to the point of defense, allowed John to suffer relatively little harm to his social identity.

Violence had a definite place in the lives of the Paston men. They were wary of bands of robbers and thugs, some probably employed by their adversaries.<sup>49</sup> John Paston II even participated in a tournament at Eltham. By jousting well he distinguished himself among his fellow courtiers thereby reinforcing his recognized masculine identity with martial prowess.<sup>50</sup> The joust and the stylized violence of the tournament, however, were markers of masculinity among upper class courtiers, and John III viewed such pursuits as impractical if not completely frivolous.<sup>51</sup> Philippa Maddern's study of male honour understates the importance of physical protection. "The protection and help given to friends, family and servants," Maddern argues, "was a matter of honour. It could be military help...but more commonly, the aid had nothing military about it."<sup>52</sup> It is true that the accounts of violence are few and far between in the Paston letters, in contrast to

the ongoing legal battles between Pastons and their rivals; however, physical defense was a powerful substratum that legal defense mimicked. John III, before engaging in a legal dispute, told Margaret that he 'would not fear death more than shame,' as if he were riding out to battle.<sup>53</sup> Frequently, lords and gentlemen flouted the laws, cutting through any legal defense with sheer physical force.<sup>54</sup> Since the laws were pliable and men referred to legal protection with militaristic language, it is clear that ideas of physical and martial activity were crucial to the Pastons' understanding defensive strategy.

Although important, physical resistance was a last resort for Paston men. Frequent military engagements were not conducive to the continuation of the family. As Joel Rosenthal argued in his discussion of patriarchy and the fifteenth-century gentry and nobility, "it seems that early (and violent) death did indeed have an adverse effect upon the continuity (and hence, the existence) of the family (let alone the patrilineal) chain. Only 7 of 17 men (41 percent) killed before they reached 30 left a son as their heir."<sup>55</sup> For a family as set on social climbing as the Pastons, such threats were immediately visible. Responding to these dangers, they played down the resort to violence in favour of legal defense. Despite this, however, the dominant masculine ideology which hovered over the Paston men bound a man's identity to his capacity to serve as a physical protector.

Frequently, as is apparent in the defense of the Paston estates of Gresham and Caister, masculine protection was combined with another important aspect of the dominant masculine ideology, that of man-as-provider. The Paston's income was derived primarily from the leasing of their lands for the cultivation of barley and for grazing animals. In his study of agriculture in Norfolk and its relation to the Pastons, R.H. Britnell described north-eastern Norfolk as "the most fertile and commercially advanced region of English agriculture."<sup>56</sup> Agrarian

problems of the period affected the Pastons, and reinforced the relationship between a man's shrewd handling of finances and his identity.

While Margaret occasionally partook in the management and supervision of the family's estates, this typically was an activity for which men were responsible. The dominant masculine ideology linked a man's identity with his ability to maintain and enhance his family's wealth. Once again, the transgressions against this ideology attest to its influence on Paston men, specifically on those functioning as patriarchs. Margaret wielded the discourse of man as provider in her admonition to her eldest son. She wrote to John II in 1472,

It was told to me that ye haue sold Sporle wood, of a right credebill and worchepfull man; and **that** was right hevy **that** ye shuld know of such disposicion...[and] if it were knowyn shuld cause bothyn your elmyse and your frendes to thynk **that** ye dede it for right gret nede, or ell **that** ye shuld be a wastour and wuld wast your lyvelode...And in asmych as it is so ner your elmyse ere it shall be to you **the** grettere vylney and shame to all your frendes, and the grettest coragyng and plesere **that** can be to your elmyse.<sup>57</sup>

John II's sale of Sporle wood, his turning of investment into ready money, and the loss of this source of income impelled Margaret's warning. According to his mother, John II's sale of these lands compromised his identity as provider and led to questions about his suitability to become head of the family. In turn, the harm to John's weakened identity also tarnished the family's image.

Prior to his sale of Sporle, John had sold several other estates in order to gain ready cash.<sup>58</sup> Sentimental connections to estates aside, once land was sold and put beyond the authority of the family, income and influence suffered and this would affect future generations of Pastons. The responsibility of the patriarch was to maintain the family estates and acquire new ones. The sacrifice of family estates,

no matter if the ends were to secure the rights to a rich prize such as Caister, identified the provider and manager of family fortunes as an imperfect man, if not an unworthy one.

Lesser sons of the family such as Edmond II and, for a period, John III, were also responsible for the management of estates yet they did not have the authority to sell them. There is no evidence of John III or Edmond II being reproached for any mismanagement. While they may have been error free in their management, their diminished responsibility did not provide them with the opportunity to take risks with family holdings. Although they were not allowed to participate in the affairs of the family with the authority of patriarchs and were supposed to subordinate their aspirations to their elder brother's plans, these younger sons could still demonstrate themselves to be capable and honourable men. William II, John I's much younger brother, acceded to his elder brother's wishes and, concurrently, accrued a considerable amount of wealth for himself through marriage and other means. Later in his life, William II even fought with his nephew John II for patriarchal authority over the family's affairs. If an uncle did not have the access to the full masculine identity of a patriarchal figure initially, a younger son could fashion an autonomous authority over his own possessions. Additionally, he could insinuate influence over his elder brother's family affairs, and, especially if his elder brother were dead, he could wield authority over his nephews. For the most part, however, the younger male siblings supervised the family's property and servants, and inherited smaller sums. Due to their lower birth order, and consequent lack of authority and responsibility, younger sons of the provincial gentry could not usually achieve the more full masculine identity of their eldest brothers.

In addition to maintaining and augmenting family lands, the Paston man needed to be vigilant against overspending. John II's insouciant

spending at the king's court at London was the target of John I and Margaret's reproaches.<sup>59</sup> Once again, John II's monetary mismanagement was linked to his identity as a waster of fortunes and a substandard family envoy.<sup>60</sup> The assessment of a man as thrifty was a positive identification of his social value among the more conservative provincial gentry. Thrifty men were men of means, were capable of leadership, and were frequently linked to the gentry.<sup>61</sup> The positive valuation of thrift was made clear in the conversation of two gentlemen about John Paston I.

Yt is the gyse of yowre contre-men to spend alle the good they haue on men and leuery gownys and hors and harnes, and so ber yt owth for j wylle and at the laste they arn but beggarys...As for Paston, he ys a swyre of worchyp, and of gret lyvelode, and I wothe he wyll not spend alle hys good at onys, but he sparyt yerely c mark or j c li. He may do hys ennemy a scherewd turne and neuer fare the warse jn hys howsholde, ner the lesse men a-bowthe hym.<sup>62</sup>

These gentlemen extolled the frugality of John Paston I, regarding it as a key to his identity and influence as a powerful provincial player. Here again, the evidence points to an association between extravagance and social ineffectiveness, thus validating the apparent stoic thrift of the eldest John.

Perhaps the term "provider" is imprecise to describe the controlling role of dominant family members. The praises of John Paston I and the admonitions of John II centred on their abilities to manage successfully the family livelihood. Overspending or selling family property would have negative consequences for masculine identity. Judicious management and the augmentation of wealth and influence brought prestige and solidified the social identity of a man and his family.

Prestige and reputation were important factors to men's success within the social and political networks of the gentry and nobility. An examination of patron-client relationships will aid in the understanding

the transmission of information about masculine identities among the fifteenth-century English gentry. In Rosemary Horrox's study of service relationships, she argued that these extra-familial affiliations were typically the province of men.<sup>63</sup> Horrox's interpretation of service should be interpreted more broadly, allowing for service relationships to be engaged in by both women and men. These relationships could confirm, augment, or threaten the social standing of the participants.<sup>64</sup> In a culture in which social standing was closely linked to personal identity, the vicissitudes of service relationships could have direct bearing on the perceptions of masculinity, and proper and improper manly conduct.<sup>65</sup>

In their relationships with their social subordinates and servants, Paston men were honour-bound to protect their retainers' interests, specifically in times of crisis. The patron-client relationship compelled John Paston II to relieve the defenders of Caister and impelled John III to reward those defenders for their service.<sup>66</sup> Good lordship required the protection of servants and failure to do so stained the patron's identity.<sup>67</sup> Legal protection and the wielding of influence in the aid of the interests of clients were more common sources of prestige than was physical protection.<sup>68</sup> The efficient conduct of the servants and the diligent management of them was another point which could reflect on a man's social identity.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the sheer number and spread of influence in a region was thought to be a source of prestige for Paston men. In her letter to her husband, Margaret urged John II to make new friends because, "it is thought the more lerned men that ye haue of yowr owyn contre of yowr counsell the more wurcheppfull it is to you."<sup>70</sup> The gentleman who protected and served the interest of his clients, efficiently managed them, and accumulated influence through their association reinforced and heightened his social prestige.



Like relationships with retainers and social subordinates, the association with a patron was also a source of social prestige, and hence personal identity.<sup>71</sup> The rhetoric of service required the humbling of the client and the flattery of the patron, thereby manifesting differences in their social standing.<sup>72</sup> Occasionally, Paston men took displays of flattery and humility to extremes in the hopes of securing the favour of a patron. Choosing a patron was a tricky business. It required the prospective client to take into account the lord's political leanings and incorporate them into a forecast of the political future.<sup>73</sup> The servants of a patron who fell out of favour with the king would suffer similar blows to their own reputation and influence. Furthermore, the patron needed to be identified as "honourable" and socially valuable if the client's social prestige was to benefit.<sup>74</sup> Male standing and identity were connected to their association with a patron; therefore, their mutual action confirmed or denied their identity as honourable men.

Service to a lord and the lord's interpretation of it also had bearing on the identity of the servant. A lord's public expression of disfavour for a servant brought with it disrepute, scorn, and ridicule. Tongue-lashings confirmed dishonour and a loss of influence and status, and when internalized, they caused a man to question his own worth and identity.<sup>75</sup> Such was the effect on John Paston III, when he wrote to his elder brother,

And I let yow pleynly weet I am not the man I was, for  
I was neuer so roughe in my mastyr's conseyt as I am  
now; and **that** he told me hym-sylff before Rychar d  
[sic] Sothewell, Tymperley, Syr W. Brandon, and twenty  
more, so that they **that** lowryd nowgh laughe vpon me.<sup>76</sup>

Derided because of his interference in the delicate negotiations to secure Caister, John the younger linked his sense of identity to how he was perceived by his peers. Beyond failure, treachery was the worst transgression. Thomas Denys's letter to John Paston I presented his

duplicitous servant in terms which ran contrary to masculine identity.

Myn hevynes is sum-what incresid for a fals harlot,  
sauſ your reuerens, one James Cook, a seruant of myn,  
falsly and traitourously is hired bi Watte Ingham and  
hath accused and diffamed me and my wif of setting vp  
billes agayn lordis.<sup>77</sup>

The patron wronged by a servant could and did present him a negative light, compromising his identity as a man, and possibly displaying him, as Denys did, in feminized terms.<sup>78</sup>

If ridicule and admonition compromised the social standing and identity of the servant, a lord's praise could bolster a client's prestige and served to solidify his identity. John II's mother wrote to him in April of 1469 that "Ye arn beholdyng to my lord of his good report of you in this contre, for he reported better of you than I trow ye deserue."<sup>79</sup> Although Margaret was sceptical of John II's good work, Lord Scales's praise of this client's efforts augmented John II's influence and standing.<sup>80</sup> Considering the close bonds of standing and identity, and the influence of the patron in confirming or questioning these, the service relationship played an important in role in the identification of a man as socially valuable or disreputable.

Perhaps one of the more important aspects of the service relationship is that it provided the superstructure for what was essentially a network in which a man's social standing and identity were evaluated *inter alia*. The Pastons were a part of this circulation of information which allowed them to keep abreast of the changes in influence and standing of their friends and rivals.<sup>81</sup> Through this network the Pastons learned of and relished the dishonour and shame heaped on William Brandon, an old enemy of the family.<sup>82</sup> Margaret frequently warned of the dishonour incurred by failure or improper masculine conduct, and disrepute would travel via this network to anyone having dealings with the Paston family. John II wrote to his mother regarding slanders made against him. He reassured her, claiming that he

had heard tidings both good and ill, and that he too was sending out stories to damage the reputations of his enemies.<sup>93</sup> Although this network did not directly govern what was honourable and dishonourable action, it conveyed information regarding the identity and prestige of those operating within it. In this forum ridicule and slander operated alongside praise and recognition, addressing the identities of its participants as honourable or dishonourable.

For the Paston men, service was an important source of identity and prestige. Service to a lord confirmed recognition of a man's value. Likewise, good servants and honourable friends reinforced a patron's identity. Whereas treachery and uninspired service brought disrepute, honest labouring without success could bring a servant honour. Finally, this service network transmitted reports of relative identity and prestige, thereby having direct bearing on how a man was perceived by his rivals and associates. The service relationship was not only linked to the dominant masculine ideology of the Pastons, but was also deeply rooted in their conception of what it meant to be properly manly and socially valuable.

The dominant masculine ideology found in the Paston evidence was rooted firmly in a man's performance. His identity, social as well as personal, hinged on his actions within the confines of what was defined as masculine, honourable, and socially valuable. The gentry's work ethic stressed assertiveness and efficiency, and regarded the valuable man as one who pressed on even though faced with considerable adversity. The dominant masculine ideology also required the Paston man to be capable of defending family interests. Although this protective action more frequently manifested itself within a legal context, a powerful substratum of physical resistance and defense operated in this dominant value system, supplying the rhetoric of legal defense with emotional force and military metaphors. The Paston men also identified themselves

as honourable and socially valuable by keeping a careful eye on familial wealth and demonstrating a high degree of frugality. Finally, the relationships between patron and client, and a man's action within these associations had considerable bearing on his identity and how he was perceived by family, friends, and society.

In all of these fora, a man's performance was critical to his social identity. It was not only successful action which reinforced masculine identity, but also diligence and effort in a failed attempt. This dominant masculine ideology compelled men to labour diligently and tenaciously in their work. The Pastons and their retainers pressed this ideology of identity and serviceability on the younger men of the family because the men's actions and identity were inextricably linked with the family's honour, influence, and identity. This ideology also functioned as a discourse of power for the older generations of Pastons. Their connections of identity and action allowed a distant Margaret to wield a degree of influence over the actions of her sons. Those men who stepped beyond the bounds of this gendered action were stigmatized as dishonourable and less masculine, and these transgressors were sometimes identified with femininity or childishness.

In summary, the evidence bears witness to a pervasive and compelling directive that focused the activity of the Paston men into patterns deemed legitimate and socially valuable. Yet this dominant masculine ideology was not ironclad. The younger Paston men were not simply the passive recipients of the ideology pressed upon them by their elders. Their transgressions and resistances illustrate their involvement in the discursive process which modified masculine ideology. This ideology, pervasive as it was, did not compel all men.

## Notes

1. Harry Brod, "Some Thoughts on Some Histories of Some Masculinities: Jews and Other Others," in Theorizing Masculinities, eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage, 1994), 88.
2. Rosemary Horrox, "Service," in Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994), 62.
3. Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, ed. J. G. Persitany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 21.
4. Ibid, 38.
5. David D. Gilmore, Manhood in the Making (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1990), 221.
6. Maddern's discussion of the importance of thriftiness to Paston honour is contrasted by her recognition of John 's compulsion to compete materially with his fellows. See Philippa Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons: Gender and Integrity in Fifteenth-Century English Provincial Society," Journal of Medieval History vol. 14, no. 4 (1988), 364.
7. Norman Davis, ed., The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 and 1976), vol. 1, no. 72, p. 128, ll. 38-40.
8. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 72, p. 128, ll. 48-9.
9. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 73, p. 132, ll. 6-24.
10. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, ed., The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483, 2 vols. (London: Office of the Society, 1919), vol. 1, no. 124, p. 128.
11. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 124, p. 128.
12. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 236, p. 396, l. 5; Ibid, vol. 1, no. 384, p. 618, ll. 28-29. These are just two examples of the numerous and ubiquitous references to the hard work of the Paston men.
13. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 213, p. 361, ll. 15-18. See also H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England: Studies in an Age of Transition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1951), 17.
14. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 384, pp. 618-9, ll. 5-8.
15. Gilmore, 229.
16. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 30, p. 43, ll. 8-12.
17. Joel T. Rosenthal, "Medieval Longevity and the Secular Peerage, 1350-1500," Population Studies 27.2 (July 1973), 290.

18. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 301, p. 497, ll. 1-17.
19. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 26, p. 39, ll. 6-8.
20. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 132, p. 617, ll. 48-50.
21. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 848, p. 486, ll. 2-7.
22. Roger Virgoe, ed., Private Life in the Fifteenth Century: Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family (New York: Toucan/Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1989), 9.
23. N.L. Ramsay, "What Was the Legal Profession?" in Profit, Piety, and the Professions in Later Medieval Europe, ed. Michael Hickey (Gloucester, UK: Alan Sutton, 1995), 62.
24. R.L. Storey, "Gentleman-Bureaucrats," in Profession, Vocation, and Culture in Later Medieval England. Essays Dedicated to the Memory of A.R. Myers, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool UP, 1982), 93-97.
25. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 14, p. 27, ll. 2-5.
26. A similar conclusion is made by Diane Watt in "No Writing For Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre, eds. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 125.
27. Watt, "'No Writing For Writing's Sake'," 125.
28. Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons," 364.
29. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 45, p. 71, ll. 52-55.
30. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 213, p. 360, ll. 44-52.
31. Virgoe, Private Life, 82.
32. H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, 19.
33. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 58, p. 95, ll. 7-13.
34. Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons," 358.
35. The Paston men were not oblivious to the dangers of the period. Joel Rosenthal's analysis of fifteenth century demography revealed that at least twenty-five per cent of the peerage died violent deaths. See Joel T. Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth Century England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 54.
36. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 443, p. 28, ll. 36-42.
37. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 443, p. 29, ll. 53-55.
38. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 473, p. 65, ll. 62-65.

39. H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, 227. See also Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 129, pp. 224-5. After the several unsuccessful assaults against Gloys by Wyndham, Margaret decide to send her chaplain away from this hot spot.
40. Maddern sets up chivalric values in order to discount their importance to Paston senses of honour. Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons," 358-9.
41. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 473, p. 64, ll. 2-8.
42. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 202, pp. 340-1, ll. 24-30.
43. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 243, p. 406, ll. 44-49.
44. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 334, p. 546, ll. 10-12. Walter Writtle was a retainer of the Duke of Clarence. He served as an intermediary between the Pastons and the Duke of Norfolk at this point in the dispute over Caister.
45. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 36, pp. 51-3.
46. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 36, p. 52, ll. 36-7, 40-49.
47. Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons," 360-1.
48. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750 (New York & Toronto: Oxford UP, 1982), 37-8.
49. John Paston I was attacked by a group of Howard's men and was struck twice with a dagger. Fortunately, John had expected trouble and wore armour. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 231, p. 392, ll. 63-66.
50. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 236, p. 396. See also Virgoe, Private Life, 162.
51. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 327, ll. 27-31, p. 535.
52. Maddern, "Honour Among the Pastons," 360-1.
53. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 384, pp. 618-9, ll. 5-8.
54. H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, 165.
55. Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege, 54-55.
56. Peter Britnell, "The Pastons and Their Norfolk," Agricultural History Review 36, (1988-part II), 132.
57. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 214, p. 362, ll. 10-22.
58. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 246, p. 410, ll. 4-8.
59. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 212, p. 359, ll. 20-31.
60. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 208, p. 350, ll. 11-15.

61. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 154, p. 259, ll. 17-20; Ibid, vol. 2, no. 653, p. 261, ll. 15.
62. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 83, p. 154, ll. 8-21.
63. Rosemary Horrox, "Service," 63; Diane Watt's "'No Writing for Writing's Sake'," focused on inter-familial service relationships, contrasting Horrox's extra-familial examination of these relationships.
64. Philippa Maddern has explored the implications of later medieval friendship in the community of the English gentry. For Maddern, these friendships had both emotional and instrumental applications and were defined by men's interests and pursuits. See Philippa Maddern, "'Best Trusted Friends': Concepts and Practices of Friendship among Fifteenth-Century Norfolk Gentry," England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1992 Harlaxton Symposium, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford, UK: Paul Watkins, 1994), 100-117.
65. Horrox, "Service," 62.
66. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 204, p. 344, ll. 7-8.
67. Stapleton, Plumpton Correspondence, no. xvii, p. 25. Also in this set of correspondence there is a request from a pregnant and unmarried maidservant to Robert Plumpton given. The father of the child was Plumpton's servant, the woman and Wittcars, the writer, thought Plumpton might consider such a request within the context of a service relationship. See Ibid, no. 83, p. 109.
68. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 2, no. 666, pp. 276-7.
69. Kingsford, Stonor Letters, no. 106, p. 109-110.
70. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 166, p. 275, ll. 18-20.
71. Horrox, "Service," 62.
72. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 352, pp. 574-5, ll. 48-56; Ibid, vol. 1, no. 390, p. 628-9, ll. 1-3.
73. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 263, p. 440, ll. 25-27.
74. Unscrupulous and treacherous patrons, such as those of Robert Harecourt, would not simply bring him dishonour but also death. Their men murdered Harecourt. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 213, p. 361, 20-24.
75. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 333, p. 544, ll. 24-34; Kingsford, Stonor Letters, no. 91, p. 97.
76. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 358, p. 586, ll. 33-36.
77. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 492, p. 88, ll. 7-10.



78. The term "harlot" had several concurrent meanings in the fifteenth century. While it was frequently used as a term of abuse, like such pejorative nouns as rake, vagabond, scoundrel, beggar, base fellow, and idle rogue, it also described a man of licentious habits, or a female prostitute. Although it is more likely that this word was understood as abuse, its feminine meaning conveyed a sense of man's feminine, understood as passive, sexuality. See The Middle English Dictionary, vol. 6, 940.

79. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 201, p. 339, ll. 37-40.

80. Kingsford, Stonor Letters, no. 285, p. 120.

81. Colin Richmond, "Hand and Mouth: Information Gathering and Use in England in the Later Middle Ages," The Journal of Historical Sociology 1.3 (Sept. 1988), 242.

82. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 312, p. 512, ll. 31-37.

83. *Ibid*, vol. 1, no. 243, p. 406, ll. 29-35.

## Chapter Five

### Power and the Language of Masculinity

Chapters three and four have touched on the experience of the individual within the sexual and dominant masculine ideologies. Men acted within and also resisted a framework which attempted to dictate how "real" and socially valuable men should conduct themselves. Moral and religious sexual ideologies co-existed with a secular discourse which promoted, condoned, and frequently overlooked morally transgressive sexual activity. These ideologies shaped how men thought about their activities and how these related to their identities and reputations. These guides to men's action were ideological constructions. A vital question looms over all these issues: who maintained, reproduced, and altered these ideologies of masculinity and male sexuality within the context of the provincial gentry? This question focuses attention on the voices of the promoters of "real" manliness, but it also focuses on those who resisted and those who presented alternate masculine ideologies. These constructions of the male gender were tools of power and control. The language and ideology of "real" manliness, effectively manipulated, could and did give a degree of indirect social control and power to the manipulator over those who accepted it. By resisting certain discourses of masculinity a man could retain a degree of personal power at the expense of his social reputation.

This chapter seeks to reveal the agency of the individual in creating, manipulating, and resisting the discourse on masculinity. An investigation of men and patriarchy, the social, political, and ideological system which provided men, specifically fathers, with power over women, provides much information about how men lived and

understood themselves and their place in society. Such a focus permits an examination of masculine experience in terms of men's inter-generational relationships, particularly the father-son relationship of John Paston I and John II. Women also had a voice, however muted, in patriarchy and an examination of their activity in the creation, reproduction, and arbitration of masculine ideology and identity is also necessary.<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance are Margaret Paston's manipulations of the language of masculinity and the special influence of matriarchs and widows, given their privileged place in inter-generational and inter-gender relations. Additionally, the men of the English provincial gentry were individually active in deciding how they would identify themselves. By participating in male-defined activity or by adopting and manipulating the discourse of an alternate and competing masculinity, these men engaged in a larger social dialogue on masculinity. The inter-generational conflicts between men, the manipulation of masculine discourse by certain women, and men's identification with gendered activity share a common thread: the language of masculine identity was a source of social power.

Since this analysis focuses largely on the role of the individual in the ideological process of gender construction, it is necessary to examine how historians have attempted to understand the individual in the Middle Ages. Medievalists have argued convincingly that, in the twelfth century, writers, specifically ecclesiastics, engaged in self-examination and self-criticism, unlike their early medieval predecessors.<sup>3</sup> These historians, however, do not agree on what constitutes this notion of individuality. John F. Benton has argued that the "shame" and honour culture of the early medieval period gave way to a "guilt" and self-conscious culture. More persuasively, Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that community-centered awareness coexisted with introspection and consciousness of self.<sup>4</sup> Bynum's view

of the coexistence of the two identities, external/social and internal/individual, is quite similar to Nancy F. Partner's conception. Partner has focused directly on the problem of understanding what it meant to be a man or a woman in the medieval period. In order to make sense of the public and private elements of a person's identity, Partner proposes a third term, "self" or "sexuality", to mediate biological sex and social gender.<sup>5</sup> The idea of a third component, the self, is founded in a psychological argument which argues that all humans have similar mental processes but their experiences and understandings of the world and culture are dependent on their socio-cultural environment and on how the self understands these factors. Therefore, the self or sexuality denotes personal/internal identity while gender and reputation are associated with social/external identity.<sup>6</sup> The use of this third category, self/sexuality, permits an attempt to understand individuals as selves who participate in social discourse and, specifically, the discourse on masculinity.

In the fifteenth century, patriarchy was a pervasive ideology that supported a gendered hierarchy favouring older men. Joel Rosenthal has observed that: "Patriarchy was an idea, an ideal type that crystallized into a major component of the social system, with a set of values created to explain, control, and perpetuate the hierarchical pyramid."<sup>7</sup> To a considerable degree this ideology dictated family function and interaction, moulded individual identity, and modelled collective and individual behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this male-specific hierarchy of patriarchal ideology largely governed the identity of men as the two were closely bound.<sup>9</sup> Patriarchy also subordinated the authority and power of women and young men to the influences of the older generations of men.<sup>10</sup> In the medieval period this association of authority and age was a source of inter-generational conflict. New fashions of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, commonly introduced by younger

generations of men, flaunted sexual prowess, virility, and masculinity in resistance to their subordination and limited access to power.<sup>11</sup> In the correspondence of the Pastons and other provincial gentry there is some evidence that brings such modes of resistance to light. This analysis focuses on the individual's experience of gender and his resistance to assertions of patriarchal authority.

Of all the relationships within patriarchal ideology perhaps the most important was the one between father and son.<sup>12</sup> Both were engaged in a common enterprise, and their successes depended on co-operation and mutual accord. Among the provincial gentry, affection existed within the limits of the family. This is evident among the contemporaries of the Pastons, the Stonor family.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, patriarchal ideology, as an influential force on intra-family relationships, did not intrinsically prohibit father-son affection. The Paston letters, however, offer no evidence of reciprocal affection between father and son.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between John Paston I and his eldest son John II was frequently rocky and occasionally hostile. The mutual antagonism found in this relationship stemmed from the idea that the father was an unquestionable and unapproachable authority whom the son was bound to obey.<sup>15</sup> John Paston II's disobedience and disregard for his father's standards triggered and fuelled the hostilities between them. In the autumn of 1463, relations between father and son were frayed when John Paston I left his son in Norfolk to monitor the family holdings. Unbeknownst to his mother and father, John II made the decision to leave the Paston family home, setting off for Edward IV's court in Yorkshire.<sup>16</sup> When John Paston I heard of his son's impertinent exodus, he wrote to Margaret, claiming she knew and had allowed John II to leave, thereby subverting the patriarch's authority. Margaret wrote to her son:

Wherfor I late yow wett I was ryght euyll payed wyth yow. Your fader thowght, and thynketh yet, that I was asentyd to your departyng, and that hathe causyd me to have gret hevynesse. I hope he wolle be your good fader her-after yf ye demene you wele and do as ye owe to do to hym...I would ye shuld not spare to write hym agenyn as lowly as ye cane, besechyng hym to be your good fader.<sup>17</sup>

Following his mother's advice, and intent on mollifying his father's anger, John Paston II wrote to his father:

Ryght worschypful syre, jn the most lowly wyse I commaund me to yowre good faderhod, besechyng yow of yowre blyssing. Mut it plese yowre faderhod to remembre and concydre the peyn and heuynesse that it hathe ben to me syn yowre departyng owt of thys contre, here abyding tyl the tyme it plese yow to schewe me grace, and tyl the tyme that by reporte my demenyng be to yowre plesyng.<sup>18</sup>

In this letter to his father, John II adhered to formal rhetorical conventions<sup>19</sup> and by his subordination sought to re-establish the veneration of parental authority. John Paston I could neither forget his son's transgression nor forgive it. Nearly two years after the fact, in January 1465, he forbade his eldest son from entering the Paston house until he could "make a fase and countenauns" in the royal court.<sup>20</sup> This episode cannot be characterized as one of common filial disobedience and reprimand. It was certainly much more.

John Paston II's decision to go Yorkshire was more than a whim; it was a calculated risk and a conscious act of defiance. The Paston estates were in the capable hands of Margaret Paston and other administrators. Furthermore, his younger brother, John III, was in Holt Castle, serving the Duke of Norfolk and monitoring Paston fortunes.<sup>21</sup> In the king's court John II was slowly cultivating valuable friendships and he was gaining a reputation among his fellows. His father's intention to keep him in Norfolk must have come as a slight, if not an insult, to his ability and identity. His response, a defiance of patriarchal authority and an assertion of his own masculine identity, struck at his father's power and manifested his will to be his own man.

Such an interpretation follows along similar lines as Guidobaldo II della Rovere's symbolic manifestations of defiance in a portrait by Bronzino.<sup>22</sup> Like Gudiobaldo II, who defied his father's attempts to control his choice of lovers by symbolically asserting his virility, sexuality, and masculinity, John II resisted authority and the subordination of patriarchal ideology in an attempt to create a space in which he could express more fully his own masculine identity.

Following the death of John Paston I, John Paston II assumed nominal power as patriarch and the formality of his mother's address to him recognized his augmented status.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, for years to come both John Paston II and John III were to experience two major threats to patriarchal authority and their identities as men. On one hand, the patriarchal authority of John II and the mutual co-operation of John II, John III, and Edmond II were undermined by the influence of their mother's advisor, Sir James Gloys. A second threat to the patriarchal authority and patrilineage of John Paston I came from their uncle William Paston II. In their relationships with both these older men, the Paston sons reacted against what they perceived to be encroachments on their authority which would jeopardize their identities as men.

Sir James Gloys served the Paston family as chaplain and agent from around 1448 until his death in 1473. Margaret Paston placed considerable trust in his counsel but her sons were wary of Gloys's influence.<sup>24</sup> In June of 1470, John III wrote to his older brother about their mother's disinclination to provide money for John II's attempts to secure Caister. John III related this message to his brother: "Ryght worchepfull syr, I recomand me to yow aftyr the old maner, sertyfying yow that I haue comonyd wyth my modyr for your comyng hom, but I can not fynd by hyr that she wyll depert wyth eny syluyr for your costys, for she and hyr cwrate alegge mor pouerte then euer wasse."<sup>25</sup> Thus, John

III considered Gloys, "hyr cwrate"<sup>14</sup>, as an important factor and influence in Margaret's refusal to dispense the needed funds. Gloys, as trusted counsellor, administrator, and financial manager to Margaret and John I, did have influence. For John II and his brothers, Gloys's power was a threat because it overstepped its boundaries and treaded on their authority. Because he challenged the authority of John II, Gloys's extended influence called into question the masculine identity and power of John Paston II.

In October of 1472 John Paston III wrote to John II complaining of Gloys's inordinate control over Paston affairs. He related to his older brother:

Sir Jamys is euyr choppyng at me when my modyr is preseent, wyth syche wordys as he thynkys wrathe me and also cause my modyr to be dyspleaseid wyth me, evyn as who seyth he wold I wyst that he settyth not by the best of vs. And when he hathe most unsyttyng woordys to me, I smylle a lytyll and tell hym it is good heryng of thes old talys.<sup>15</sup>

John III recognized Gloys's influence over his mother and how he was turning her against her own sons. Margaret seemed to have sided with Gloys against her sons, threatening that she would leave nothing in her will to John III and it was questionable whether John II would inherit Margaret's family holdings either.<sup>16</sup> Even if this were an idle threat, it questioned the authority of the new patriarch and the patrilineage. Edmond Paston II also saw Sir James Gloys's hand in the dismissal of the servant, Gregory, because of the rape of a farm woman. "That jantylman," Edmond wrote, "is hys woordys lord: he hathe seyde that he wold lyfte whom that hym plese, and as yt scheweyt welle he lyftyd on xiiij myle in a morenyng, and now he hathe ben cawsare of hys lyfte."<sup>17</sup> Certainly Edmond believed that Gloys's influence was becoming overmuch, undermining Edmond's rightful authority over his servants.

The Paston brothers acknowledged Sir James Gloys as a threat to



their management of family affairs. They recognized Gloys as an instrumental and coercive force behind Margaret's decisions over her estates and finances. The sons of John and Margaret understood the family chaplain's firing of Gregory and his control of Margaret's finances as a subversion of the patriarchal authority and patrilineal convention after which these men modeled their identities. On hearing of Gloys's death, undoubtedly there was much rejoicing. A letter from John II to John III, dated November 22, 1473, immediately discussed the good news:

Ryght wyrshypfull and hertyly belovyd brothere, I command me to yow, letyng yow wet that I receyuyd a letter that com from yow wretyn sirca viij Mychaelys, wherein ye leet me weet off the decesse off Syr James, and that my moodre is in purposoe to be at Norwyche; and I am ryght glad that sche wyll now doo somewhat by yowre advyce. Wherffor be ware from hense forthe that noo suche felawe crepe in be-twyen hyre and yow.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, Gloys competed with the exercise of authority which belonged rightly to the new, nominal patriarch, John Paston II.<sup>33</sup> John II's characterization of Gloys as "creeping" between John III and Margaret betrays anticlerical suspicions, and an expectation that the counsel of her sons should be given more weight than that of her chaplain. Explicit is John II's conception of John III working closely with Margaret to co-ordinate the management of the estates so John II could finance his attempt at winning back Fastolf's inheritance. The death of Gloys allowed John II to realize more fully the connection between patriarchal authority and the dominant masculine ideology's placement of the capable eldest son in ultimate control of the family's fortunes.

A second threat to the Paston patrilineage came from William Paston II. William II was the son of William Paston I and Agnes, and brother to John I. During his brother John's life the two worked together without strife. William II was much younger than his eldest brother and only six years older than his eldest nephew, John II. After

the death of John I, William II, as an uncle and a relatively successful gentleman<sup>32</sup>, attempted to wield a degree of patriarchal authority over John Paston II. In 1469, three years after Agnes Paston drafted her will, John II wrote his mother regarding the deteriorating relationship between uncle and nephew: "He and I be as goode as fallyn owt, for he hathe laten me pleynly wete ~~that~~ he schalle haue alle my graunt dames lyfflod off here enherytance and of hyr joyntore also, wherin I trust to God that he schall helpe."<sup>33</sup> William II was clearly going beyond the bounds of his authority. The estates of Marlingford and Oxnead, which Agnes brought to her wedding with William I, were entailed in William I's will to John Paston I and, in turn, were to be inherited by John II.<sup>34</sup> Although John I was the principal heir of William I, Agnes sought to divert some of the rights of this property to her younger sons and William II was eager to add his mother's lands to the considerable amount of property he had accrued already.<sup>35</sup>

Following the death of John II and Agnes in 1479 the issue of the inheritance of Marlingford and Oxnead re-emerged. In 1484 John Paston III filed a formal bill of complaint against William II, seeking restitution for damages caused by his uncle's machinations and unlawful seizure of lands which were rightfully John III's since John II had died with no legitimate heirs.<sup>36</sup> In extending his rights over his mother's lands, William II was working within the patriarchal framework which put the older male family members in authority over younger men. Despite his disadvantaged status as a younger son, William II still had authority over his nephews because he was their father's brother. Unfortunately, the rights of primogeniture and entail worked against William II's claim. In resisting the assault against his patriarchal rights, John III acted to reinforce his identity as a socially powerful and valued man.

William II also attempted to extend his power by lending money to

John Paston II, using his leverage as a creditor to try to augment his authority.<sup>37</sup> In late 1474, John II wrote to Margaret about his recent dealings with his uncle. "It was soo that I mett wyth myn onkle William by the weye," he wrote, "and there in the felde I payed hym the iiiij li. whyche I had borowyd off hym, and he was passyng jnquisytyff howe that I was purueyed for recompensyng off Towneshend."<sup>38</sup> William II went on to badger the new Paston head about the source of his new found wealth. Realizing that strings were attached to the loans from his uncle, John II vowed to use his uncle as a creditor no longer. The uneasy relations between John II and William II were the result of conflicting ambitions. Both men sought to achieve patriarchal authority and generational position: William II, through force of money and influence; John II, by his right of inheritance, and by means of securing and strengthening his authority by weakening the influence of his uncle William II. The conflicts between John Paston II and John III and their uncle William provide a third venue in which to view the inter-generational conflicts of men within a patriarchal system. Both of the younger men resisted the imposition of their uncle's authority and, in turn, reinforced their identity as independent adult men.

The Paston evidence reveals that patriarchy was an active forum in which men of different generations asserted masculine identity and resisted the attempts of others to exert control over them. John Paston II's resistance to his father's authority demonstrated the son's desire for recognition as a capable adult and his refusal to subordinate his individual will to his father. The resistance of John III, John II, and Edmond to the seemingly paternal influence of James Gloys was another manifestation of these young men trying to identify their rightful places as authority figures within the patriarchal hierarchy. Finally, John Paston II's and John III's conflicts with their uncle also point to the inter-generational nature of the competition for masculine

authority. By repelling the challenge to his authority by William II, John III secured his identity as an able patriarch and a socially valuable man.

The patriarchs and would-be patriarchs were not the only actors who attempted to direct the actions and shape the identities of the younger men of the family. From the beginning, Margaret Paston exerted considerable indirect social control over her sons by manipulating the language of masculine identity.<sup>39</sup> Following the death of her husband in 1466 and her renewed control over the estates she had brought as her dowry, Margaret's authority was enhanced further. Her influence stemmed from her strength of character, her practicality, and her diligent effort in family business. In 1449 Margaret defended the Paston estate at Gresham against a force of one thousand men under the command of Lord Moleyns. She persisted in the fortified house for several days but was eventually forcibly removed. John Paston I's letter to his wife commended her resolute defense: "I recummaund me to yow and thank yow of yowr labowr and besynes with **the** unruly felechep that cam befor yow on Monday last past, wherof I herd report be John Hobbis; and in god feyth ye aquyt yow rygth wel and discretly, and hertyly to yowr wurchep and myn and to **the** shame of yowr aduersarijs."<sup>40</sup> During the minority of their sons, the first of whom was born in 1442, John Paston I frequently left the executive management of the family estates and administrators in Norfolk to his capable wife. Margaret's strong personality required an access to power and, within the context of the family, Margaret realized this ambition.

Margaret's ambition to control her family was focused on her children. When her daughter, Margery, made it known that she was betrothed to Richard Calle, the Pastons' steward, Margaret chose to disinherit her entirely, and left only twenty pounds to Margery and

Calle's son in her will.<sup>41</sup> Margaret's control over her male offspring was, more often than not, rather subtle compared to her treatment of Margery. The language of identity and the ideal of the "real" man were the tools that allowed her to exercise influence over her sons.

During the cold war between John I and John II, Margaret acted as a mediator. She conveyed the disapproval of the father to the son and urged John II to seek forgiveness.<sup>42</sup> Following the death of John I, Margaret received her jointure, thereby gaining direct control over the property rights of the Mautby estates and numerous Paston manors.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, John II, as nominal head of the Paston household, was supposed to have general authority over family affairs and fortunes, and, as Ann Haskell has inferred, Margaret was reluctant to yield control of her income to her son.<sup>44</sup> While her son served as a courtier in the Edward IV's Court, Margaret, with the help of her administrators and other maturing sons, managed the Paston estates in Norfolk.<sup>45</sup> Margaret Paston followed several strategies in an attempt to influence John II's actions. As the manager of Paston estates and the outright owner of the Mautby estates, Margaret had her hands on the family purse, thereby limiting some of her sometimes wayward son's expenditures.<sup>46</sup> In other instances she appealed to John II's piety, attempting to instill fear of divine retribution to motivate her son to follow what she thought was the proper course of action.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps one of her most effective tools was her manipulation of her son's identity as a man.

On August 31, 1469 Margaret wrote to her son regarding the siege of Caister by the Duke of Norfolk. She described the worsening situation for the defenders of Caister, led by John Paston III. Margaret commanded,

make no lengere delay; for thei must nedes haue hasty  
socour that be in the place, for thei be sore hurt and  
haue non help. And if thei haue hasty help it shall  
be the grettest wurchep that euer ye had, and if thei  
be not hopen it shall be to you a grettest

diswurcheþ, and loke neuer to haue favour of your  
neybores and frendes but if this spede wele.<sup>48</sup>

In a following letter, Margaret referred to John's duty and honour-bound obligation to aid his besieged brother and his men. Urging John II to send ammunition and reinforcements to John III as quickly as possible Margaret warned, "thei be like to lese bothe there lyfes and the place, to grettest rebuke to you that euer came to any jentilman, for euery man in this contre marvaylleth gretly that ye suffre them to be so longe in so gret joparte wyth-ought help or othere remedy."<sup>49</sup> Her rhetorical strategy used the language of identity, specifically as a gentleman, to direct John Paston II's course of action.

She also used this rhetorical strategy of questioning his identity to discourage her son from reducing the Paston landholdings and livelihood. Margaret was angered when she heard of John II's intention to sell family property, namely Sporle Wood. In her attempt to sway her son, the matriarch first referred to the woods as a favourite spot of his father's. Following this, Margaret went straight to a discussion of her son's identity and the challenge to it presented by this decision. She wrote that if this land were to be sold, and if this were commonly known, it would "cause bothyn your elmyse and your frendes to thynk that ye dede it for right grete nede or ell that ye shuld be a wastour and wuld wast your lyvelode."<sup>50</sup> Margaret warned John of the disrepute brought by attempting to sell family land and vehemently protested any further attempts. Again, Margaret used identity as her crook to control her son's actions. The widow constructed, related, and exaggerated the issue of John II's identity in order to achieve a level of control over the new and titular head of the family. While we cannot accurately gauge the effectiveness of this strategy, John II did send supplies to his brother at Caister and Sporle Wood was eventually recovered.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that Margaret's interventions were effective.

In addition to her deployment of language and identity, Margaret was quite capable of exerting her authority as heiress of the Mautby estates, overseer of the Paston finances and holdings, and moral guardian of the family to assert a discourse of masculinity and male sexuality. Her expulsion of Gregory, the Paston servant and rapist of a tenant woman, from her estate at Mautby demonstrated to her sons Edmond and John III, as well as to Gregory, that transgressive sexuality of this sort would not be tolerated.<sup>52</sup> Margaret's dominating influence over her family home is also illuminated by a letter from John III to his elder brother. In July, 1472 John Paston III wrote of the situation: "Many qwarellys are pyeked to get my brodyr E. and me ought of hyr howse...We [John III and Sir James Gloys] fyll owght be-for my modyr wyth 'Thow prowde prest,' and 'Thow prowde sqwyer', my modyr takyng hys part, so I haue almost beshet the bote as for my modyrs house."<sup>53</sup> Within the family, Margaret had tremendous influence. Her use of authority and manipulation of the ideology of patriarchy and masculine identity, braced by her matriarchal influence, allowed her to control her sons and become an active part of the ideological discourse on manliness.

So far this investigation has examined the actions of men and women in the creation of discourses of gendered behaviour. The discourse of masculinity was not restricted to vertical lines of communication between those of higher and lower stations but also crossed a horizontal surface of relationships with friends, associates, and peers engaged in activities which confirmed or reinforced each other's identities. Since social identity was closely bound to personal identity, a man's masculinity required recognition by a group. In their relationships with their fellows, men acted and expressed their masculine character, usually within the parameters of this social group but such expressions could also serve to extend the boundaries of group

ideology.

As a courtier, John Paston II associated with men of similar and higher rank on a daily basis. He arrived at the king's court at age nineteen and circulated among the men, women, and retainers of the privileged families of England. In this environment John Paston II gradually accumulated many friends among the courtiers. For the courtiers, masculine identity was determined quite differently from the ideology pressed upon John II by his family. The much-criticized spending practices of John II were quite in keeping with the displays of munificence and generosity of his fellows at court. Robert Cutler, the vicar of Caister, wrote to John Paston I in 1463 regarding the sequestration of John II from the affairs at court. He related to the patriarch that:

summe sey that ye kepe hym at home for negard chepe  
and wyll no thyng ware vp-on hym; and so heche man sey  
is auyse as it plese hem to talke. And I haue  
hanswerryd and seyde the most cause is in party for  
cause ye hare so meche howte that he is the rather at  
home for the saue gard of the cost."

Cutler, clearly recognizing John I's parsimony, pointed out that John Paston II needed to spend, sometimes frivolously, if he were to succeed at Court and his father needed to loosen the purse-strings. John I had little experience with the conventions of life as a courtier, and, instead, was steeped in middle class notions of thrift and cautious management of income inherited from his forefathers, William I and Clement Paston. On one level, John II's spending and generosity clashed with his father's yeoman sensibilities. The courtier's ostensible frivolity also conflicted with a class-based masculine ideology of the parvenus which prescribed that a man should be a responsible provider for his family by safeguarding and closely monitoring the family's finances.

Expenditure and a measure of frivolity were connected to a second



feature of this courtier ideology of masculinity: the participation in a theatre of chivalric combat. With the death of his father in May of 1466, John Paston II gained considerable control over family finances. In the spring of 1467 John II wrote to his younger brother about his success at a tournament. He related:

My hand was hurte at the Tourney at Eltham upon Wednesday last, I would that you had been there and seen it, for it was the goodliest sight that was seen in Inglande this Forty yeares of so few men. There was upon the one side within, the King, My Lord Scales, My selfe, and Sellenger, and without my Lord Chamberlyn, Sr Iohn Woodvyle, Sr Thomas Mountgomery and Iohn Aparre &c.<sup>55</sup>

By competing and succeeding at Eltham, John II reinforced his reputation among his fellows and strengthened his position among higher-born courtiers and even with the king himself.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, the tournament presented an opportunity for him to augment his reputation<sup>57</sup>, yet John II's success was not appreciated by the younger John. Wryly, John III wrote back to his elder brother, saying "and wher as it plesyth yow for to wyshe me at Eltam at the tornay for the good syth that was ther, by trowththe I had leuer se yow onys in Caster Halle then to se as many kyngys tornay as myght be betwyx Eltam and London."<sup>58</sup> This response addressed the precarious situation regarding the Fastolf inheritance after John I's death and it also echoed the need for fiscal restraint prescribed by the recently deceased patriarch. For John Paston III, the success of John II at Eltham was of flighty worth, which he valued less as a marker of reputation than did John II's comrades at the tournament. By participating in this tournament John made a conscious choice to establish and further his identity within this group of courtiers. Disregarding his father's, mother's, and brother's lingering counsels against superficial expense, John II decided to affiliate himself with the ideal of the courtier, an alternate and co-existing masculine ideology, at the expense of his reputation within the more practically

grounded gender ideology of his provincial family and society. John II's upward social mobility estranged him from the masculine ideology of the provincial gentry.

A third element that comprised this courtier masculinity was sexual. As evident from the correspondence between John II and Thomas Daverse, the pursuit of the ladies in and around the court circles also served to connect the courtiers.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, they shared quite explicit information about their sexual interests that confirms the sexualized nature of the king's court.<sup>60</sup> The masculine ideology among the courtiers departed clearly from the one promoted by John I and Margaret along two lines. Where the middle class masculine ideology stressed practicality and serviceability, the courtier ideology emphasized extravagant spending, permissive sexuality, and participation in arguably frivolous tournament combat. The distinctions between these two worlds were manifest to John II in the admonitions of his family. In his conduct it is evident that he chose to associate himself with the masculine ideology of the courtiers. This choice was possible due to the competition of a plurality of masculinities.

John Paston II had several reasons to affiliate himself with the courtier construction of manliness. First, if he was to be successful at court it was essential that he fit in with the other courtiers; however, conforming to the values of this micro-society meant a clash with the gender ideology embraced by the Paston family. John II was functioning within two mutually exclusive masculine ideologies, which diverged on issues such as how a man was to provide for and manage the finances of his family. Nevertheless, his decision to affiliate himself with the courtier ideology was probably not a difficult one for young Sir John, considering the badgering of his father and the relative ease of court life. John II struggled initially to establish himself at court, and, as William II related to John I, he was not assertive enough

to be noticed nor popular enough to be sponsored by a patron.<sup>61</sup> At nineteen years of age, John not only had to adjust to a new and imposing physical environment, but also to a new ideological environment. H.S. Bennett regarded the mature John II as a lazy, spoiled, and spendthrift eldest son<sup>62</sup>, but this characterization betrays Bennett's Edwardian disdain for apparent frivolity and dissolute behaviour. John II's late adolescence and early manhood was spent in this environment. Thus, it is easy to understand that, while adopting the values of his fellows, he nevertheless appeared lazy and frivolous to his family. The decision to choose between mutually exclusive masculinities was foisted upon John II when he arrived at court. His options were few, and John II eventually chose to embrace the masculine ideology of the courtiers, foregoing his reputation as a "real" man of the provincial gentry in his family's eyes.

The men of the provincial gentry were also agents of their own gender identity in their decisions to take part in ostensibly masculine activity. Hunting and falconry, although open to noblewomen under certain limited circumstances<sup>63</sup>, were interests pursued by aristocrats and gentlemen in the later Middle Ages. As boys, many of these gentlemen were trained at hunting and medieval society understood hunting as a test of manhood and whetstone of martial prowess.<sup>64</sup> In the literature of the period hunting is frequently identified with male sexuality, and a successful kill presented the man as a provider and also reinforced his sexual capacity.<sup>65</sup> Although there is no mention of hunting in the Paston correspondence, the Cely and Plumpton letters reveal a keen interest in hunting, specifically the hunting of that masculine-identified quarry, the stag.<sup>66</sup> By discussing hunting, these men appealed to an established masculine touchstone in order to reinforce their identities as men. John Paston III, on several occasions, conveyed a passion for falconry to his older brother and,

when his elder brother sent him a hawk, he was upset by its poor and battered condition when it arrived in Norfolk.<sup>67</sup> By involving themselves in hunting and hawking or at least in a discourse about these pursuits, these men of the gentry were emulating their higher-born associates and patrons, but they were also reinforcing their masculine identity. The corporate activity of hunting provided a forum in which men's identities could be validated. In this space a successful kill validated a man's status, explicitly as a provider and implicitly as a capable sexual being. The individual who partook in these pursuits underscored his masculinity in a venue designed to allow men to confirm their gender identity.

The importance of the individual in the creation, perpetuation, implementation, and modification of the discourse on masculinity occurred within three general fora. First, the inter-generational conflicts between the younger generation of Paston men and an older generation of family men and retainers allow the historian to examine how the men of the provincial gentry articulated their conflicts. The elder generation, namely John Paston I, William II, and Sir James Gloys, attempted to manipulate patriarchal ideology in order to exert a degree of social control over a younger generation who were just coming into their own and seeking identification as independent and capable men in their own right. The younger generation's resistance to the imposition of patriarchy and the subordination it entailed demonstrated that they were active in the creation of their own identities. Also working within the discourse on masculinity, Margaret Paston manipulated the language of what it meant to be man in order to achieve indirect social control over the actions of her sons. Her participation in the ideological process allowed her to extend her authority as a widow and landowner over several grown and ambitious sons. Finally, individual men exerted a significant amount of control in creating and confirming

their own identities. John Paston II chose how he would define himself as a man. Others, like John III, could also act to further their own masculine identities by participating in male-identified pursuits.

The Paston letters illuminate the crucial role of the individual in the creation of masculine gender identities. Men and women, specifically of the older generation of the family, manipulated the discourse on manliness in order to exert influence over the aspiring and ambitious men of the younger generation. Young men who were in the process of establishing their identities and reputations manipulated gender ideology to feel personally autonomous or to reinforce their identities within a dominant structure. Nevertheless, ideologies such as patriarchy framed how individuals participated in the process of masculine identity.

## Notes

1. Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History," Gender & History 1.3 (Autumn 1989), 260. Bennett has argued that patriarchy is a valuable tool for discussion of a ubiquitous gender system which permitted men to wield many forms of authority over women. This more general and broad understanding of patriarchy does not identify it as a static, transcultural, and transhistorical construct but rather as one of many historically and culturally generated patriarchies.
2. Ibid, 263.
3. John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of the Individual," in Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, eds. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, UP: 1982), 264.
4. Benton, "Consciousness of Self," 271; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" Journal of Ecclesiastical History 31.2 (Jan. 1980), 3, 8.
5. Nancy F. Partner, "No Sex, No Gender," Speculum 68 (Autumn 1993), 242.
6. This paper will use terms like personal identity, individual identity, personality, and self when discussing the inwardness and introspection of historical persons. Social identity, prestige, reputation, external identity denote the community's perceptions of a person. Although such labels are not completely satisfactory, they do recognize the differences between these the two identities.
7. Joel Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 57.
8. Ibid, 57.
9. Stanley Chojnacki, "Subaltern Patriarchs: Patrician Bachelors in Renaissance Venice," in Medieval Masculinities, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 84.
10. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 90.
11. Lois Banner, "The Fashionable Sex, 1100-1600," History Today 42 (April 1992), 42-3; Lyndal Roper, Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 1994), 118-9; Patricia Simons, "Alert and Erect: Masculinity in some Italian Renaissance Portraits of Fathers and Sons," in Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History, ed. Richard Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 164-9; Konrad Eisenbichler, "Bronzino's Portrait of Guidobaldo II della Rovere," Renaissance and Reformation 24 (1988), 28; David Kutcha, "The Semiotics of Masculinity in Renaissance England," in Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 1993), 234.
12. Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege, 24.

13. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, ed., The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483, 2 vols. (London: Office of the Society, 1919), vol. 1, xliii, xxviii; vol. 2, no. 204, p. 42; no. 226, pp. 66-7.
14. Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege, 63.
15. Ibid, 60.
16. Roger Virgoe, ed., Private Life in the Fifteenth-Century: Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family (New York: Toucan/Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1989), 128.
17. Norman Davis, ed., The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 and 1976), vol. 1, no. 175, pp. 287-8, ll. 4-22.
18. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 234, p. 394, ll. 1-6.
19. Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege, 64.
20. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 72, p. 128, ll. 29-49.
21. Ibid, vol. 1: lix.
22. Guidobaldo della Rovere's conflict with his father shares similarities with John II's clash with his father. Essentially, Guidobaldo was challenging his father's patriarchal authority and his own position as an inferior and dependant. See Eisenbichler, "Bronzino's Portrait," 28.
23. Compared to the *salutationes* of earlier letters to John II, Margaret's opening is warm and friendly. She wrote: "I grytte you well, and send you God ys blessing and myn, desyryng you to send me word how that ye spede in youre maters." See Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 198, p. 333, ll. 1-5.
24. Virgoe, Private Life, 10.
25. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 339, p. 554, ll. 1-4.
26. There is a hint of bitterness in his mention of "hyr cwrate". Colin Richmond has argued that anti-clericalism in late fifteenth-century England was common to the gentry and nobility. Indeed, Richmond argues that the gentry displayed a lukewarm attitude towards religion in this period and that "those laymen who were employing priests were slipping into the habit of thinking they owned them." See Colin Richmond, "Religion," in Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1994), 196-7.
27. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 355, p. 582, ll. 16-20.
28. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 353, p. 577, ll. 58-61.
29. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 635-6, ll. 11-18.
30. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 282, p. 470, ll. 1-7.

31. The Pastons may have suspected that the relationships between Gloys and their mother had deepened to a more romantic and physical one. Such a relationship, of which there is no definite evidence in the letters, would have further jeopardized the patriarchy of John II. According to Joel Rosenthal, "Sexual activity between widows and clergy seemed a likely possibility, in a society of many single women and many unmarried (if not celibate) clerics." Although it is a stretch, perhaps John II and John III suspected that Gloys was not only valorous but virile. See Rosenthal, Patriarchy and Families of Privilege, 203.
32. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1: lvii.
33. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 245, p. 409, ll. 17-21.
34. H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1951), 190.
35. Virgoe, Private Life, 155, 194.
36. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 387, pp. 622-6.
37. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 271, pp. 454-5, l. 70-76.
38. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 285, p. 476, ll. 10-28.
39. Diane Watt, "'No Writing for Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre, eds. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 124.
40. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 74, p. 134, ll. 1-5. In addition, this quotation indicates that there it was shameful for a man to be bested by a woman in warfare. Could a gentleman besiege a castle or fortified manor that was defended by a woman without incurring some loss to his social identity as an honourable and masculine individual? This query requires future consideration.
41. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 230, p. 388, ll. 177-8.
42. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 176, pp. 289-90, ll. 14-20.
43. Frances and Joseph Gies, Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 90-1.
44. Ann Haskell, "The Paston Women and Marriage in Fifteenth-Century England," Viator 4 (1973), 465.
45. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, nos. 221, 224.
46. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 339, p. 554, ll. 1-4.
47. Ibid, vol. 1, nos. 203, 205.
48. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 202, pp. 340-1, ll. 24-30.
49. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 204, p. 344, ll. 4-8, 42.



50. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 214, p. 362, ll. 10-36.
51. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 283, p. 474, ll. 33-4.
52. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 395, p. 635-6.
53. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 353, pp. 576-7, ll. 46-52.
54. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 681, pp. 293-4, ll. 39-52.
55. Ibid, vol. 1, no. 236, p. 396. Davis's comments on this letter reveal it to be an obvious an inaccurate copy of an earlier letter, yet he maintained that its content was "no doubt genuine".
56. Virgoe, Private Life, 162.
57. John Marshall Carter, Medieval Games: Sports and Recreation in Feudal Society (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 45.
58. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 327, p. 535, ll. 28-31.
59. Ibid, vol. 2, no. 745, p. 379, ll. 18-22.
60. Virgoe, Private Life, 119.
61. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 116, pp. 199-200, ll. 15-24.
62. H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and Their England, 18-19, 22.
63. Virgoe, Private Life, 220.
64. Nicholas Orme, From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530 (London & New York: Methuen, 1984), 192-197.
65. Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Men's Games, King's Deer: Poaching in Medieval England," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 18.2 (1988), 191.
66. Alison Hanham, ed., Cely Letters, 1472-1488 (London: Oxford UP, 1975), no. 19, p. 18, ll. 28-32.
67. Davis, Paston Letters, vol. 1, no. 354, p. 579, ll. 70-5.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

For all intents and purposes the masculinity of the Paston men like John I, John III, and even John II was based on that of their yeoman ancestors. Due to the varied composition of their social group and the family's aspirations to higher status, one son, John II, stretched the boundaries of their class-defined masculine ideology and risked estrangement from his family in order to further their shared interests. Truly, at no point was there ever a static masculine code of the provincial gentry. Instead, what surfaces from the evidence is a lively discourse on what was masculine.

An important consideration which should be addressed is the question of whether the Paston men were always thinking about reputation, self, sexuality, and work *inter alia* in terms of gender identity. It is absurd to argue that men did not think about self and sexuality in terms of their masculine identities because they did not have the language to articulate such issues. On many occasions men consciously entered into discussions about male gender identity by, for example, reporting on the alleged size of a man's penis or by criticizing a man's failure to live up to the family standard for male effort. More often than not, though, men and women did not consciously consider masculinity as a separate issue, but rather as part of a larger system of thoughts about daily social and personal concerns.

An examination of male sexuality in the letters of the provincial gentry has evinced how several men of this group considered women, sexuality, morality, and themselves. They could choose to operate within two broadly defined and frequently commingling sexual ideologies. The secular sexual ideology functioned as a system which justified

institutional sexism against women by promoting a mutual acceptance of the extreme impulses of male sexuality. The moral system compelled the more devout gentleman to respect the personality and sexuality of women, and to reflect on his own sexuality.

Perhaps the most influential of the two, the secular ideology, allowed for earthy and ribald discussions of male sexuality, while underrating women's individuality and personality. Frequently, they neglected the iniquities against the immediate victims and consequences of rape, adultery, and fornication. A tacit acceptance of the force of the male sexual impulse, in conjunction with the sizable quantity of cultural discourse justifying illicit male expressions of sexuality, allowed men to accept a double standard: They withheld scrutiny when discussing morally transgressive sexual activity but did not do so in relation to female transgression.

Although the secular sexual ideology was referred to often by the men of the provincial gentry, the moral ideology was certainly not absent from the articulations of their thoughts about male sexuality. The letters of the provincial gentry show that men demonstrated a considerable amount of tenderness, respect, piety and morality, and emotional dependence towards their lovers and prospective brides. These personal relationships with women also were the source of considerable anxiety and led men to introspection. However, due to the waning influence of the Church in later medieval England, the moral ideology did not exert as strong an influence on the men of the gentry as did the secular system. Even if he were irreligious, it was important for the provincial gentleman to appear moral and Christian. If a gentleman's sexual transgressions became widely known, the offending man would be scandalized and his family would be dishonoured.

As men participated in the articulation of sexual ideology they were also active in the transmission and perpetuation of a class-based

masculinity that, to a great extent, governed how men of the provincial gentry identified themselves. Emphasized heavily in the Paston correspondence, work and other forms of duty were the cornerstones of masculine identity. Men demonstrated their honour in their service of family, friends, and retainers. Recognition as "real" men came from the successful performance of such activities as the defense of family estates. More often than not, though, individuals presented the dominant masculine code to remind younger men to avoid actions which could throw the man and/or his family into disrepute. Identities and reputations, as they were common topics of discussion among the wide network of England's gentry, were crucial to the individual man and to his family. Therefore, the family had a vital interest in conditioning its younger men so that the group would succeed and continue their social ascent. Cautionary and hortatory, the dominant masculine ideology of the provincial gentry sought to impel and guide the actions of its young men.

Individual family members and retainers, friends, and associates were all active participants in the manipulations of masculine ideology. As individuals, men and women sought to seize personal power through their deployment of the language of masculinity. This power frequently was aimed at controlling the actions of others, usually younger men of the family. The language of masculinity also allowed men to express themselves to their fellows and associates as masculine and socially valuable. As well, a man could choose to identify himself with an alternate masculine ideology, to reinvent his identity as a man, even if such fashioning meant the stigma of effeminacy by his class's dominant masculine code. The language of masculinity presented a means for individuals to assert their identities and power, while, at a societal level, masculinity directed men's actions towards functional purposes.

The larger historical argument that anxiety, threat, and

uncertainty were important to the articulations of masculinities and male sexualities is validated by this study. Vern J. Bullough and Mark Breitenberg, discussing the medieval and early modern periods respectively, maintain that masculinity's relationship to anxiety is crucial in understanding medieval and modern conceptualizations of it.<sup>1</sup> "Masculine anxiety," Breitenberg argues, "is a necessary and inevitable condition...it reveals the fissures and contradictions of patriarchal systems and, at the same time, it paradoxically enables and drives patriarchy's reproduction and continuation of itself."<sup>2</sup> The society of the English provincial gentry constantly scrutinized a man's identity as provider, progenitor, protector, and the evidence from the Paston correspondence demonstrates this point repeatedly.

Men and women, young and old, all participated in a larger discourse on masculinity which encouraged men to act within certain parameters at the risk of losing face and being stigmatized. John Paston II was frequently the object of his family's concern, and they criticized actions which presented him as unmanly and effeminate. Institutions, too, contributed to the late medieval discourses on masculinity. John III, for example, accepted the theological discourse on sexuality, and his need to express sexual impulses within a moral context was a source of desperation and fear. The individuals and institutions who wielded the threat of disrepute could guide men, exercise control over them, and, in certain cases, use the successes of these younger men to confer social prestige upon themselves.

Masculine anxiety did not make slaves of men nor did it suffocate their individual agency. On the contrary, men could manipulate masculine discourse themselves, thus destabilizing the rigidity of an anxiety-causing masculine ideology. Again, John Paston II serves as a good example of this point. By opting to associate with upper-class courtier masculinity, John II disconnected himself from full identity as

a man according to the provincial gentry's dominant masculine code. John II was in a double bind: to act and succeed according to the courtier ideology would serve his family's interests; to do so, however, meant his father would ridicule him for behaving according to the masculine ethic of these upper class men. Other men, like John III, chose to work within ideologies to reinforce their identities. Still, there were men such as Philip Berney who consciously chose to go against masculine codes with apparently little concern or anxiety. To varying degrees men participated in and, frequently and consciously, transgressed masculine boundaries.

By providing a nuanced view of how men and, to a lesser extent, women understood and perpetuated masculine ideologies, this study has contributed to the larger historical investigation of sex-gender systems. Accepting the close association between masculine ideologies and patriarchies, men in general were not solely culpable of using patriarchal ideology to gain social and political power. Older generations of men used the language of masculinity over their younger sons, nephews, and retainers. In horizontal relationships, men also used the language of masculinity to effect social control over their fellows. Women, too, participated in the reproduction of masculine and patriarchal ideologies in their attempts to improve their often modest cultural authority. Older men, of any group, appear the most culpable of reproducing masculine ideology to reinforce their influence. However, for these individuals patriarchy was natural and right, a benefit of their age, gender, and birth which provided power over younger men and women. Such a conclusion must have an obvious proviso attached: the young men who fought against the masculine ideologies of the older men one day became older men themselves.

Since the Paston correspondence only illuminates a forty year period, there is scant evidence to show how the Paston men manipulated

masculine and patriarchal ideology as they aged. Speculation is necessary to compensate for the absence of information. John III's son, William IV, had a long life and he continued to press his own sons to aspire socially and politically. Indeed, later generations achieved this goal of the Pastons and, when the last male Paston died in 1732, he was the Second Earl of Yarmouth.<sup>3</sup> The masculine ideologies of William I, John I, James Gloys, and John III appear to have maintained their force into later generations. Indeed, it is conceivable that the class-based masculine ideology which men and women, old and young, reproduced in the fifteenth century, guided masculine action even into the eighteenth century, with only subtle and/or minor fluctuations.

If a masculine ideology served the family's social and political interests, succeeding generations would perpetuate it. Of course, individuals and changes in historical context continued to modify the discourse on masculinity. The masculinities of the fifteenth century were the objects of manipulation and, at the same time, were also powerful cultural forces which shaped how individuals understood gender identity. Parvenu families, like the Pastons, brought a pragmatic yeoman masculinity into contact with an upper-class and extravagant courtier value system. The later earls of Yarmouth and many other members of the early modern English elite were most likely products of the blending of these two class-based masculine ideologies. Finally, if the masculine ideologies of the fifteenth century continued with only slight alterations through the early modern period and into the modern period, then the masculinities negotiated by the late medieval gentry allow us to better understand the development of modern masculinities.

### Notes

1. Vern J. Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 43.
2. Mark Breitenberg, Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1996), 2.
3. Roger Virgoe, ed., Private Life in the Fifteenth Century: Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 279.



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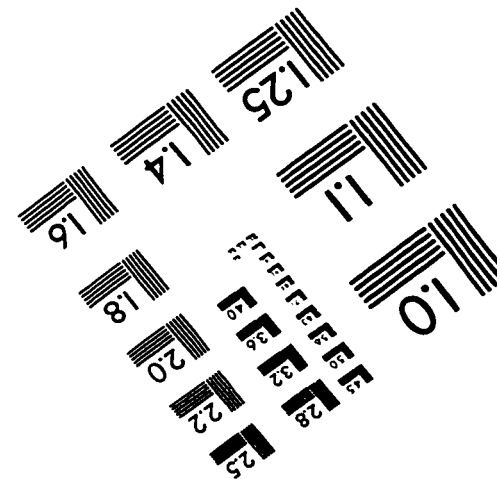
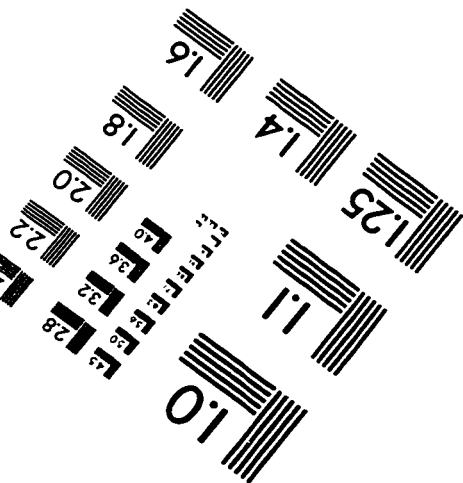
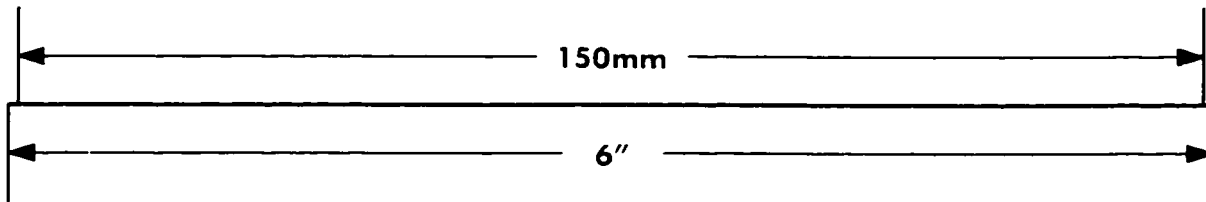
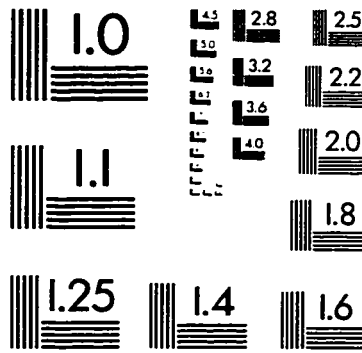
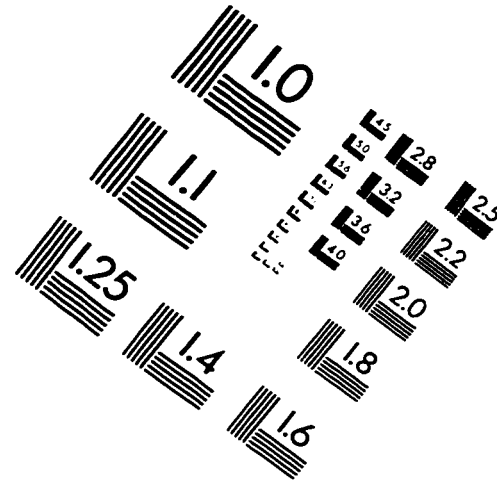
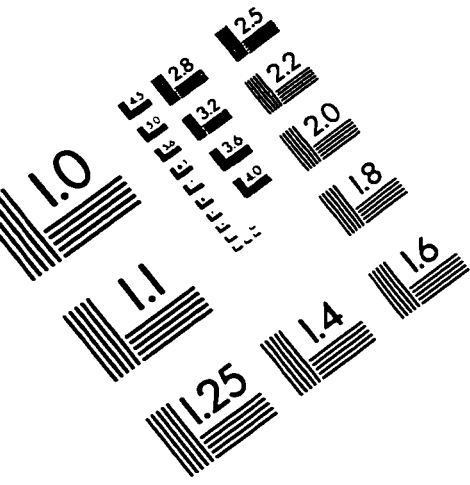
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