

Five British Writers

Day 6



Comparing Butler and Rubin

- How does Rubin use the categories of gender that Butler questioned?
- What are the terms of each scholar's argument--how does questioning Ontology or Epistemology compare with questioning Rights or Ownership?
- How did each affect the way you read the *Franklin's Tale*?

Keeping Up Appearances, I:

The Marriage Contract vs. Fin Amor (Courtly love)

“wel unnethes dorste this knyght, drede, / Telle hire his wo, his peyne, and his distresse. / But atte laste she, for his worthynesse, / And namely for his meke obeysaunce, / Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce / That pryvely she fil of his accord / To take hym forhir housbonde and hir lord, / Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves” (736-743)

“Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght / That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght, / Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie / Agayn hir wyl...but hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al, / As any love to his lady shal, / Save that the name of soveraynetee, / That wolde he have for shame of his degree” (745-752)

“Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye... Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee, / And nat to been constreyned as a thral” (764, 768-769)

Keeping up appearances, II:

Averagus's Threats

Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
For God so wisly have mercy upon me,
I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
For verray love which I to yow have,
But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe
...I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,
That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
To no wight telle thou of this aventure, --
As I may best, I wol my wo endure
Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,
That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse.
(FrT 1474-1479, 1481-1485)

Threats that sound like...

Aurelius?

“my righte lady, quod this woful man,
Whom I moost drede and love as best I kan,
And lothest were of al this world displese,
Nere it that I for yow have swich disease
That I moste dyen heere at youre foot anon,
Noght wolde I telle how me is wo bigon.
But certes outhere moste I dye or pleyne;
Ye sle me giltelees for verray peyne.
But of my deeth thogh that ye have no routh,
Avyseth yow er that ye breke youre trouthe.
Repenteth yow, for thilke God above,
Er ye me sleen by cause that I yow love.
For, madame, wel ye woot what ye han hight --
Nat that I chalange any thyng of right
Of yow, my sovereyn lady, but youre grace --
But in a gardyn yond, at swich a place,
Ye woot right wel what ye bihighten me;
And in my hand youre trouthe plighen ye
To love me best -- God woot, ye seyde so,
Al be that I unworthy am therto.
Madame, I speke it for the honour of yow
Moore than to save myn hertes lyf right now”

(FrT 1311-1332)

Exchange Values

Dorigen and Desire?

“What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf
For to go love another mannes wyf,
That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh?”
(FrT 1003-1005)

Dorigen as Object of Exchange?

That sith I se **his** grete gentillesse
To yow, and eek I se wel youre distresse,
That **him** were levere han shame (and that were routh)
Than ye to me sholde breke thus youre trouthe
(FrT 1527-1530)

And right as frely as **he** sente hire me,
As frely sente I hire to **hym** ageyn,
This al and som; ther is namoore to seyn.
(FrT 1604-1606)

“if women are for men to dispose of, they are in no
position to give themselves away” (Rubin)

Anthropology and Literature

Gail Rubin on Kinship Networks:

The exchange of women “is shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves”

Let's Discuss

- “[W]hich was the most fre” (1622): is this a good question to end the Franklin’s tale?
- What does the tale suggest about married fidelity and promiscuity? How does it fit with the other tales you have read?
- Do you think that readers are encouraged to criticize the behavior of the male characters in this tale? Why or why not? Are we encouraged to criticize the behavior of the female characters?

What Next?

Deadly Danger of Authorship

Read the *Manciple's Tale*, *Sir Topas* and read *Melibee* extract. Read extract from Barthes.

- A) Re-read the Manciple's Prologue after reading the Manciple's tale. How does the Manciple come across as a character—does his tale reflect his behaviour here? How do his tale and his behavior relate to his mother's advice at the tale's end?
- B) Comment on the conversation between the Host and the narrator after the interruption to tale of *Sir Topas*: how does it affect your reading of the rest of the tales?
- C) Barthes asserts that we should not read texts as “the voice of a single person, the author” but rather as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” a space defined only in the mind of a reader. What kind of textual reading is invited by the narration of the *Canterbury Tales*?
- D) Write your own discussion question about any of the material we have read so far! We will discuss our questions in our day of discussion next Thursday.