...then the fountain of that stream which Zeus, when he was in love with Ganymede, called “desire” flows copiously upon the lover...

— Plato *Phaedrus* 36c

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in English and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Acknowledgements

This project has benefited from the support of fellowships with the Graduate Division Summer Program for Undergraduate Research at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan University. I am especially grateful to my summer mentor, Professor Lowell Gallagher of the UCLA Department of English, for directing the early stages of this research and expanding the theoretical horizons of my project. I would like to thank Professor Jill Morawski for gathering the warm community of fellows with whom I explored the theme “Worlding” at the Center.

I would like to thank my two mentors at Wesleyan University, Professor Natasha Korda and Professor Ruth Nisse, for their encouragement and generosity. I am grateful to Ruth for guiding me through my first research in medieval studies with a sense of humor. Thank you, Natasha, for rigorously engaging my thinking and writing at all stages of this project.

I have endless gratitude and respect for the faculty of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program, who taught me the value of thoughtful scholarship.
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I
Reading Ganymede

Une expérience aussi centrale, aussi décisive, aussi bouleversante ne doit pas être abandonnée à l’irrationalité. —Marianne Massin

Orpheus sings of Ganymede in Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and his song constitutes the paradigmatic scene of rapture in European literature and art:

But now I need the gentler touch, for I would sing of boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust. The king of the gods once burned with love for Phrygian Ganymede, and something was found which Jove would rather be than what he was. Still he did not deign to take the form of any bird save only that which could bear his thunderbolts. Without delay he cleft the air on his lying wings and stole away the Trojan boy, who even now, though against the will of Juno, mingles the nectar and attends the cups of Jove. (X.152-161)

Ganymede’s youthful beauty inspires Jupiter’s homoerotic desire, which produces his metamorphosis from god into eagle. This transformational desire induces Jupiter’s rapture, which is characterized by the transformation of his physical form and his descent from Mount Olympus to Mount Ida. Yet his abduction of Ganymede is the central episode of rapture in the myth. In Ovid’s articulation of the myth, rapture involves abduction, translation, transformation, transgression, immortalization, and rape. Once on Mount Olympus, Ganymede is made cupbearer of the gods and rendered immortal. This event is “against the will of Juno” because Ganymede replaces her daughter Hebe as cupbearer, and Jupiter delights in the Trojan boy.


Ganymede is unique among Ovid’s stories of Jupiter’s rapes because he is the only male subject and the only one to be translated to Mount Olympus.

The etymology of “rapture” reveals that the term underwent significant changes during the medieval and early modern periods, including the gendering, sexualization, and spiritualization of the term. This thesis uses these changing definitions to understand how the myth was interpreted and revised in the medieval and early modern periods. The term *rapere* comes from Latin, the language of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and means “to seize and carry off,” “to carry off (and violate), ravish,” “(of an emotion, idea, etc.) to carry away.” The Latin noun *raptus* means both “rape” and “carrying off.” Although “rape” signified the abduction of a woman from guardians before the twelfth century in medieval Europe, Gratian’s *Decretum* (c. 1150) added the meaning of “forced sex” to the definition of the crime of rape, and his text greatly influenced canon law. In Middle English, *rapt(e)* means “rapture, transport; abduction, rape.” Yet the earlier term is *ravishinge*, which first appears in 1384 and explicitly refers to Ganymede in 1387. The Middle English definition of *ravishinge* is: “Theft, plundering,” “ravishment, rape; also, abduction (of Ganymede),” “the transporting,” “contemplation of God, a vision,” “mystical ravishment; a state of spiritual ecstasy,” and “impelling force, violent motion.” Since the Middle Ages, Ganymede has been understood as a figure of both physical and spiritual ravishment. A deeply ambivalent figure, he is both the homoerotic boy lover

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5 The former definition appears in 1425 and the latter in 1449. *Middle English Compendium*, s.v. “rapt(e),” http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/medidx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=rapte&rgxp=constrained [accessed April 7, 2011].
6 *Middle English Compendium*, s.v. “ravishing(e),” http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/medidx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=ravishing*&rgxp=constrained [accessed April 7, 2011].
and an allegory of the transcendent soul. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the appearance of “rapture” in 1594 to the work of George Chapman, who completed Christopher Marlowe’s unfinished poem “Hero and Leander” and published it 1598.⁷ Beginning in the early modern period, the term came to have the following meanings: “A state, condition, or fit of intense delight or enthusiasm”; “The action or an act of carrying off a woman by force; abduction” and “Rape; sexual violation, ravishing”; “The act of conveying a person from one place to another, esp. to heaven; the fact of being so conveyed”; “The action or an act of seizing and carrying off as prey or plunder.”⁸ Rapture is thus a movement across time, space, and meaning. Movement is inherent in the term, rendering it resistant to localization and final definition.

By remaining attentive to the many meanings of rapture at play in this foundational myth, this study proposes that the varied representations of Ganymede in the medieval and early modern periods constitute homoerotic transgressions of order in the texts and contexts in which they were written. The event of Ganymede’s rapture engenders disorder by moving across hierarchical divisions and troubling binaries. Queer rapture is the fusion of opposites and the intertwining of poles, notably subject/object, active/passive, homoerotic/heteroerotic, human/animal, giving/taking, and representation/reality. Marianne Massin argues that an experience as central, decisive, and moving as rapture must not be abandoned to irrationality.⁹ What is at stake from a queer theoretical perspective is a new way of engaging the unbounded, transportive eroticism that is productive of desires and ruptures in

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⁸ OED, s.v. “rapture,” 1a, 2a, 2b, 4a, 5.
⁹ Massin, 14.
medieval and early modern texts. These ruptures are replete with erotic, social, and political potential with which the contemporary reader can queerly engage the past while simultaneously troubling hetero- and homonormative readings of the canonical texts analyzed in this thesis. The ethics of reading queer rapture demand that one:

1. Insist upon Ganymede’s queer significations. Ethically, a reader must think about the other, queer “side” of this figure. I define queer as that which is in a structural relation of opposition to the normative. Heteronormative readings reduce Ganymede to an allegory of the transcendent soul and evacuate him of queer eroticism. Homonormative readings conceive of him as a pre- or proto-identity, thereby imposing modern categories of sexuality onto the past. Representations of Ganymede are replete with semantic excess that challenges categorization, limitation, and final definition, thereby queering the text.

2. Refuse to read the subjects of rapturous man/boy love as two essential, fixed, and oppositional identities (top/bottom, ravisher/ravished). Such roles are performed and fluid; yet, they simultaneously maintain the power to transform subjects. A queer reading understands the dyad as a dynamic phenomenon.

3. Keep at play the various significations of rapture. In the experience of rapture, boundaries are blurred between the ravisher and the ravished. Rapture is both “to carry” and “to be carried” away, signifying the active and passive elements of the event. Yet rapture is also the active giving over to transport. In medieval and early modern tellings of the tale, rapture is a giving over to transport, translation, mutability, and unbounded eroticism, troubling readings that reduce participants to oppositional roles of active and passive.
View rapture through various disciplinary and theoretical frameworks. Rapture necessarily challenges traditional confines in the movements that it makes. Thus, I use approaches from gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, and classical studies.

Poetry of the classical Latin tradition, including Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, made the Ganymede myth available to vernacular authors and artists in France, Italy, and England. This thesis is concerned with the cultural transmission and translation of classical homoeroticism through the myth of Ganymede and its varied retellings. In Chapter One, I investigate traces of Ovidian homoeroticism in three medieval dream visions: Alain de Lille’s *De planctu Naturae* (c. 1160-1165), Dante’s the *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308-1321), and Chaucer’s the “House of Fame” (c. 1379-1380). These texts negotiate between the pagan content of classical poetry and the Christian terms through which they articulate the myth. Medieval authors rework the representation of physical rapture in order to distance Ganymede from the erotic significations of embodied rapture. Despite efforts to repress the queer significations of the figure, Ganymede transgresses rigid categories within these texts. In Chapter Two, I then traverse traditional period divisions by analyzing representations of Ganymede in the poetry and drama of the early modern playwright Christopher Marlowe, including “Hero and Leander” (c. 1593), *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c. 1585-86), and *Edward II* (c. 1592). Departing from the Ganymede *moralisé* of the Middle Ages, Marlowe’s scenes of rapture emphasize embodiment and homoeroticism. They rely on the Renaissance practice of using Ovid as a vehicle for
expressing the mutability of eroticism and power relations within a patronage system.

My analysis focuses on Marlowe’s literalization of homoerotic rapture through the practice of gift-giving, which materializes the unstable nexus of the giver-gift-recipient triad.

Cultural Translations: Reading Ovid and Mythography

Ganymede first appears in Book One of the *Aeneid* where Virgil tells of Juno’s hatred for the Trojans and for Ganymede in particular, who was son of the King of Phrygia (Troy). Of Juno’s rage toward Ganymede, Virgil writes: “deep within her mind lie stored the judgment of Paris and the wrong done to her scorned beauty, the breed she hated, and the honors that had been given ravished Ganymede” (I.41-44). 10 This dynamic of jealousy, bitterness, and anger informs Marlowe’s depiction of Ganymede in his early play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which is a retelling of the *Aeneid*. Yet this first mention of Ganymede in the *Aeneid* inspired less artistic production in the Middle Ages and Renaissance than did Virgil’s later, ekphrastic representation of the cape given by Anchises to Cloanthus for winning a sailing competition:

A gold-embroidered cape goes to the victor;
around its borders ran a double fringe
of Meliboean purple, sinuous and
rich; and woven in it Ganymede,
the royal boy, with javelin gives keen
chase—he is panting—tiring running stags;
and Jove’s swift armor-bearer sweeps him up
from Ida in his talons; and the boy’s
old guardians in vain implore the stars;

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the savage barking of the dogs disturbs
the skies. (V.329-339)

Virgil’s ekphrastic rendering removes Ganymede to a secondary level of
representation in which he is figured as an image on a cloak. In this version, Jupiter
sends an eagle to seize Ganymede rather than transforming into an eagle himself,
thereby removing the strong homoerotic charge present in Ovid’s description of the
rapture. It is this episode that would inform Chaucer’s representation of the youth in
his “House of Fame.” Despite the reduced eroticism of Jupiter’s eagle, the language
of this passage is expressive of a submerged eroticism that nonetheless permeates the
ekphrastic description. The language strongly appeals to the sense of touch, such as
the tactility and sensuousness of the “sinuous and rich” cape. Ganymede’s “panting”
and the “savage barking of the dogs” evoke an excessive, bestial eroticism even as
they displace it. Medieval renderings of Ganymede likewise evoke, while
simultaneously eliding or displacing, the eroticism of Ganymede’s rapture, which is
both religious and erotically charged.

The overt eroticism of Ovid’s Ganymede scene is performed by Orpheus, who
combines music and poetry, thereby allowing him to perform upon the spectator and
ravish him through aural penetration. Ovid’s Orpheus is himself a homoerotic figure
because he took boys as lovers after the death of Eurydice. The poet’s language
appeals to the senses of touch (“I need the gentler touch”), sight (the beauty of
Ganymede), hearing (“I would sing of boys”), and taste (“mingles the nectar”),
overwhelming the senses of the reader. Ovid’s remarkably erotic telling of the myth
of Ganymede was more influential than Virgil’s despite (or because of) its
homoerotic content.
The event of human/non-human rape inherent in Ganymede’s rapture is found elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, including the stories of Danae, Io, and Leda.\(^\text{11}\) In each of these stories, the poet represents Jupiter in a non-human form that covers over or envelops the woman, permeating boundaries without violently disfiguring her body. Ovid elides the violence of Io’s rape by figuring Jupiter as the darkness that envelops her: “Now had she left behind the pasture-fields of Lerna… when the god hid the wide land in a thick, dark cloud, caught the fleeing maid and ravished her” (1.597-600). Jupiter’s disembodied form (i.e., “a thick, dark cloud”) is suggestive of a blind, terrifying eroticism that completely engulfs her body. Arachne weaves the event of Danae’s rape into her tapestry, illustrating “how in a golden shower he [Jupiter] tricked Danae” (6.113). The god gains access to her secluded tower by metamorphosing into a liquid form, which allows Ovid to elide the violence of embodied rape because the water caresses her body rather than penetrating it. Also illustrated by Arachne, Leda is “beneath the swan’s wings” (6.109), recalling Jupiter’s erotic ravishment of Ganymede. Ovid’s ekphrastic representation of Arachne’s tapestry, which illustrates Danae and Leda, distances their ravishments from the register of the physical. Like Ganymede’s ravishment, these stories are deeply erotic and transportive in their crossing of physical boundaries. My reading extends upon Lynn Enterline’s analysis of Ovid’s disfigured bodies that are replete with erotic excess by theorizing other significations of Ovidian rapture, such as transport and translation.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\) Ovid *Metamorphoses*: Danae, 4.611, 6.113, 11.117; Io, 1.585-6.88; Leda, 6.109.

The pre-Christian poetry of Ovid and Virgil inspired intellectual and artistic productions as well as exegetical practices and ways of reading in the Middle Ages, thus integrating metamorphosing bodies and sexualities with Christian intellectual productions. Within the Christian intellectual tradition of the Middle Ages, however, the *Metamorphoses* was mined for “deeper,” religious, and Christian truths about humanity and the cosmos. Twelfth-century readers of myth mostly produced these readings in the form of the *integumentum*.\(^\text{13}\) *Integumenta* used metaphor, allegory, and analogy to reveal these hidden truths, exposing myth’s metaphorical significance in order to align it with Christian doctrine.\(^\text{14}\) In this way, Ovid and Virgil were made compatible with the Christian forms of exegesis and reverence.\(^\text{15}\) As suggested above, however, Ganymede’s raptures were nonetheless potent with Ovidian eroticism within the male homosocial/homoerotic communities in which they were read. The subtle or overt transgressions prompted by the myth take place not only at the level of the text, but between the text and the reader. It is therefore important to look at the interpretive communities in which these translations were received. One such interpretive community is the medieval educational setting. The pagan material of Ovid’s poetry, and more specifically the sexual content, likewise challenged medieval Christian educators interested in reading and teaching Ovid’s work in the classroom for the educational benefit of his poetic techniques. In response, Christian readers, teachers, writers, and philosophers developed interpretive strategies that recast Ovid

\(^{14}\) Wetherbee, 45. Barkan also notes that Ovid became a translation of Platonic cosmology, and that metamorphoses were an important part of this cosmology. Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 30.  
\(^{15}\) Religious reverence, poetic imagination, and the pagan poet’s stories were all understood by the Christian reader as being similarly interested in reading metaphor for the deeper meanings underneath the surface of language. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 103.
as a Christian poet. Pedagogical practice thus contributed to the development of reading theories in the form of commentaries that rendered Ovid appropriate for a Christian setting.\textsuperscript{16}

     Augustine’s foundational readings of myth, which translated pagan writing into the realm of dreams and the imaginary, contributed to the practice of reading Ovid’s poetry as metaphor rather than \textit{à la lettre}.\textsuperscript{17} In his fifth-century text \textit{City of God}, Augustine criticizes poets for presenting false stories of the gods. Reading Ganymede in particular, he writes,

After that, however, we get the story of Ganymede, the beautiful boy snatched away to be Jupiter’s catamite – a foul crime committed by King Tantalus and ascribed by legend to Jupiter – and the tale that Jupiter sought entrance to Danae’s bed in the form of a shower of gold – meaning that a woman’s purity was corrupted by gold. Whoever were the inventors of such tales, whether fact or fiction, or facts concerning others and fictitiously attributed to Jove, words fail to express what a low opinion these fable-mongers must have formed of human nature to assume that men could endure such lies with patience. And yet men gave them a delighted welcome. One would have thought that the more devotion men felt in their worship of Jupiter, the greater should have been their severity in punishing those who dared to tell such tales about him. But in fact, far from being angry with those who invented these fictions, men were even induced to enact those inventions in the theatre by their fear of incurring the anger of the gods.\textsuperscript{18}

This passage demonstrates Augustine’s effort to degrade pagan sexuality by distancing it from the Christian divine. He approaches this task by first discrediting the honesty of the classical poets. He figures the abduction of Ganymede as a violent, murderous, sodomitical crime by comparing it to that of King Tantalus, who chopped his son’s body into pieces and served it as a soup to the gods.\textsuperscript{19} Interestingly,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Barkan, \textit{The Gods Made Flesh}, 100-101.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ovid \textit{Metamorphoses} 6.401-6.411.
\end{itemize}
Augustine finds allegorical meaning in the rape of Danae (i.e., “a woman’s purity…corrupted by gold”), but offers none for Ganymede, whose tale resists typological interpretation, and is irremediably about erotic desire and violent sexuality. Augustine’s final sentence ambiguously alludes to the performance of the Ganymede myth in open-air ampitheaters as a means of assuaging the “anger of the gods.” He criticizes the interpretive community of pagans who mistakenly believe such performances are pleasing to gods who purportedly take catamites as lovers, instead of punishing misguided humans who created the myth. This link between myth and performance is nonetheless suggestive of the sexual practices that reading might encourage within interpretive communities. Indeed, one might argue that it was precisely the anxiety over the potential of the Ganymede myth to inspire sodomitical acts that prompted Christian intellectuals to perform integumenta readings. As we shall see, moreover, these two modes of reading were not always viewed as antithetical: in later academic settings of the twelfth century, for example, poetry, pedagogy, and man-boy love were practiced together.

A later group of Christian authors influenced by Augustine, known as “the Vatican Mythographers,” also produced readings of pagan myth that “uncovered” their truths for the purpose of teaching them in schools. To this end, the Vatican Mythographers rewrote mythological stories with supplemental information in order to present the myth in a Christian articulation.\textsuperscript{20} The work of the First Vatican Mythographer, who is thought by scholars to be an Irish writer of the eight or ninth

century, exists in a twelfth-century manuscript.\textsuperscript{21} Longer and more systematically presented, the Second Vatican Mythographer’s writing exists in eleven manuscripts, probably produced shortly after that of the First Vatican Mythographer.\textsuperscript{22}

Ganymede appears in a manuscript of the Second Vatican Mythographer, in a small section titled “On Ganymede”: “So that he [Ganymede] might not suffer the shame of male intercourse because of the beauty of his body, an eagle snatched him up to the sky while he was hunting in the forest of Mount Ida.”\textsuperscript{23} In the Second Mythographer’s rendition of the tale, Ganymede’s beautiful body renders him vulnerable to the male gaze and phallus and must be “saved” from the shame of sexual passivity. He thus manipulates Ovid’s tale by refiguring the eagle as a protector rather than a perpetrator, who rescues Ganymede from “the shame of male [i.e. male-male] intercourse.” According the logic of this retelling, Ganymede’s beautiful body is safer in the sky than on earth, where sexual vice and debauchery tempt men. The Second Vatican Mythographer notably and explicitly acknowledges the homoerotic valence of the tale, if only to elide it.

The next section of the Second Mythographer’s short chapter explains how Jupiter used the eagle as a symbol on his ensigns after an eagle appeared to him as an omen of victory. It was on a boat marked with the symbol of the eagle that he captured Ganymede, not by metamorphosing into an eagle himself.\textsuperscript{24} The Second Vatican Mythographer thus manipulates the eagle figure, turning it into a symbol or ensign, thereby distancing Jupiter from the predatory, bestial eroticism of Ovid and

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Pepin, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Some scholars have suggested that the author of these manuscripts was a woman. Pepin, 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Second Vatican Mythographer, 187.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Second Vatican Mythographer, 187-188.
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
eliding sexual motivation for the rapture of Ganymede. This ornithographic detail recalls Virgil’s ekphrastic representation of Ganymede and the eagle in the *Aeneid*, in which the eagle is similarly transformed into an image on a cloak. The Second Vatican Mythographer retains the elements of abduction inherent in the myth, but forecloses the possibility of divine metamorphosis, transformation, and translation byfiguring the eagle as an image. Unlike the submerged eroticism of Virgil’s representation, the Second Vatican Mythographer’s representation is static and unrapturous.

These are but a few of the medieval retellings of the Ganymede myth. John Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* includes a chapter on Ganymede describing the scores of homoerotic poems of the Middle Ages that contain the figure of Ganymede, many of which are gathered in *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, testifying to the figure’s homoerotic significance in the period. It is unfortunately not within the scope of this project to chronicle exhaustively the many texts in which Ganymede appears. Examples of medieval versions of the Ganymede myth that this thesis will not take up include: the homoerotic poetry of Baudri of Bourgueil (1046-1130), including “To a Youth Too Proud”; a popular early-thirteenth century poem entitled “A Debate Between Ganymede and Helen,” in which the two figures argue for the superior pleasure of their own sex over the other; Pierre Bersuire’s thirteenth-century poem *Ovide*

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moralisé, which translates the *Metamorphoses* from pagan into Christian terms; and Christine de Pizan’s late fourteenth-century *Epistre d’Othéa*, which tells one hundred stories of Troy, including that of Ganymede’s fight with Phoebus. “A Debate Between Ganymede and Helen” is particularly interesting for its bawdy humor, as Helen ultimately wins the debate by pointing out the grotesque act of male same-sex activity, and Ganymede experiences disgust at the thought of sodomy.

The poems discussed in Chapter Two, all canonical texts of medieval literature, are dream visions in which the narrator identifies himself with or against the figure of Ganymede. The medieval retellings of the myth upon which I focus allow for a consideration of how various exegetical strategies were influenced by the interpretive communities and institutional settings within which they were practiced. Leonard Barkan links reading strategies such as the *integumenta* discussed above to sexual practices that took place within the educational and religious settings in which they were developed. He argues that the male homoeroticism between teacher and pupil in medieval educational settings was modeled after classical modes of pederasty.26 My thesis is in this respect influenced by his tripartite analysis of Ganymede’s importance to medieval humanism: “We are dealing, then, with a cultural series in three terms: the revival of ancient literary forms expressive of homosexual desire; the myth of Ganymede along with a tradition of interpretation that denies or sublimates the latent sexual content; a lived society in which pederastic or other homosexual relations may be undertaken.”27 Within Barkan’s schema, one aspect of the cultural transmission of Ganymede was the emulation of classical modes

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of sexuality within such institutional settings. The performance of pederasty existed in tension with the Christian translation of these classical texts. Ganymede was thus both a model for sexual relations and the subject of exegesis that sought to elide his homoerotic valence. Barkan’s paradigm suggests that the cultural translation and transmission of Ganymede transformed the students and teachers performing the intellectual work by inspiring homoerotic desire.

Sodomy and Theology

Building on this secondary literature that places representations of Ganymede in relation to pederastic modes of sexuality, I argue further that one reason for the anxiety over homoerotic sexual practices modeled after classical modes was the specification of sodomy as a legal and theological category throughout the Middle Ages. This anxiety over the sodomitical connotations of the rapture of Ganymede greatly influenced representations of the figure in medieval poetry, abstracting him further into disembodiment. Biblical exegesis from Ambrose to Dante understands (and constructs) the sin of Sodom as a sin of the body. Mark Jordan carefully traces the history of sodomy as a theological category in *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*. According to Jordan, the definition of the sin of Sodom is variously linked to pleasure, luxury, waste, and the body in scripture and the writing of the Church fathers. In Biblical exegesis, sodomy is associated with blasphemy and

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28 Barkan identifies the School of Chartres and the study of rhetoric in Paris as institutions at which these various practices, both intellectual and sexual, occurred. Barkan, *Transuming Passion*, 40.
unnatural sexuality.\textsuperscript{30} Jerome, the ascetic Church father responsible for translating the Old and New Testament into Latin, wrote that too much leisure produces pride, which is the first sin of Sodom.\textsuperscript{31} Sodomy according to Jerome results from “the opulence of delicacies and of luxury.”\textsuperscript{32} The crime is thus connected to pleasure and luxury, which are not compatible with the ideal religious life or Jerome’s own ascetic lifestyle. It was not until later, however, that the sin became specifically associated with particular sexual practices.

Jerome’s use of the term \textit{luxuria}, or “luxury,” to describe the sin of Sodom relies on an ancient Roman conception of luxury while simultaneously Christianizing it.\textsuperscript{33} In Roman texts, \textit{luxuria}, often coupled with \textit{licentia}, was construed as antithetical to the virtues of the Republic.\textsuperscript{34} The term had a negative charge, designating disorder and dissolution. Jordan notes that the Old Testament uses of \textit{luxuria} are associated with drunkenness, gluttony, and sexual excess.\textsuperscript{35} The Old Testament associates the term with the Prodigal Son, who in the Gospel of Luke is characterized by excessive spending and waste. The Prodigal Son does not generate anything with his money. Thus, the sin of Sodom, which is intertwined with the concept of \textit{luxuria}, becomes associated with waste, superfluous material goods, bodily pleasures, and the excesses of the flesh. Consequently, those who committed the sins of Sodom were linked to excessive bodily pleasures and to excessive consumption. Like decaying material

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{30} Jordan, 32.
\textsuperscript{31} Jordan, 33.
\textsuperscript{32} Jordan, 33.
\textsuperscript{33} Jorda, 37.
\textsuperscript{34} Jordan, 37.
\textsuperscript{35} Jorda, 37.
\end{small}
\end{flushleft}
goods, the waste of the Prodigal Son, and the non-procreative ends of sexual pleasure, the sodomite does not generate or (re)produce.

As Church fathers continued to interpret the story of Sodom, their exegeses gradually moved towards understanding the sin as one concerned with the body and sex. Jordan identifies Ambrose’s fourth-century writing as the first to locate the sin of Sodom in the body because he associates the sin with the flesh, lasciviousness, luxury, and disordered desire. Augustine’s later treatment of the story would focus specifically on its homoerotic elements, claiming that the citizens of Sodom desired to rape the male angels and that this behavior towards men was common in the city. In Augustine, the excess of disordered desire is figured as causing same-sex penetrative acts in particular, which constitute the sin of Sodom. Later, the term sodomia appeared in Church theology in Peter Damian’s eleventh-century tract, the Book of Gomorrah. Peter Damian, himself a religious ascetic, was concerned with same-sex practices amongst clerics. His concern for clerical sexuality was not unique, as sodomy within monastic settings and amongst clergy was a widespread practice.

Amongst the clergy, sodomy was a prevalent crime that underwent fierce institutional prohibition in the twelfth century, which saw official sanctions against the crime. Urged to act against sodomy among clergy and in monastic communities, Anselm of Canterbury held The Council of London in 1102, which produced a

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36 Jordan, 34.
37 Jordan, 34.
38 Jordan, 35.
39 Jordan makes the argument that the term sodomia creates a social category for a form of sexual behavior, which is a basic form of essentialism. Jordan, 44. Peter Damian, Book of Gomorrah, trans. by Pierre J. Payer, (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982).
A document stating that sodomy should be confessed as a sin.\textsuperscript{40} Despite Anselm’s calls for official prohibitions against sodomy, he did not agree with Peter Damian’s polemic that demanded the removal of men accused of sodomy from the clergy and monasteries.\textsuperscript{41} The Third Lateran Council of 1179 produced a document that crystallized attitudes and reforms previously held in ecclesiastical communities when it declared that clerics guilty of sodomy must forfeit their religious status or remain in a monastic setting. With regards to non-clergy, it stated that laymen should be excommunicated.\textsuperscript{42} Burgwinkle notes that secular authorities joined in the ecclesiastical prohibitions against sodomy.\textsuperscript{43} Following the Lateran Council of 1215, civic authorities began punishing sodomites as criminals.\textsuperscript{44}

Appearing in a context that saw the increasing specification and criminalization of sodomy, I argue, Alain de Lille’s and Dante’s representations of Ganymede attempt to distance the figure from physical rapture precisely because they read the tale within a sodomitical context. Yet I argue that even disembodied rapture marks a transgression in the narrator’s identification with Ganymede. Disembodied rapture blurs the boundaries between dreaming and waking, active and passive, subject and object, sexual and spiritual, and religious and erotic, and thereby queers the relationship between poet and reader.

\textsuperscript{41} Burgwinkle, 29.
\textsuperscript{42} Burgwinkle, 31.
\textsuperscript{43} Burgwinkle, 32.
\textsuperscript{44} Burgwingkle, 32.
Traversing Period Divisions

This trans-historical study departs from previous scholarship by analyzing Ganymede across traditional period divisions, arguing that representations of the figure from both the medieval and early modern periods are suggestive of semantic overflow, unbounded eroticism, and Ovidian influence. Although expressive of different forms of eroticism (i.e. submerged or displaced vs. explicit), the representations of Ganymede’s rapturous transports analyzed in this thesis are variously linked over time through the transgressions that they enact. This argument does not deny that Ovid and Ganymede had different valences in each period. Rather, it suggests that Ovid’s poetry and Ganymede’s character are inherently transgressive, causing ruptures in various texts and contexts over time. Scholarship has traditionally bracketed Ganymede to either the medieval or the early modern period.45 Barkan’s study is unique in its trans-historical approach to reading neo-Platonism and Ganymede from the European Middle Ages to the Italian Renaissance.46 Departing from Barkan, I focus on Ovid, who has been overshadowed in secondary literature by the influence of Platonism and neo-Platonism, as a larger figure throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. By tracing the phenomenon of queer rapture over time, this study is able to analyze the ways in which re-imaginings of the myth exist in relation to their antique and more recent pasts, as well as how they influence future

46 Renaissance writers’ engagement with the erotics of Platonism (such as Phaedrus and Symposium) influenced the ways in which they expressed eroticism through physical terms and expressions of beauty. Barkan, Transuming Passion, 71-74.
readings of the figure. For example, Dante’s representation of Ganymede was a significant cause of the proliferation of the figure in the Renaissance, thus positioning the poet as the inheritor of the Christian exegetical tradition as well as the prototype of a more erotically engaged tradition.\(^{47}\) This relationship between classical literature and later re-imaginings of the myth is nowhere more apparent than in the reception of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which remained influential throughout the Renaissance.

Although English poets, such as Chaucer, were engaged with Ovid’s poetry, English translations of the text did not appear until later in the fifteenth century, when printing technologies were being developed.\(^{48}\) William Caxton’s English translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1483) is a literal translation of a version of the *Ovide Moralisé*, the medieval French text that translated Ovid into Christian moral terms.\(^{49}\) In his preface to Book 1, Caxton defends the “good” and “proufyt [profit]” that a reader can gain from this text because “the trouth therof lyeth coverid under the fables.”\(^{50}\) Caxton’s preface reveals that allegorical reading strategies both informed and troubled his fifteenth century English translation, which, like its medieval precursors, aims to uncover the truth hidden behind the fables. Arthur Golding’s English translation of the text appeared in two installments, the first in 1565 and the second in 1567,\(^{51}\) and was dedicated to the Earl of Leicester, who commissioned several translations.\(^{52}\) Golding’s Ovid is especially significant for its influence on

\(^{47}\) Barkan, *Transuming Passion*, 72.


\(^{49}\) Lyne, 249-251.

\(^{50}\) William Caxton, Book 1, Preface ‘Thordenance for to have the understandyne of this booke,’ in *The Metamorphoses of Ovid Translated by William Caxton*, as quoted in Lyne, 252.


\(^{52}\) Lyne, 249.
Renaissance poets like Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Spenser.\textsuperscript{53} Although his translation aims to adhere to the tradition of the \textit{Ovide Moralisé}, his excited language often breaches this moralizing tradition.\textsuperscript{54} Golding writes explicitly, for example, about Jupiter’s love for Ganymede: “The King of Goddes did burne erewhyle in love of Ganymed,” so he transformed into an eagle, “And so he soring in the ayre with borrowed wings trust up / The Trojane boay who still in heaven even yit dooth beare his cup” (X.161, 165-6).\textsuperscript{55} English Renaissance translations of Ovid, and the poetry and plays influenced by it, reveal the changing nature of eroticism in the Renaissance.

In Chapter Three, I turn to early modern depictions of Ganymede, focusing in particular on the work of Christopher Marlowe. Christopher Marlowe first translated Ovid’s \textit{Amores} under the title \textit{Amores, All Ovid’s Elegies} as an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he received a BA in 1584.\textsuperscript{56} Marlowe’s oeuvre is highly Ovidian in its exploration of mutable desire and polymorphous sexuality, especially his poem “Hero and Leander,” based on the late classical poet Musaeus.\textsuperscript{57} Like Marlowe, other Renaissance writers engaged Ovid as a means of expressing the mutability of desire and eroticism, in part because desire can take any object, or no object, as erotic in Ovid.\textsuperscript{58} Departing from the (unsuccessful) medieval practice of taming Ovid through allegorical or typological reading strategies, Renaissance translations of Ovid are replete with eroticized bodies and semantic excess.\textsuperscript{59} The body is a particularly important site in Marlowe because it is the object

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Lyne, 252.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Lyne, 253.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Arthur Golding, \textit{Ovid’s Metamorphoses}, 10.157-167.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Orgel, vii, ix.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Orgel, xvii.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Enterline, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Enterline, 2.
\end{itemize}
that inspires wonder and desire in Jupiter. Lynn Enterline suggests that rhetorical 
copia and sexual excess meet in Renaissance figurings of Ovid’s violated bodies.\(^{60}\) 
She notes that the Renaissance Ovid “appears to be far more interested in the shear 
force of amor… than in the particularity of what this or that character desires.”\(^{61}\) This 
powerful, transformative excess of desire is precisely what Marlowe employs as the 
vehicle for Ganymede’s transgressive raptures.

Ganymede becomes still more prevalent in the literature of the early modern 
period, largely because of the secular approach to the classics, which enabled writers 
to engage Ovid as a vehicle for expressing mutable eroticism. First, since Ovid was 
widely read and translated in schoolrooms of Renaissance England, Ganymede would 
have been a familiar figure to the educated.\(^{62}\) Second, the figure’s fame as a shepherd, 
renowned for his male beauty, rendered him a fitting subject for pastoral poetry, a 
popular genre of Elizabethan literature. One particularly good example of homoerotic 
pastoral is Richard Barnfield’s “The Affectionate Shepherd.”\(^{63}\) Another reason for 
Ganymede’s prevalence in early modern literature was that “ganymede” had by this 
time become a common term used to designate boy lovers in male homoerotic 
relations. Depending on the context, the term “ganymede” might be linked to the 
tradition of pastoral love or idealized male friendship, on the one hand, or to sodomy, 
on the other. Sodomitical figurings of Ganymede further associated the figure to other 
forms of excess and debauchery, such as drunkenness, rape, bestiality, sorcery, and

\(^{60}\) Enterline, 1. 
\(^{61}\) Enterline, 85. 
\(^{63}\) Ganymede also appears in Sonnets 4, 10, and 15 of Richard Barnfield.
heresy. One especially notable example is Henry Peacham’s *Minerva Brittana* of 1612, which links Ganymede to buggery, incest, witchcraft, murder, and counterfeiting. Finally, Ganymede became a common figure in early modern plays performed in private theaters that catered to an almost exclusively male clientele. As Mary Bly has argued, in the case of the Whitefriars theater, a disreputable company of boy-actors, the Children of the King’s Revels, performed there for about nine months between 1607 and 1608, deploying bawdy puns focused on the male body to create a sense of homoerotic community among its niche audience.

Queer Theory: Resisting Definition

My interest in the multiple valences of rapture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is informed by the concerns of contemporary queer theory. As Lee Edelman writes, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.” “Queer” is not an essence, but rather that which challenges normative structures and constructions. Figures, proclivities, habits, desires, and events become queer by moving beyond established norms of gender and sexuality. The term queer resists final definition and rigid categorization because it is inherently mutable, fluid, and shifting. The erotic raptures that are at the center of the Ganymede myth are “queer,” I argue, because they exceed the possibility of defining, localizing, and

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categorizing the erotic “identities” of the figures participating in the event. Insofar as rapture represents a breakdown of the binaries that traditionally structure erotic relations, it is a constitutively queer event.

Unlike much Queer Renaissance work, this project does not aim to map pre- and proto-sexual identities emergent in the pre- or early modern periods. The mutability of Ovidian eroticism forecloses the possibility of categorizing identities that may be largely constituted by particular forms of desire. Rather, this thesis aims to trace the ways in which the mutability of eroticism interacts with the event of rapture, and the ways in which the indeterminacy of rapture has been variously interpreted in different historical contexts and interpretive communities. I employ methods of queer history, which I shall expand upon here, in order to analyze the continuities and differences in representations of Ganymede’s raptures across periods. In so doing, I hope to contribute to queer theory by introducing the concept of rapture as a constitutively queer event.

Intense critical debates have surrounded the use of queer theory to read pre- and early modern texts. On one side of the debate are scholars who advocate a historicist approach, such as David Halperin. On the other, are scholars such as Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, who argue that historicist methods must themselves be queered. The following passage from Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I has provoked various reading strategies that have fuelled these debates. Foucault writes,

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them… Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny,
a hermaphrodisism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. ⁶⁸

In “Forgetting Foucault,” Halperin argues that Foucault draws a distinction in this passage between sexual acts and identities, contrasting the differences of power in pre-modern and modern regulations of sexuality. ⁶⁹ Foucault’s distinction between pre- and modern sexualities introduces the question of terminology and how to recover the forms of pre- and early modern erotic subjectivity without imposing modern categories on them. I address this issue by using terms such as “eroticism,” “desire,” and “modes of sexual relations” because they do not posit pre- or proto-identities, while keeping open the possibility of identifying historical continuities as well as discontinuities.

In her Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick argues that Foucault and Halperin both rely on a narrative of history in which we presume to know and understand the homosexual in contemporary conceptualizations, and that both present a “unidirectional narrative of supersession.” ⁷⁰ This is to say that in their linear histories, one model of sexuality replaces or supercedes another, and the preceding model falls out of the picture. These models of queer history deny the multiplicity of residual and emergent acts, practices, behaviors, and even identities that may coexist simultaneously. Contrary to the concept of a knowable homosexual identity in the present, Kosofsky-Sedgwick posits that the modern homo/hetero definition is characterized by “the unrationalized coexistence of different models

during the times they do coexist."\textsuperscript{71} Her criticism calls readers to remain attentive to the complexity of sexual relations at any given moment because a variety of definitions coexist at the same time.

Jonathan Goldberg, editor of \textit{Queering the Renaissance},\textsuperscript{72} and Madhavi Menon argue against historicism and the approach that Halperin advocates because it relies on a foundation of “ontology, teleology, and authenticity.”\textsuperscript{73} They are careful to note, however, that their approach is not necessarily ahistorical. Homohistory is “invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences” and “challeng[ing] the notion of a determinate and knowable identity, past and present.”\textsuperscript{74} A queer project would be able to recognize a “non-self-identical nonpresent” and resist providing final definition.\textsuperscript{75} Since definitions of sexuality are always shifting, overlapping, and conflicting, we cannot ever “know” it.\textsuperscript{76} Their method resists understanding the past either as “wholly other,” or identical, to the present.\textsuperscript{77}

These queer theoretical models allow for a reconceptualization of the transmission, reception, and translation of Ovid in the medieval and early modern periods. The transmission of these texts is also the transmission of classical forms of eroticism, which interact in complex ways with forms of eroticism in later periods. Queer historical methods further allow for an analysis of the relationship between the eroticism of classical texts, the medieval and early modern reception and re-imagining of those texts, and the ways in which desires and eroticism are similar and

\textsuperscript{71} Kosofsky Sedgwick, 47.
\textsuperscript{73} Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, “Queering History,” in \textit{PMLA} 120:5 (2005), 1609-1610.
\textsuperscript{74} Goldberg and Menon, 1609.
\textsuperscript{75} Goldberg and Menon, 1609.
\textsuperscript{76} Kosofsky Sedgwick, 45.
\textsuperscript{77} Goldberg and Menon, 1616.
different across periods. Various forms of eroticism, desires, sexual relations, and behaviors inform representations of Ganymede through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Since the transmission of these texts is also a process of transmitting and translating eroticism, I analyze the coexistence of various eroticisms that evade chronological and teleological mapping. In *Transuming Passion*, Barkan writes, “A transumptive history of myth is both synchronic and diachronic: that is, it attends to both the rhetorical movements of interpretation and the revisionary sequences that are built into the more ‘belated’ re-imaginings of myth.” Barkan’s method calls for an attentiveness to similarities and differences both within and across historical periods. Representations of Ganymede can be both continuous with and revisionary of the classical myth and the erotic potential it mobilizes, suggesting the figure’s relevance to contemporary modes and understandings of sexuality.

**Rapturous Gift-Giving**

The explicit focus on sexuality that emerges in the Renaissance is translated onto the stage in the work of Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe’s homoerotic Ganymede scenes all involve gift-giving, which, I argue, represents the literalization or materialization of the “giving over” inherent to rapturous transport. Rapture transgresses boundaries, just as the giver and receiver enter into an unstable economy of exchange that troubles the distinction between active/passive, lover/beloved, man/boy, and the movements of up/down. Although there are multiple interpretive frameworks within which the gift might be analyzed, including those of philosophy,

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theology, anthropology, literary studies, and cultural studies, Marcel Mauss’s anthropological study of the gift is particularly useful in the present context for its theorization of the circularity and excess or imbalance of the gift-exchange.\textsuperscript{79} The act of receiving requires that one accept the gift and repay with something of equal or more value. This obligation renders the gift a dangerous thing to accept.\textsuperscript{80} Gift-giving also creates unequal power relations because the one who gives exerts superiority over the one who receives. The donee must either meet the challenge or subordinate himself to the donor.\textsuperscript{81} This model of power informs early modern representations of Ganymede and Jupiter that place the figures in a relationship of patronage and/or prostitution. Jupiter offers luxury material objects that are often saturated in meaning, and Ganymede offers companionship, embraces, and his body in exchange. Early modern representations of Ganymede’s gift-giving transform medieval representations because they enflesh him, emphasizing his embodied eroticism that takes the place of the submerged, or displaced, eroticism of earlier poetry.

Building on Mauss, I theorize the gift in the Elizabethan culture of patronage, favoritism, and prostitution. The recent material turn in Renaissance cultural studies has also been useful in its theorization of the early modern subject’s relationship to objects and the power of objects to fashion subjects. These theories allow me to analyze the power of the gift-object and the ways in which it can transform the subject. The early modern “subject’s” sense of self was shaped by material objects, including objects given in gift-exchange. The subject was fashioned by the clothes

\textsuperscript{80} Mauss, 58.
\textsuperscript{81} Mauss, 71-72.
that she or he wore, as Stallybrass and Jones argue in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*.\(^{82}\) The authors write, “We need to understand the animatedness of clothes, their ability to ‘pick up’ subjects, to mold and shape them both physically and socially, to constitute subjects through their power as material memories.”\(^{83}\) Clothes maintained the ability to change the wearer, his character, his nature, and even his gender.\(^{84}\) They draw on Mauss’s theory of the life of the gift to argue that material objects “w[ere] richly absorbent of symbolic meaning” and that “memories and social relations were literally embodied” in them.\(^{85}\) Further building on Mauss’s theory of the gift, Patricia Fumerton argues that the peripheral, the fragmentary, the ornamental, and the trivial are pivotal to aristocratic selfhood precisely because they are marginal.\(^{86}\) She claims that peripheral and ornamental objects, which were saturated in history, meaning, and power, were part of the Renaissance notion of “self.” Fumerton argues that the gift alludes to the individual who gives. The objects offered to Ganymede in Marlowe’s poetry and drama are often significant because they metonymically evoke his outlandish sexual practices. Ganymede’s fashion and accessories both mark his difference and create his difference.

Yet historical and anthropological models such as those cited above have sometimes failed to address the “impossibility” of the gift, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out. There are interpretive differences between reading the gift as an economy that includes objects, persons, and cultures (anthropology, sociology) and

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\(^{83}\) Jones and Stallybrass, 2.

\(^{84}\) Jones and Stallybrass, 4.

\(^{85}\) Jones and Stallybrass, 8.

the impossibility, or “saturated” character, of the gift (philosophy, religion). In *Given Time*, Jacques Derrida demonstrates how the gift is destroyed once it is understood as a gift.\(^{87}\) The gift always produces a “reciprocity, return, exchange, counterfeit, or debt”\(^{88}\) that annuls the gift. For the giver, gift-giving produces “a return payment to oneself,” an image of generosity, and “narcissistic gratitude,” placing the gift within an economic circle.\(^{89}\) Derrida argues that although the gift can never exist or appear “as such,” it can be experienced as the impossibility.\(^{90}\) I argue that gift-giving between Jupiter and Ganymede expresses this impossibility through the infinite economy of exchange, and it suggests the excessive and “saturated” character of eroticism, gift-giving, and rapture. In Marlowe’s texts, Ganymede and Jupiter give themselves over to rapture through gift-giving.

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This thesis is avowedly large in scope, and moves across various historical periods, literary traditions, and critical discourses in order to trace queer rapture in pre- and early modern European literature. The advantage to such an approach is its ability to locate and trace a queer phenomenon in various texts, languages, and traditions over time, thereby demonstrating how queer rupture is replete with erotic, social, and political potential.

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\(^{88}\) Derrida, *Given Time*, 12.

\(^{89}\) Derrida, *Given Time*, 23.

II

Dreaming Ganymede

They are a branch of Sodom’s vine-stock, and from the vineyards of Gomorrah. Poisonous are the grapes and bitter their clusters.
Deuteronomy 32:32

Alain de Lille’s Queer Cosmogeny

Alain de Lille, a twelfth-century French poet of the School of Chartres, wrote his poem *De planctu Naturae*\(^{91}\) sometime between 1160-1165.\(^{92}\) This canonical poem is a foundational text for queer medieval studies because it is expressive of medieval Christian attitudes toward same-sex behavior. The poet is interested in non-procreative sex practices that defy the rules of Latin grammar. Ganymede appears in both the sexual and spiritual forms, demonstrating his ambivalent nature in medieval literature. Despite Alain de Lille’s reconfiguration of the figure, however, Ganymede disturbs divisions such as subject/object and suggests poetry’s ability to ravish its reader. My analysis first summarizes Alain de Lille’s taxonymizing of the grammar of sex before reading how the figure of Ganymede troubles the classification of neat categories. My reading is not an intervention into recent scholarship on the poem, but rather a means of introducing the textured topic of homoeroticism in medieval Europe.\(^{93}\)

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\(^{92}\) James J. Sheridan, introduction to *The Plaint of Nature*, by Alan of Lille, 35.

The writing of *De planctu Naturae* precedes by a few years the Third Lateran Council’s document on same-sex activity in 1179. Both edict and poem are concerned with same-sex activity between clerics. Alain de Lille attended the Third Lateran Council, and his views in *De planctu Naturae* are officially in line with the document that the Council produced: the poet seeks to align the ethics of his fictional universe with Church politics. However, this alignment is not entirely successful as the significations of the poem exceed the intention of the poet. Alexandre Leupin notes that “one of [the Plaint’s] most prominent features is that the very discourse of censorship effects a return of repressed sodomy,” suggesting that repression is productive of queer desire in the text. Queer desire, sodomy, and Ganymede exceed taxonymizing, and transgress the neat categories that the poet constructs.

A polemic against male-male sexuality, this poem is a dream vision and a cosmogeny, which allows the poet to create a fictional universe and an ethic. His project in *De planctu Naturae* is to orient humanity within the cosmos, to restore man to his natural position, and to correct man’s sexual deviance. The text is composed of nine sections written in alternating Latin prose and poetry. This paragraph represents only a most basic outline of the story. Following Alain’s lament on how men have turned into women, the figure Nature appears to him and complains about the state of man. Nature has charged Venus with the responsibility of governing reproduction on earth, but Venus has failed to maintain Nature’s laws by introducing sexual vice. Men

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94 Scanlon, 218.
96 A cosmogeny is the origin or evolution of the universe. OED, s.v. “cosmogeny, n.”
97 I would argue that all cosmogenies, especially those engaged in the Christian tradition, create some sort of ethic because they are constructing a way of understanding the universe, which is a very political act.
have turned away from Nature toward debauchery. Nature calls on her priest Genius to banish men who engage in unnatural behavior. Genius arrives and curses the lustful. Finally, the poem ends by informing the reader that this event has been a dream vision.

The poem opens with the narrator’s lament over inversion: “I turn from laughter to tears, from joy to grief, from merriment to laughter… when Venus wars with Venus and changes ‘hes’ into ‘shes’ and her witchcraft unmans man.” These inversions from “good” to “bad” that occur upon the “unmanning” of man establish the unnaturalness of same-sex relations. Venus is charged with regulating sexuality, but she fails to maintain the rules of Nature on earth. In warring against herself, she causes disorder and turns men into women through witchcraft. She enacts this transgression not by transforming the physical sex of the male body, but by permitting penetrative sex acts between men that challenge the integrity of the male body by rendering it passive and penetrable. In Alain de Lille’s universe, same-sex acts turn what is good against itself, and have the ability to transgress and undo categories such as gender.

Alain de Lille does not use the term sodomy, but employs other phrases such as \textit{monstra nefanda} [wicked act],\footnote{De planctu Naturae, 67.} thereby adhering to the Christian practice of not naming that “horrible sin not to be named among Christians” (“\textit{peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum}”). According to Scanlon, attempts to speak the unspeakable during the middle ages produced a great ambivalence that

\footnote{Translation my own. Scanlon, 219.}
reaches its apex in *De planctu Naturae* because it appeared just before the Third Lateran Council’s edict. On sterile sex acts, Alain de Lille writes,

The active sex shudders in disgrace as it sees itself degenerate into the passive sex. A man turned woman blackens the fair name of his sex. The witchcraft of Venus turns him into a hermaphrodite. He is subject and predicate: one and the same term is given to a double application.

Alain de Lille’s use of metaphors of grammar is influenced by the medieval analogy between sexuality and grammar. Those who engage in this unnamable sin controvert not only the laws of nature but the laws of grammar, according to which man is the predicate who acts upon the feminine subject, just as the predicate modifies the subject in grammar. Any inversion of, play with, or reorganization of the rules of grammar has serious material implications regarding the social categories of gender and sexuality. When man participates in same-sex activity, he slips from his hierarchically privileged position of activity into a lower position of passivity, and is rendered mutable. By playing the passive role in sex, the man is acted upon rather than active in sex. The term “hermaphrodite” further suggests that the individual who engages in same-sex behavior has both male and female characteristics, and thus challenges binary oppositions such as active/passive, penetrator/penetrated, and

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100 Scanlon, 219.
101 *De planctu Naturae*, 67-68.
102 The incompatibility of like with like (*hic et hic*) in this poem is opposed to the rules of grammar, which demand that the genders of adjectives and nouns agree. Masculine nouns must be paired with masculine adjectives, and the same rule applies for feminine nouns and adjectives. In the anonymous early thirteenth-century poem *Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene* (“A Debate Between Ganymede and Helen”), Ganymede argues that “the right way is like with like… look at the gender of their articles. / Masculine should be coupled with masculine by the rules of grammar” (141-144). He draws on grammar to defend the naturalness of same-sex eroticism. Since there can be no argument against this formal rule of grammar (Helen fails to articulate a response to this specific argument), it appears that the grammar of Nature and the grammar of grammarians are organized differently. *Altercatio Ganymidis et Helene*, in Stehling, 113; Burgwinkle, 182; Schibanoff, 203.
103 This construction reminds me of Catherine MacKinnon’s feminist slogan, “Man fucks woman; subject, verb, object,” although with different political implications.
subject/predicate (hence the mutability mentioned above). The man’s body is no longer intelligible as such once he penetrates or is penetrated by another man. His physical actions are represented as threatening to the gender hierarchy, and both the physical and the symbolic properties of masculinity are thereby degraded. Venus’s ability to unman man thus has material, social, and symbolic consequences.  

Alain de Lille’s description of the various kinds of sexual activity and passivity demonstrates his anxious concern with the male body as able both to penetrate and be penetrated. In this economy of activity and passivity, the penetrator is aligned with the masculine gender while the penetrated slips into the female role:

Of those men who subscribe to Venus’ procedures in grammar, some closely embraced those of masculine gender only, others, those of feminine gender, others, those of common, or epicene gender. Some, indeed, as though belonging to the heteroclite class, show variations in deviation by reclining with those of female gender in Summer. There are some, who in the disputation in Venus’ school of logic, in their conclusions reach a law of interchangeability of subject and predicate. There are those who take the part of the subject and cannot function as predicate. There are some who function as predicates only but have no desire to have the subject term duly submit to them.  

In this passage, the poet describes the grammar of the physical ways in which men relate to one another in penetrative sexual acts. “There are some who function as predicates only” designates men who penetrate other men and who do not perform the receiving role; “those who take the part of the subject and cannot function as predicate,” designates men who are penetrated by the active partner. His mention of predicates who “have no desire to have the subject term duly submit to them” is somewhat ambiguous but may refer to members of the clergy who have strong homoerotic desires but do not act upon them by engaging in sexual activity with other

104 Gender is an organizing principle on the social and symbolic levels.
105 De planctu Naturae, 137.
men. These are probably the most deviant men of all because they challenge the active role that the predicate’s body is expected to perform. The “interchangability” of sexual desire, sexual behavior, and the body in the above account is suggestive of man’s capacity to traverse categories, boundaries, and sexes. Sexual acts between men challenge hierarchical divisions (and resist modern categories of sexual identity) by transporting the perpetrator across the boundaries that structure social and linguistic relations.

*De planctu Naturae* is distinctly un-raptuous in its static taxonymizing of the grammar of sex between men. Yet Alain de Lille establishes the transitivity of the “unnamable sin” even as he attempts to classify it into neat categories. Ovidian eroticism and metamorphoses influence the poet even as he attempts to elide them, such that bodies and desires move across divisions. In the next section, we will see that Alain’s representation of Ganymede likewise troubles rigid categories as he moves across spiritual and sexual forms and the division between subject and object.

**Unbounded Eroticism in *De planctu Naturae***

Ganymede first appears in *De planctu Naturae* as an ekphrasis akin to Virgil’s: here, he is a sculpture within a gem that is part of Nature’s “reddish royal crown and diadem, glittering with circling gems, flash[ing] like lightening above [Nature’s] head.”

106 In the front of this crown that represents Nature’s honor, there are three precious stones (Leo, Gemini, Cancer) that shine more brightly than the

106 *De planctu Naturae*, 76.
other nine on the diadem.\textsuperscript{107} Ganymede is located in the first of three stones, in a second-grade position, arranged diagonally. Unlike the chaotic positions that unmanned men occupy in Alain de Lille’s imagined cosmos, Ganymede is located in a very precise position because his ambivalent character requires that he be described in an appropriate and particular way in order to reduce his inherent eroticism.

The poet writes of the sculpted image,

The first of these, giving the impression of tears by little drops of moisture, gave itself a sad expression by a kind of imaginary weeping. In this stone, the cruet of the youth of Ida [Ganymede], as the appearance of the sculptured image of an attendant showed, signed forth a flowing stream.\textsuperscript{108}

In this ekphrastic depiction, Ganymede traverses the boundary between poetry and sculpture, figuring the mutability or transitivity of his rapture at the level of representation. The “cruet of the youth of Ida” designates the constellation Aquarius.\textsuperscript{109} James Saslow, in \textit{Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society}, notes that Ganymede was incorporated into astrology during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods and by early medieval mythographers.\textsuperscript{110} According to the mythographers, Jupiter translates Ganymede into the constellation Aquarius, immortalizing him in the sky. In Alain de Lille’s poem, Ganymede-Aquarius becomes an object that disturbs the boundary between subject and object through the “real” tears that flow out of the sculpture. Although he occupies a static, fixed position that forecloses the possibility of rapturous transport, unlike the “unmanned” men who transgress divisions of gender, the mode in which he is represented enacts a

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{De planctu Naturae}, 77-79.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{De planctu Naturae}, 79.
\textsuperscript{109} Sheridan, 79.
\textsuperscript{110} Saslow, 5.
transgression by troubling the division of subject/object and reality/representation.
The figure of the crying Ganymede-Aquarius appears to be Alain de Lille’s invention, as it does not appear in any prior version of the story.\textsuperscript{111} Within the poem, the sculpture has a “sad expression” because Ganymede is saddened by his degradation in poetry that renders him a homoerotic figure. Ganymede weeps to express his indignation at the history of his own representation. For in Alain de Lille’s conception of the cosmos, Ganymede does not engage in sexual activity.

Through reference to homoerotic Orpheus, Alain de Lille implicitly invokes the figure of Ganymede. While speaking to the poet, Nature expresses anger that men have turned away from her, claiming that they prefer Orpheus’s melancholy songs to her own ordered melodies.\textsuperscript{112} It is Orpheus’s status as a poetic tempter and seducer of men that is the object of Nature’s anger. His music has the ability to act upon spectators, suggesting that it is a form of musical/poetic rapture. Here, Ganymede is not an inherently homoerotic figure, but rather is represented by Orpheus as such—wrongfully so, in the poet’s view.

The final representation of Ganymede in the poem demonstrates the poet’s purging of the figure’s Ovidian homoeroticism. Although the poet fears offending Nature, She reassures him that he may ask questions for the purpose of being edified by the “secure certainty” of her answers.\textsuperscript{113} The dialogue is structured so that the poet may express his own moral through the authoritative voice of Nature. He asks,

\begin{quote}
I wonder why, when you consider the statements of the poets, you load the stings of the above attacks against the contagions of the human race alone,
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{111} As far as I know, a crying Ganymede does not appear until the seventeenth century. A notable example is Rembrandt’s “Rape of Ganymede” in 1635.
\footnote{112} \textit{De planctu Naturae}, 133.
\footnote{113} \textit{De planctu Naturae}, 138.
\end{footnotes}
although we read that the gods, too, have limped around the same circle of aberration. For Jupiter, translating the Phrygian youth to the realms above, transferred there a proportionate love for him on his transference. The one he had made his wine-master by day he made his subject in bed by night.114

Citing Ganymede as an example of the homoerotic desire of the gods as recounted by Orpheus, the poet wonders why Nature focuses exclusively on the sexual practices of men. In so doing, he utters a phrase that both Sheriden and Ziolkowski describe as untranslatable: “For Jupiter, translating the Phrygian youth to the realms above, transferred there a proportionate love for him on his transference.” The poet here employs the Latin word for metaphor (translatio), and this translates into English through the words translating, transferred, transference to convey the transport or “carrying away” of Ganymede’s rapture, while also suggesting that it is merely metaphorical. Jupiter’s homoerotic desire for Ganymede nonetheless persists, queering Mount Olympus by troubling Nature’s attack against “unnatural” desires that even the gods experience.

The poet seeks to strip Ganymede of all homoeroticism by claiming that poetry is false, despite Alain de Lille’s own engagement with it through the writing of De planctu Naturae. Nature associates being “carried away” poetically (through the uncontainable semantic transfer of metaphor) with being “carried away” sexually (like Ganymede), while simultaneously attempting to ward off the threat of breached boundaries that this transfer poses. According to Nature, poets cover their false claims in beautiful and seductive words that render poetry more aesthetically pleasing and elegant than other kinds of discourse, such as history, fable, or philosophy. Poetry has the ability to “intoxicate the bewitched ears” of its readers and listeners—that is, to

114 De planctu Naturae, 138-139.
ravish the reader through aural penetration.\textsuperscript{115} In declaring that all poetry is false, Nature undermines the homoeroticism of Ganymede in classical Latin poetry, defining it as perverted fantasies and elegant lies of the poets.

To purge Ganymede of homoeroticism and restore him to his proper place in the cosmos, Nature changes the valence of his rapture so that it becomes one of the transcendent soul rather than the deviant body. Disembodiment strips him of all physicality, carnality, sexuality, and homoerotic vice. For as long as Ganymede is embodied, he poses a problem within the Christian tradition. Yet both Alain de Lille’s and Dante’s invocations of Ganymede fail to purge his homoerotic charge, for the multivalent unboundedness or boundary-crossing of his rapture troubles the purity of the texts in which he finds himself.

Queering the \textit{Divine Comedy}

The narrative similarities between the myth of Ganymede and Dante’s journey in the \textit{Divine Comedy} create an affinity between the two figures.\textsuperscript{116} In Ovid’s account, Ganymede experiences rapture through his abduction by Jupiter, and his ascent to Mount Olympus places him among the gods. In the mythography of the early Middle Ages, Ganymede is immortalized when he is translated into the constellation Aquarius. In neo-Platonic terms, God transports Ganymede’s pure and ideal soul to heaven, rendering him immortal. Translated in these terms, the homoerotic pagan myth furnished medieval Christian poets with a narrative of ascent from earth to

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{De planctu Naturae}, 140.
heaven, such as that we find in the *Divine Comedy*. Dante experiences the rapture of
divine being through his ascent to heaven and immortalization through the writing of
the *Divine Comedy*. Like Ganymede, he occupies the precarious position of a traveler
in a queer narrative who is at once the subject and object of rapture. Dante’s
identification with Ganymede in *Purgatorio* Canto IX, I shall argue, marks a textual
rupture and rapture in which binaries collapse.

My analysis of rapture as inherently queer in its conflation of subject and
object is indebted to Roland Barthes, who writes, in *Fragments d’un discours
amoureux*,

…in the ancient myth, the ravisher is active, he wants to seize his prey, he is
the subject of the rape (of which the object is a Woman, as we know,
invariably passive); in the modern myth (that of love-as-passion), the contrary
is the case: the ravisher wants nothing, does nothing; he is motionless (as any
image), and it is the ravished object who is the real subject of the rape: the
*object* of capture becomes the *subject* of love; and the *subject* of the conquest
moves into the class of loved *object*. (There nonetheless remains a public
vestige of the archaic model: the lover—the one who has been ravished—is
always implicitly feminized.) This singular reversal may perhaps proceed
from the fact that for us the “subject” (since Christianity) is the one who
suffers: where there is a wound, there is a subject…117

Barthes creates a distinction between ancient and modern myth according to the
activity or passivity characterizing the ravished subject or object. In ancient myth, the
ravished one is the object of the active ravisher. On the contrary, in modern myth, the
ravished object becomes the subject through suffering. Barthes’ use of the term
“passion” to describe the experience of the modern subject is suggestive of the
passion of Christianity (i.e. of Christ), which recalls the suffering of the subject.

Although Barthes classifies the ancient object of ravishment as Woman, and claims

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that the modern subject is feminized through ravishment, his writing often suggests, while simultaneously eliding, homoerotic objects of desire, thus rendering his concept of ravishment as compatible with the myth of Ganymede.\textsuperscript{118} Medieval poetic representations of Ganymede express rapture as simultaneously active and passive, thus queering the ancient myth of Ganymede as the object of rapture. As we have seen, activity, passivity, and the breaching of sexual/linguistic boundaries captured Alain de Lille’s imagination in the writing of De planctu Naturae.

A similar transgression of boundaries troubles Dante as he journeys through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in the \textit{Divine Comedy}, as he is both subject and object of rapture at the same time. This movement between passive and active positions queers his relation to God, to Beatrice, to Virgil, and even the narrative of his poem. Dante’s journey begins with his crisis in the woods and the divine intervention that saves him. Mary, mother of Jesus, says to Lucia, “Your faithful one has need of you now, and I commend him to you.” (\textit{Inferno} II.98-99). Lucia then goes to Beatrice and implores her to help Dante. Beatrice descends to Limbo in order to send Virgil to Dante’s rescue. These three heavenly ladies are thus the first cause of Dante’s rapture, and Virgil leads him through this dream journey. From this perspective, passivity characterizes Dante’s rapturous ascent to paradise. Yet Dante the traveler simultaneously becomes an active subject through his climb towards Beatrice, just as Dante the poet becomes the active creator through his composition of the poem.

According to Dante, the production of poetry through writing is active.\textsuperscript{119} By contrast, Beatrice is abstract, disembodied, and closer to the divine, recalling Barthes’ conceptualization of the image. She maintains a status of loved and idealized object throughout the poem. Dante idealizes Beatrice beyond the horizons of the human. Barthes’ observation that he who suffers becomes the subject (since Christianity) helps to elucidate Dante’s journey towards becoming a Christian subject. As the object of rapture, Dante experiences suffering, which paradoxically constitutes him as the ideal Christian subject. This tension between activity/passivity and subject/object is nowhere more apparent than in Dante’s identification with Ganymede in \textit{Purgatorio} IX.

\textbf{Queer Identification in Dante’s Dream of Ganymede}

Dante’s queer identification with Ganymede constitutes a problem for his translation of pagan material because it interrupts his journey toward becoming an ideal Christian subject. Even though Dante abstracts the figure of Ganymede by removing him from the primary level of representation through dreaming and metaphor, the latter’s homoerotic charge resurfaces in the poet’s encounter with the eagle, creating a disturbing similarity between pagan rapture and the Christian subject’s ascent towards God.

An exhausted Dante falls asleep after leaving the Inferno and dreams of an eagle lifting him to the steps of Purgatory. Upon awakening, he learns that his sleeping body also made the ascent that he dreamt of. Thus, his imagined body and

physical body trace the same movements.\textsuperscript{120} The transport of rapture here occurs in different registers, at once physical and spiritual. It is here that Ganymede appears in the text, as a dream within a dream, since the \textit{Divine Comedy} is itself a dream vision. That Ganymede appears in a dream renders Dante’s identification deeply intimate. Yet Dante invokes Ganymede through metaphor, distancing and abstracting him further from the literal narrative. The abstraction of metaphor and dreaming removes Ganymede from embodiment, elevating him above the sexualized body. Dante begins the episode, “At the hour near morning when the swallow begins her sad lays, perhaps in memory of her former woes, and when our mind, more a pilgrim from the flesh and less captive to thoughts, is in its visions almost divine …” (\textit{Purgatorio} IX.13-18). The swallow recalls Procne, who is symbolized as a swallow in Ovid’s tale of her and her sister, Philomela. According to Ovid, Philomela is raped by her sister’s brother, Tereus, and rendered speechless after he cuts out her tongue so that she cannot tell of the event. In order to communicate her suffering, she weaves a tapestry that tells the story of her rape (\textit{Metamorphoses} 6.576-578). Of Philomela’s presence in this passage, Chance writes: “Dante’s spiritual transportation, in short, depends on a ravishment that is inarticulate, its awareness of the divine

\textsuperscript{120} In \textit{Dreaming in the Middle Ages}, Kruger discusses a ninth-century dream poem by Strabo in which one event of the dream occurs to the body of the dreamer. In “De quodam somnio ad Erluinam,” Strabo writes about an eagle that appears to a dreamer and lifts him to the heavens. Although the reader first assumes that this eagle is from the heavens, it is not, and the dreamer experiences terror. The dreamer vomits during this flight and awakens to find that he has actually vomited over his physical body. Kruger reads this dream alongside Visio Wettini (also by Strabo), and he argues that “ad Erluinum” is part of a tradition of “physically-motivated” dream fictions and that “A digestive disorder seems to stand at the root of this dream, and it is with the working-out of that disorder that the dream is finally concerned.” This dream is about embodiment. Dante and Strabo trouble the relationship between embodiment and dreaming, suggesting that the two are intertwined. Steven F. Kruger, \textit{Dreaming in the Middle Ages}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 126-128.
incommunicable except by dream or swallow’s cry.”¹²¹ According to Chance, Dante’s ravishment takes place in the register of the spiritual, and cannot be articulated through language. Yet this interpretation occludes the fact that the raptures of Philomela and Ganymede are also defined by a rape of the body. Unlike the rape of Ganymede, however, which is often rendered as an erotic encounter to which he willingly submits, Tereus’s rape of Philomela violates and disfigures her body. Thus, although Dante represses the carnal connotations of rape through the abstraction of Ganymede’s body, the erotic and violent elements of the myth remain potent. The two poles of physicality and disembodiment are intertwined here in the event of rapture.

In Dante’s dream, he sees an eagle and imagines himself to be Ganymede:

I seemed to see, in a dream, an eagle poised in the sky, with feathers of gold, its wings outspread, and prepared to swoop. And I seemed to be in the place where Ganymede abandoned his own company, when he was caught up to the supreme consistory; and I thought within myself, “Perhaps it is wont to strike only here, and perhaps disdains to carry anyone upward in its claws from any other place.” Then it seemed to me that, having wheeled a while, it descended terrible as a thunderbolt and snatched me upwards as far as the fire. *(Purgatorio IX.19-30)*

Dante’s language figures his ascent as a violent and erotic capture. The passage sets up a circuit of desire between the two subjects: the eagle desires Dante in this particular location, and Dante desires to be seized. The pagan eagle, “prepared to swoop,” and Dante, “in the place where Ganymede abandoned his own company,” seduce each other. The latter phrase suggests at once Ganymede’s deserting his own family and an abandoning of the self, of one’s own company, which is richly

suggestive of the transport of rapture. This scene of rapture further recalls the sodomites of *Inferno* Canto XV, who direct their lustful gazes at both Dante and Virgil. Unlike the sodomites, who are denied sexual contact with one another, however, the eagle and Dante are here transported through rapturous embrace. Although they are ostensibly removed from embodiment through metaphor, the term “snatched” is strongly physical. Dante identifies with Ganymede’s abandon, his giving himself over without resistance to abduction, translation, and rapture. He imagines himself as the object of rapture, as the sexual partner of the eagle/Jupiter, and as a subject who serves the gods. Chance writes, “That Ganymede served Jupiter, but was raped by him, is a point Dante wishes to make about the nature of grace as violent and penetrating, the role of the sinner as passive and submissive.”

Although her language evokes the register of the sexual, Chance reads Dante’s identification with Ganymede as a purely poetic and spiritual one, rather than as affective or erotic. As I read the passage, Dante/Ganymede’s abandon is an active surrender to rapture that problematizes Chance’s positioning of Dante as a solely passive and submissive subject. By yielding to rapture, he gives himself over to the transitivity of rapture, the transgression of boundaries (between subject/object, active/passive, etc.), and the homoerotics of classical poetry.

In dreaming of Ganymede, Dante intertwines pagan, Christian, homoerotic, and feminine elements. The heat intensifies as Dante and the eagle ascend: “there it seemed that it and I burned; and the imagined fire so scorched me that perforce my sleep was broken” (*Purgatorio* IX.127-127). The heat becomes so intense that Dante

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122 Chance, 61.
123 Schibanoff, 126-127.
awakens to find that he is actually on the steps of Purgatory. The awakening is itself a rupture/rapture, as the scorching heat breaks through consciousness, transporting Dante from sleeping to waking. The “imagined fire” recalls the burning rain that disfigures the sodomites of Canto XV in the *Inferno* and the wall of fire that contains the lustful, homoerotic shades in Canto XXVI of *Purgatorio*. These three references link this episode to homoeroticism, and are further suggestive of the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone.\(^{124}\)

Upon awakening, however, everything returns to a divine Christian framework. Virgil informs Dante that it was Lucia who carried the sleeping Dante up to Purgatory, bringing to an end the male homoerotics of the dream vision. The event of Lucia’s carrying him up is mediated through the paganism of Virgil. Dante’s identification with Achilles further attempts to foreclose the homoerotics of his dream:

> Even as Achilles started up, turning his awakened eyes about him and not knowing where he was, when his mother carried him off, sleeping in her arms, from Chiron to Skyros, whence later the Greeks took him away; so did I start, as soon as sleep fled from my face, and I grew pale, like one who is chilled with terror. (*Purgatorio* IX 34-42)

This passage references Statius’ *Achilleid*, in which Thetis urges Achilles to cross-dress so that he may avoid going to war. He only submits to gender transformation so that he may be closer to the woman whom he loves. Upon gaining access to the female group while he is dressed as a woman, he rapes her.\(^{125}\) By identifying himself with Achilles, who performs misogynistic violence through rape, Dante attempts to

\(^{124}\) Genesis 19:24.  
\(^{125}\) Schibanoff, 128-129.
cleanse himself of homoeroticism and passivity. Yet the cross-dressing of this episode, in which Achilles can only become a penetrator by posing as a woman, blurs the gender boundaries and thereby troubles the heteroerotic reading of their sex act. It is this queer identification with cross-dressed Achilles that causes Dante to grow pale.

Dante moves towards the divine through becoming the subject/object of rapture. Ganymede is the last pagan figure with whom Dante identifies before he is cleansed at the steps of Purgatory. Following this rupturing of the text by pagan homoeroticism, Dante must cleanse himself at the steps of Purgatory by having seven P’s burned onto his brow. Through suffering in Purgatory, Dante will be able to cleanse himself of any trace of homoerotic identification. He descends into the depths his self through dreaming in order to ascend to God. If Ganymede is symbolic of Dante’s flight towards God, his ascent is thus nonetheless deeply intertwined with the homoerotic rapture of the myth.

Although critics have traditionally read Dante’s use of Ganymede as an allegory of the transcendent soul or divine thought, my reading troubles this tradition by arguing that the episode imagines this ascent as a homoerotic rupture/rapture. Schibanoff maintains that Ganymede resists being read as an allegory of the soul because Dante refers to the Ganymede of Ovid (and therefore the homoerotic Orpheus, who sings of Ganymede), as well as to the popular poem “Debate between Helen and Ganymede,” in which Ganymede defends same-sex love. The popularity of these two poems within literary cultures and Dante’s direct engagement with Metamorphoses provides convincing evidence for reading Dante’s Ganymede as a

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127 Schibanoff, 127.
homoerotic figure. Extending Schibanoff’s reading, I analyze here three implicit references to Ganymede in the *Divine Comedy* in which he is figured as a homoerotic subject of man-boy love.

Ganymede’s presence in *Purgatorio* recalls the sodomites of *Inferno* Canto XV, including Priscian and Ser Brunetto Latini. Priscian was a grammarian whose text was a staple in classrooms. Ser Berunetto Latini was a former teacher of Dante and author of *Tesoro*, an important poetic influence on his work. Schibanoff argues that Dante places Brunetto and Priscian among the sodomites because of the medieval educational setting’s association with sodomy and pederasty. Teachers of grammar were especially implicated in this accusation of sodomitical proclivities.

Boccaccio, a commentator on the *Divine Comedy*, writes in his gloss of Canto XV: “I judge he put [Priscian] here to represent those who teach his doctrine, since the majority of them are believed to be tainted with that evil [i.e. sodomy]. For most of their students are young… And because the students are so accessible, it is believed

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128 Circle Seven: Round Three is for “The Violent Against Nature,” and it is full of poets, scholars, and religious men who are all connected by the pleasures they found in sodomy. In his discussion of Canto XV of *Inferno* in *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages*, Eugene Vance takes as his starting point the instability of the word “sodomy.” Since sodomy designated many forms of sexual behavior all considered deviant, Vance argues that poets could have used the word sodomy in poetic language (language that is inherently more imaginative) to designate the inappropriate use of language. Vance asserts that Dante expands the term sodomy from a kind of sexual relation to the problematic relationship of an individual to the body politic and language. This move from sodomy as a sexual practice to sodomy as a linguistic practice enables Vance to use Dante’s interest in the political use of language (see *De vulgari eloquentia*) in order to argue that Ser Brunetto Latini remains in Hell because he wrote in a language other than his mother tongue. Although Dante may have disagreed with Brunetto Latini’s use of French in poetry, I take issue with Vance’s metaphorizing of sodomy. André Pézard’s important book on the Canto performs the same kind of metaphorizing. Although sodomy did designate a variety of behaviors in the Middle Ages (non-procreative sexual acts, bestiality, same-sex activity), I argue that Dante’s use of the term refers to sex acts between men, which is made clear when one reads Canto XXVI of *Purgatorio* and Canto XV of the *Inferno* together. Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 230-255. André Pézard, *Dante sous la pluie de feu (Enfer, chant XV)*, (Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1950.)

129 Schibanoff, 121.
that the teachers often fall into this sin.” Boccaccio invokes the medieval anxiety
over the relationship between poetry, pedagogy, and man-boy eroticism. His
comment demonstrates anxiety over the physical proximity of men and boys, and the
erotic content of the texts they were reading together. Ser Brunetto is also implicated
in the homoerotics of pedagogy. Dante intermingles the language of Brunetto’s
_Tesoro_ with _Inferno_ XV and his _Tesoretto_ throughout the _Divine Comedy_.
Holsinger aptly identifies this as “homosocial affinity between pedagogy and
poetics,” arguing that Dante thereby suggests the “inextricability of pedagogy and
desire.” Ganymede is linked to this Canto as a classical figure who would have
been read by schoolboys, and as the paradigmatic literary example of man-boy love,
who functioned as a classical model for the embodied sexual relations that occurred
within these educational settings.

Dante elsewhere invokes Ganymede implicitly when the heteroerotic lustful
shades of _Purgatorio_ Canto XXVI reference Cæsar’s homoerotic proclivities:

_The people who do not come with us offended in that for which Cæsar in his
triump[h] once heard Queen cried out against him; therefore they go off crying
‘Sodom,’ reproving themselves as you have heard, and they help the burning
with their shame. (Purgatorio_ XXVI.76-81)_

The shades here reference Cæsar’s same-sex relations with Nicomedes, the conquered
King of Bithynia. This reference comes from Suetonius’ _Vitae Cesarium_, a history of
the Cæsars, in which the author claims that the “stain on [Julius Cæsar’s] reputation
for chastity…” is:

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130 Boccaccio, _Comento_, quoted in Singleton, _Inferno: 2. Commentary_, 269-270.
131 Holsinger, 249.
132 Holsinger, 249.
intimacy (*contubernium*) with King Nicomedes: At this time… one Octavius, a man whose disordered mind made him somewhat free with his tongue, after saluting Pompey as “king” in a crowded assembly, greeted Cæsar as “queen.” But Gaius Memmius makes the direct charge that [Cæsar] acted as cupbearer (*cyathum et vinum*) to Nicomedes with the rest of his wantons at a large dinner-party (1:49).\(^{133}\)

Suetonius asserts Cæsar’s passive sexual positioning in relation to his partner Nicomedes. By telling the reader that Ocatvius’ mind is “disordered,” he alerts the reader to be both skeptical *and* to trust his accusation against Cæsar, because a man of disordered mind both recognizes and blabs about disordered sexuality more readily. By greeting Cæsar as “queen,” Octavius links same-sex intimacy to gender inversion. Suetonius indirectly links Cæsar to Ganymede by citing Gaius Memmius’ charge that Cæsar, like Ganymede, “acted as cupbearer.” This gesture infantilizes, effeminizes, and renders Cæsar a passive subject. It also suggests that the term “cupbearer” had by then become synonymous with a boy used for sex.\(^{134}\) Dante’s implicit reference to Cæsar as a Ganymede-like figure in *Purgatorio* positions man-boy love as a fundamental element of empire, pedagogy, and Christian religious experience, a daring gesture insofar as Dante held enormous respect for Cæsar, placing his murderers deep in the *Inferno*.

Dante’s identification with Ganymede is thus queer, as the figure’s queer eroticism exceeds the intentions of the poet. Later artists, notably Chaucer and

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\(^{134}\) Dante’s shades may likewise reference another version of the story found in John of Salisbury, who was bishop at Chartres from 1176 to his death in 1180. He participated in the Third Lateran Council of 1179, which produced the edict detailing the Church’s official stance on same-sex practices. In *Policraticus*, he writes, “Nichomede, King of Bythinia, was said to have made Cæsar submit to his desires, Cæsar being considerably younger and having been admitted by the King to unusual intimacy.” He emphasizes Cæsar’s youth in relation to the Nichomede, which creates a parallel between this narrative and the story of Ganymede. John of Salisbury, *The Frivolity of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, trans. J.B. Pike (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1938), quoted in Burgwinkle, 25.
Michelangelo, identify Dante’s homoerotic identification with Ganymede and subvert the poet’s use by enfleshing the figure through giving him a human body.

Chaucer’s Resistance to Rapture in “The House of Fame”

Chaucer’s dream vision the “House of Fame” is a parody of Dante’s the Divine Comedy that focuses on his use of Ganymede as a spiritual allegory.135 Chaucer’s representation of the randomness of fame contrasts with Dante’s highly ordered structure of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, which is rooted in divine justice. Chaucer’s classical sources, Ovid and Virgil, present Fame as a wayward figure.136 Chaucer subverts poetic “truth” by demonstrating how it is nothing more than conflicting representations, when he provides Ovid’s and Virgil’s different accounts of the same narrative. Chaucer’s Ganymede plays an important role within this parody of Dante. His representation of rapture focuses on its embodied and physical aspects, which contrast with Dante’s interpretation of Ganymede’s spiritual ascent, while simultaneously calling attention to the homoeroticism that ruptures Dante’s text. The body in the “House of Fame” constitutes a site of resistance to the concepts of poetic flight, mystical experience, and divine knowledge, all of which characterize Dante’s spiritual rapture, while emphasizing Dante’s identification with Ganymede.

Like Dante, Chaucer’s poetic project is invested in developing poetry in the vernacular. Chaucer’s English poetry grows out of French and Italian poetry, which

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136 Lynch, 51.
was more developed, elegant, and beautiful than Chaucer’s English models. Yet the moment during which Chaucer was writing was also the period when English was becoming the common language of “royal, legal, and parliamentary business” while remaining “plastic and responsive” to poetic manipulations of language.

Chaucer probably encountered the poetry of Dante (and Boccaccio) during his travels, which triggered his movement away from courtly poetry inspired by French models. Dante’s vernacular project in the Divine Comedy provided hope for creating English poetry that might match continental standards. Chaucer aims to elevate English poetry by translating Latin literature into his mother tongue, including Virgil’s Aeneid, which he re-writes in Book One.

The “House of Fame,” composed in octosyllabic couplets, is presented in the form of three books. In Book One, Chaucer finds himself in a glass temple filled with visual representations of famous people and mythological figures. He narrates his version Virgil’s Aeneid, paying particular attention to the figure of Dido. This Book expands Chaucer’s theme about the irreconcilability of poetic accounts by exposing differences between Virgil’s and Ovid’s telling of the tale of Dido and Aeneas. In Book Two, he narrates his flight in the sky with an eagle sent by Jupiter. Finally, Book Three narrates Chaucer’s experience in the House of Fame, and it describes the

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137 Wallace notes that the English language during Chaucer’s time was less developed than Italian or French. Furthermore, it did not have English poetic models, nor did it have much potential to influence continental poetry. David Wallace, “Chaucer’s Italian inheritance,” in The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer, 2nd ed., ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.
138 Wallace, 37.
139 Chaucer traveled to Italy three times: Milan in 1368, Genoa and Florence in 1372-3, and Milan in 1378. The last visit is documented, and the poet made this trip in the capacity of controller of customs. Schibanoff, 101.
140 Wallace, 40.
141 Schibanoff, 159-161.
The poem ends unfinished at 2158 lines. My analysis focuses on the eagle episode in Book Two, and in particular on Chaucer’s resistance to Dantesque rapture and identification with Ganymede.

An eagle with “fethres as of golde” (2.530) captures Chaucer in Book Two of the “House of Fame” and carries him into the sky. Chaucer’s fear elevates as they climb higher into the air, the province of Juno. This mythological figure signifies fame and victory, which are central themes of Chaucer’s poem. As mentioned above, Juno was opposed to Ganymede on account of his replacement of Hebe and his Trojan origins. Unlike Ovid and Dante, Chaucer does not represent his abduction as a scene of ravishment; rather, he evokes a terrifying image of hunter and prey.

Chaucer writes,

And with his grim pawes stronge,
Within his sharpe nailes longe,
Me, fleinge in a swappe he hente,
And with his sours ageyn up wente,
As lightly as I were a larke, (2.541-546)

In this scene of abduction, Chaucer emphasizes the eagle’s claws and nails, which render the experience of abduction painful. The harsh physicality of this scene likewise functions as an implicit critique of Dante’s poetic rapture. Chaucer parodies the perfect match between eagle and man that Dante describes in his Ganymede scene. The eagle reassures Chaucer of his safety and says, “Be ful assured, boldly, I am thy frend” (2.581-582). Schibanoff argues that the term “friend” is suggestive of the eagle’s homoerotic signification, and that it is not a symbol for spiritual

142 Chance, 60.
143 Chance understands this rapture as “the flight of poetic fancy,” and she suggests that the eagle may metonymize flight or synecdochize air. Chance, 60.
transcendence.¹⁴⁴ This claim is significant because it opposes the critical tradition of interpreting Chaucer’s eagle as “Thought” that has been in place since the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁵ My own reading, building on Schibanoff’s analysis, likewise queers both Dante’s and Chaucer’s eagles by elucidating the experience of embodied rapture that is suggested in these texts.

Virgil’s ekphrastic representation of Ganymede in the *Aeneid* informs Chaucer’s version of the episode because Chaucer’s Jupiter, like Virgil’s, commands the eagle, rather than metamorphosing into him, reducing the abduction’s homoerotic charge. If Book One of the “House of Fame” can be understood as Chaucer’s attempt at translating the *Aeneid* into the English vernacular, his Virgilian Ganymede is implicated in this process of translation.¹⁴⁶ The eagle explains to Chaucer:

First, I that in my feet have thee,
Of which thou hast a fere and wonder,
Am dwelling with the god of thonder,
Which that men callen Jupiter,
That dooth me flee ful ofte fer
To do al his comaundement. (2.606-611)

Jupiter commands the eagle to transport Chaucer to the House of Fame as a reward for the poet’s service to the gods. Jupiter pities Chaucer’s hermetic lifestyle, and therefore grants him this experience. Yet Chaucer claims to prefer reading and lived experience to the divine knowledge that he might gain from spiritual flight. By refusing identification with Ganymede, Chaucer resists the experience of Dantesque rapture.

¹⁴⁴ Schibanoff, 158.
¹⁴⁵ Chaucer’s eagle does not recall the eagle as symbol of thought, intellect, or Word in medieval exegesis. Schibanoff, 152, 158.
¹⁴⁶ Schibanoff, 160.
Intending to calm the anxious poet, the rather long-winded, insipid, and confused eagle says to him, “Seynte Marie, Thou art noyous for to carie,” (2.573-574), suggesting that Chaucer’s corpulent body impedes their rapturous ascent. He does not metamorphose into the light lark that he imagines himself as earlier in the poem, as quoted above, when the eagle abducts him. Flying towards the stars, Chaucer ruminates,

“O God,” thoughte I, “that madest kinde,
Shal I noon other weyes dye?
Wher Joves wol me stellifye,
Or what thing may this signifye?
I neither am Enok, ne Elye,
Ne Romulus, ne Ganymede
That was y-bore up, as men rede,
To hevene with Daun Jupiter
And made the goddess boteler.” (2.584-592)

Seeing the stars, Chaucer fears that Jupiter will stellify him as he stellified Ganymede as Aquarius. Of the four figures listed, however, stellification is unique to the figure of Ganymede. This anxiety over stellification signifies that Chaucer understands the eagle to be a homoerotic figure who might rape him. Although stellification would lead to eternal fame (the subject of this poem), Chaucer does not desire to become immortalized as Jupiter’s “boteler,” a term that calls attention to itself through its substitution for the more traditional “cupbearer,” and that has strong homoerotic resonances through its evocation of “butt” or “buttocks.” The men that Chaucer lists (Enoch, Elijah, Romulus, and Ganymede) were stellified, deified, or ascended to heaven. These men come from different traditions, including the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, and pagan literature. With the exception of Ganymede, they were all understood to pre-figure Christianity (i.e. Enoch and Elijah were figures of Christ,

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147 Chance, 61.
and Romulus founded Rome, which pre-figured the Roman Church). By insisting his difference from these men, Chaucer resists pre-figuring another tradition, as well as being among the gods.

Chaucer subverts the privileging of spiritual rapture by articulating the body’s resistance to such transport. Chaucer’s reasons for not identifying with the figure of Ganymede concern his own body: he is fat, old, and has human limitations, such as poor eyesight. When Jupiter’s eagle asks if Chaucer will learn from this experience, he responds: “Nay, certeynly,” quod I, “right nought.” / “And why?” “For I am now too old” (2.994-995). Unlike Dante’s Ganymede who is ostensibly abstracted from embodiment, Chaucer’s dream state emphasizes physical sensation and corporeality.148 The eagle encourages Chaucer to see these constellations because they are referenced in the poetry that he reads, including stories of metamorphosis that influence the “House of Fame.” Chaucer responds by saying, “And eek they shynen here so bright, / It shulde shenden al my sight / To look on hem” (2.1015-1017). Once again, Chaucer refuses unmediated experience in favor of the knowledge of stars to be found in books. He claims that the stars’ brightness could blind him. His limited eyesight also eclipses the apprehension of beauty, which is the cause of Ganymede’s rapture in classical philosophy. Spiritual flight and direct observation through mystical experience are rendered useless to the learned and solitary poet, who resists these concepts from an intellectual perspective.

Chaucer articulates the myth of Ganymede as one to be read (“That was y-bore up, as men rede”), suggesting that all experience is mediated through

148 Chance, 63.
representation. Such poetic representation is also not authoritative, as he articulates earlier in the different accounts of Ovid and Virgil. Unlike Dante, who likens his spiritual ascent to Ganymede’s rapturous transport, Chaucer positions Ganymede as a foil for what the poet is not. He locates rapture in the intellectual work of reading, following the movements of metaphor as it travels across semantic meanings, rather than in spiritual transport and translation.

Chaucer’s version of the Ganymede myth suggests that embodied knowledge is the only form of valid knowledge. A learned poet with a hermetic lifestyle, he insists that he will gain knowledge through reading rather than an experience of divine rapture or dream vision. Scholarly knowledge is gained through the bodily practice of reading, as the eagle points out:

And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another booke
Til fully daswed [dazed] is thy looke
And livest thus as an hermyte
Although thyn abstinence is lyte. (2.656-660)

Chaucer’s avid reading exhausts his body and renders him speechless. Yet, unlike the hermit, Chaucer’s “abstinence is lyte,” suggesting that he indulges his bodily appetites. As usual, Chaucer the poet is a non-sexual being. Since he is not an ascetic figure, he does not fit within the model of previous medieval religious authors, and his reading of Ganymede therefore resists the transcendence of the body and ascent to spiritual knowledge. Chaucer mocks Dante’s spiritual vision in Paradise as well as his homoerotic rapture through the figure of the “boteler.” Chaucer’s secularization of Ganymede, which focuses on embodiment, makes way for English Renaissance poets, who pick up this in order to explore embodied, homoerotic rapture. He is thus a
bridge between the authors of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the period I analyze in the next chapter.
III
Gifting Ganymede

Scruter veut dire fouiller : je fouille le corps de l’autre, comme si je voulais voir ce qu’il y a dedans…
—Barthes, Fragments d’un discours amoureux

The term “catamite” entered the English language during the Renaissance as a corrupt form of “Ganymede” to designate boys hired for male same-sex activity, and the passive sexual partner. Yet early definitions of the term, such as Thomas Cooper’s 1565 definition, do not explicitly refer to sodomy. The Renaissance language of sodomy was itself vague, evoking a plurality of meanings, including any form of non-procreative sex, allowing authors to use it to designate a broad sense of sexual aberration and sin. Bredbeck aligns the use of the term “sodomy” with the Renaissance rhetorical device of synecdoche because it designates a plurality of meanings with a single term. The term “Ganymede” functioned in a similar by designating “a boy ‘loved for carnal abuse,’” and a “lover,” as well as sodomy, debauchery, and vice more generally, thus rendering the mythological Ganymede a robust figure for the drama and poetry of Christopher Marlowe, whose works are

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149 “To scrutinize means to search: I search the other’s body, as if I wanted to see what was inside…” Translation my own. Roland Barthes, Fragments d’un discours amoureux, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977) 85.
150 OED, s.v. “catamite, n.”
151 Thomas Cooper’s 1565 Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae defines “Catamitus” as “A boye abused contrary to nature.” The term “catamite” thus had negative connotations of abuse, unlike the more neutral term “ganymede” (now spelled with a lower-case “g” to signal its metamorphosis into a common, rather than a proper, noun), which signified a boy lover who maintained agency in his sexual relations. Although Cooper’s definition suggests “unnatural” sexuality, it does not explicitly refer to sodomy. Gregory W. Bredbeck, Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 18.
152 Bredbeck, 11.
153 Bredbeck, 13.
154 Bredbeck, 18.
suggestive of sodomy, particularly in moments of Ganymede’s social and political transgressions. Ganymede appears in episodes of rapture in “Hero and Leander” (1593), Dido, Queen of Carthage (1585-86), and Edward II (1592). Sodomy looms in Marlowe’s Ganymede scenes, suggesting its presence in textual transgression that include ruptures in poetic form and plot-lines figuring sexual abduction, social mobility, and other boundary crossings. This chapter analyzes the various forms of rapture at play in Marlowe’s work, examining the transgressive character of unbounded and transportive eroticism.

Beauty as the Cause of Rapture in “Hero and Leander”

Marlowe’s “Hero and Leander” is classified as an epyllion, a genre of poem that first appeared in 1589. An epyllion is characterized by a mythological (usually Ovidian) love episode, a personalizing and localizing of scene and situation, a lover’s complaint, a catalogue of beauties, a male or female wooer, metamorphoses, and long digressions. Poets who experimented with the genre epyllion participated in the contemporary defense of poetry against its critics. Elizabeth Story Donno argues that the epyllion’s “ornamentation, the verbal flourishes, the wit and virtuosity should be recognized” as attempts to persuade the reader of the pleasures of the text. Such verbal ornamentation produces desire through poetic language, and between the text

157 The first epyllion was Thomas Lodge’s Scillaes Metamorphosis, (1589). Donno, 57.
158 Donno, 63.
159 These defenders of poetry, such as Sir Philip Sidney’s In Defence of Poesie published in 1595, created an ideology out of which the epyllion could develop. Donno, 59.
160 Donno, 59.
and reader. In “Hero and Leander,” this rhetorical force is particularly pronounced in Marlowe’s poetic descriptions of the lovers’ bodies. Leander’s beautiful physique, figured through the poetic device of the blazon, induces Neptune’s desire to ravish him. More than Marlowe’s other works, this poem explores the Platonic concept of how this Ganymede-like figure’s beauty is the cause of rapture.

Marlowe’s poem is based on versions of the myth recounted by the late classical poet Musaeus, and in Ovid’s *Heroides*, but the scene of rapture between Neptune and Leander is purely Marlowe’s invention: borrowing elements of the Ganymede myth, it renders this moment, which ruptures the poem’s narrative, deeply (homo)erotic.¹⁶¹ This invented scene constitutes the central episode of the poem, subverting earlier heteroerotic articulations of the myth.¹⁶² Marlowe’s Hero is a beautiful “nun of Venus” who lives in Sestos. Across the Hellespont lives Leander of Abydos. Leander’s beauty attracts mortals and immortals, gods and goddesses, alike. Leander uses sophistry and rhetoric to persuade Hero to sleep with him, arguing that a nun of Venus should engage in love and sexuality rather than chastity, and that honor is won through (erotic) action rather than virginity. The two lovers spend an initial night together, but do not consummate their love because of the youth’s naïveté and Hero’s attachment to her virginity. When Leander next attempts to swim across the strait to visit Hero, he is prevented by Neptune. It is here that Marlowe draws on the Ganymede myth in his fantasy of Leander’s abduction by Neptune. Mistaking Leander for the amorous Ganymede, the sea-god seizes him, and takes him to his

¹⁶¹ Orgel, xiv.
¹⁶² The poem was published posthumously in 1598 following the addition of four sestiads by George Chapman. Although the earliest additions of the poem are dated at 1598, scholars speculate that a manuscript circulated between 1593 and 1598. Donno, 64.
underwater palace. The text is ruptured at this point by pure passion, and the poetry takes flight, becoming buoyant and saturated with erotic excitement. Upon the god’s eventual release of the youth, Leander swims to Hero’s tower, where the two lovers consummate their love. As dawn comes, however, the scene of their lovemaking is weighted down with images of money and shame. The poem ends unfinished, with this dark, unsettling episode of heteroerotic love.

Marlowe’s depiction of Leander’s beauty and his abduction by Neptune embellishes on Ovid’s account of the tale, in which the god burns for desire, presumably because of the boy’s beauty. In contrast to his emphasis on clothing and accessories in his description of Hero (“The outside of her garments were of lawne, / The lining purple silke, with guilt starres drawne; / Her wide sleeves greene, and bordered with a grove” [I. 9-11]), Marlowe’s blazoning of Leander notably depicts his beautiful body as unadorned, in need of no supplement:

His bodie was as straight as Circes wand,
Jove might have sipt out Nectar from his hand.
Even as delicious meat is to the taste,
So was his necke in touching, and surpast
The white of Pelops shoulder. I could tell ye,
How smooth his brest was, and how white his bellie,
And whose immortall fingers did imprint,
That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,
That runs along his backe, but my rude pen,
Can hardly blazon foorth the loves of men,
Much lesse of powerful gods. (I.61-71)

In describing the attributes of Leander’s body, Marlowe conjures his eroticized presence in the poem. Indeed, the erotic language of this passage is so heightened that it inspires the narrator to rupture the scene he is describing with his own expression of homoerotic desire. This rupture in the poem’s narrative is also marked by a poetic
caesura or disruption in meter (before “I could tell ye, / How smooth his brest was”), further drawing attention to the narrator’s voyeuristic presence. The narrator admits that he is not the author/creator of Leander’s body; rather, the gods created his physical form, adorning it with a path leading to Leander’s buttocks. The narrator here constructs Leander/Ganymede’s body as a homoerotic object of desire that is not only to be gazed at, but touched and tasted: “Even as delicious meat is to the taste / So was his neck in touching”; “immortal fingers did imprint, / That heavenly path, with many a curious dint.” These lines are remarkable for their tactility, recalling Ovid’s Ganymede passage, in which the poet heightens the experience of taste, touch, sound, and sight. The narrator here imagines his own presence in the scene, tasting and touching Ganymede, as well as knowing the precise hue of his belly.

The narrator interrupts the poem yet again with a poetic caesura (before “but my rude pen”) to inform the reader that he lacks the ability to accurately describe Leander’s great beauty. He simultaneously chastises himself for his rudeness in interrupting the poem with his own erotic reverie. The narrator’s experience of Leander/Ganymede’s body exceeds his powers of poetic description. The narrator’s dwelling on the creation of Leander’s body by immortal fingers recalls yet another Ganymede referent, in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (cited in my epigraph at the beginning of this thesis), where Socrates maintains that Ganymede’s beauty is a reminder of the absolute truth that one glimpses in the heavens:

…then the fountain of that stream which Zeus, when he was in love with Ganymede, called “desire” flows copiously upon the lover; and some of it flows into him, and some, when he is filled, overflows outside; and just as the wind or an echo rebounds from smooth, hard surfaces and returns whence it came, so the stream of beauty passes back into the beautiful one through the eyes, the natural inlet of the soul, where it reanimates the passages of the
feathers, waters them and makes the feathers begin to grow, filling the soul of
the loved one with love.\(^{163}\) (Plato \textit{Phaedrus} 36c-d)

Marlowe’s poem bears traces of neo-Platonic influence, not only in his representation
of the experience of beauty and its ability to inspire rapture (i.e., the “overflowing” of
desire), but in the tactility through which this experience is described (i.e., lubricating
the “feathers” of the soul).

Marlowe constructs the physical body of Leander by weaving together
allusions to classical mythology and philosophy that are in turn inspired by the figure
of Ganymede, rendering it a site of beauty, wonder, and mutability. These allusions
also challenge the integrity of the male body by transferring onto it elements
associated with femininity in the Renaissance. The metaphorical yoking together of
Leander and Circes, the mythological enchantress of Aenea, transfers her magical
powers of seduction and transformation to Leander/Ganymede. This suggests that his
body has the power to seduce men and transform them through lust, as it does in the
episode with Neptune. The homoerotic reference to Jove sipping nectar from his hand
positions Leander as an avatar of Ganymede, foreshadowing his later abduction. The
emphasis on Leander’s smooth, white skin, untainted by age or experience (e.g. the
growth of body hair, sun damage, etc.), is echoed in a later passage in which Neptune,
in an attempt to seduce Leander, tells him the story of a shepherd and his “faire” boy
lover. In the Renaissance, “faire” connoted several, mutually-reinforcing meanings,
including beauty, female or effeminate sexual purity, and light complexion.\(^{164}\)

\(^{163}\) Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, The Loeb Classical Library, (1914; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
\(^{164}\) OED, s.v. “fair, adj.”
Although most often used to describe women, the term also appears in poetic blazonings of youthful male lovers, as in Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

The reference to Pelops’s shoulder in the blazoning of Leander likewise underscores his fairness. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Pelops’s body is reconstructed by the gods following his dismemberment by his father Tantalus. Because “one part was lacking where the neck and the upper arm unite” (6.409-410), the gods reconstruct his body using a piece of ivory to replace the missing shoulder. The reference to Pelops’s shoulder draws attention to Marlowe’s poetic practice of cutting Leander’s body into pieces. As Bredbeck argues, Leander is “a masculine body anatomized and substantiated through the typically feminine rhetoric of the Renaissance blazon.” Marlowe’s application of this rhetoric to Leander subverts the integrity of the male body and calls traditional gender schemas into question by representing the masculine body in terms ordinarily associated with female beauty. Bredbeck argues that Marlowe figures the blazon as a “ready-made matrix” that can be applied to subjects of any gender. The blazon directs the reader’s gaze upon Leander’s intimate body parts, viewed from the perspective of the (presumptively male) narrator, thus rendering him a homoerotic object of desire.

The particular body parts emphasized in the poem are likewise suggestive of gender mutability. Thus, for example, Marlowe’s description of Leander’s hair draws

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166 Bredbeck, 113.
167 Bredbeck, 113.
168 Bredbeck, 113.
on a much larger discourse on hair in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,\textsuperscript{169} which viewed long hair as a sign of femininity:

\begin{quote}
His dangling tresses that were never shorne,
Had they beene cut and unto Colchos borne,
Would have allur’d the ven’rous youth of Greece,
To hazard more, than for the golden Fleece. (I.55-58)
\end{quote}

Leander’s tresses are here rendered a homoerotic object of desire for which the “ven’rous youth of Greece” would brave danger to possess. The etymology of the word “tresse” reveals that it usually refers to the hair of women. The OED defines “tress” as “A plait or braid of the hair of the head, usually of a woman” or “A long lock of hair (esp. that of a woman), without any sense of its being plaited or braided.”\textsuperscript{170} This etymology reflects a broader cultural discourse in which long hair was understood to be natural on women, and short hair on men (“natural” here referring to Biblical authority); and when men allowed their hair to grow long they were rendered effeminate, if not metamorphosed into hermaphrodites.\textsuperscript{171} The latter phenomenon is described in Thomas Wall’s \textit{A Spiritual Armour to Defend the Head from a Superfluity of Naughtiness}, published in 1688, which claims that men who wear “a womanish length of hair” will become “hermaphrodites” with “the faces of men, and . . . the hair of women.”\textsuperscript{172} Marlowe similarly associates Leander’s effeminate beauty with Hermaphroditism when he describes Hero’s aggressive embrace of Leander’s body: “Therefore unto him hastily she goes, / And like light Salmacis, her body throes / Upon his bosome” (II.45-47). His reference here is to

\textsuperscript{169} Will Fisher, \textit{Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{170} OED, s.v. “tress,” 1a and 1b.

\textsuperscript{171} Fisher, 131 and 139.

\textsuperscript{172} Thomas Wall, \textit{A Spiritual Armour to Defend the Head from a Superfluity of Naughtiness}, (London, 1688), 31, quoted in Fisher, 135.
Ovid’s lonely nymph Salamacis, who, smitten with Hermaphroditus’s beauty, seizes him in the clear pond in which he bathes. She clings to his body so tightly that her body and his fuse into one of intermediate sex. When Marlowe compares Hero’s embrace of Leander to that of Salamacis, he thus suggests that Leander’s body is mutable and of an indeterminate sex, even in the “natural” mode of heterosexual coitus. In a similar vein, we might read Leander’s “dangling tresses that were never shorne” as simultaneously phallic and feminine. Leander’s young body is something singular and stunning that troubles rigid categorizations of the masculine body.

The rapture of Leander/Ganymede in Marlowe’s poem is cast as primarily physical. Unlike medieval articulations of the myth, which abstract or elide the body of Ganymede, Marlowe emphasizes the embodied, and deeply erotic, experience of rapture and uses Ovid as a vehicle for depicting the gendering of the body, and of desire, as mutable. When Neptune, the brother of Jupiter, mistakes Leander, as he swims across the Hellespont, for Ganymede, he does so

Imagining, that Ganimed displeas’d,
Had left the heavens, therefore on him hee seaz’d.
Leander striv’d, the waves about him wound,
And puld him to the bottome, where the ground
Was strewd with pearle… (II.157-161)

Neptune’s abduction of Leander/Ganymede is here clearly prompted by homoerotic desire, and transports the reader into a realm of sublimely embodied, rather than spiritual, rapture. Marlowe inverts the classic narrative of rapture by transferring Leander/Ganymede from the heavens to the sea, in a downward movement, reversing the upward trajectory of the eagle in Ovid.
Marlowe’s depiction of Neptune’s encounter with Leander/Ganymede imagines the event as a violent, erotic, and sublime rapture—for the sea-god and narrator (and by extension, the reader), if not for the youth himself. In Neptune’s “azure palace” (II.165), the god possesses Ganymede:

The lustie god imbrast him, cald him love,
And swore he never should returne to Jove.
But when he knew it was not Ganimed,
For under water he was almost dead,
He heav’d him up, and looking on his face,
Beat downe the bold waves with his triple mace,
Which mounted up, intending to have kist him,
And fell in drops like teares, because they mist him. (II.167-174)

In Marlowe’s imagining of Ganymede’s ravishment, the sea god is able to engulf, encompass, and caress Leander’s body without his consent because Neptune is the water that surrounds and caresses him. Marlowe figures Neptune as an all-encompassing and “lustie” sea that touches every surface and orifice of Leander’s body as he swims. This violent rapture approaches its limit when Leander comes close to death because his mortal body (and human sexuality) cannot endure the rapture of the god. Whereas the Ganymede of mythology was made immortal upon his translation to Mount Olympus, thus foreclosing the possibility of death, Marlowe here emphasizes Leander’s mortality and embodiment; it is within the experience of rapture that the youth approaches death. In response to Leander’s condition, Neptune releases him and heaves him to the surface of the water.

As noted above, Marlowe figures Neptune as both a deity who protects Leander from the waves, and as the engulfing medium of the water itself. The water/Neptune falls upon his body like tears because they “mist” him. Marlowe uses the verb “mist” to signify Neptune’s insatiable desire for Leander/Ganymede, but the
spelling of the verb is also suggestive of the noun “mist,” which denotes “A natural phenomenon consisting of a diffuse cloud of fine water droplets suspended in the atmosphere on or near the ground so as to limit visibility.”173 Neptune’s diffused body of condensed “fine water droplets” is able to caress Leander’s body, while himself remaining invisible in his unboundedness. Neptune’s “mist” further recalls another Ovidian rapture: Jupiter’s ravishment of Danae, in which he metamorphoses into a shower of golden rain in order to rape her.174 Marlowe here draws on Ovid to express the mutability of bodies and desires, as well as an experience of rapture that is at once embodied, deeply erotic, and transportative. The liquid form of Neptune in the poem allows Marlowe to evade the violence of rape, which would call Leander’s agency into question. Leander asserts agency in this poem, as discussed below, while simultaneously being objectified by Neptune, thus troubling the division between subject and object in this episode.

Elizabeth Story Donno claims that the “informing principle of Marlowe’s poem is “an energetic movement in one direction followed by an equally energetic countermovement” which results in “a sense of equipoise.”175 The rhyming couplets create a quick forward movement in the poem, while the stopping of the sentence or meaning after each two lines slows the movement down.176 The following two examples come from the heteroerotic scenes towards the end of the second sestiad, which demonstrate the metrical regularity with which Marlowe renders their love:

Herewith afrighted Hero shrunke away,
And in her luke-warme place Leander lay. (II.253-254)

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173 OED, s.v. “mist n.” 1a.
174 Ovid, Metamorphoses, 4.611, 6.113, 11.117.
175 Donno, 64.
176 Donno, 64-65.
And everie kisse to her was as a charme,
And to *Leander* as a fresh alarming. (II.283-284)

In both of these examples, of which there are many, the couplet is a complete sentence that communicates a self-contained idea. Unlike these passages, however, the episode depicting Leander/Ganymede’s abduction overflows from line to line, breaching the boundaries of form through enjambment. This quickens the rhythm of the scene, heightening the poetic rendering of the god’s rapture:

> The god put *Helles* bracelet on his arme,
> And swore the sea should never doe him harme.
> He clapt his plume cheeks, with his tresses playd,
> And smiling wantonly, his love bewrayd.
> He watcht his armes, and as they opend wide,
> At every stroke, betwixt them would he slide,
> And stealle a kisse, and then run out and daunce,
> And as he turnd, cast many a lustful glaunce,
> And throw him gawdie toies to please his eie,
> And dive into the water, and there prie
> Upon his brest, his thighs, and everie lim,
> And up againe, and close beside him swim,
> And talke of love: *Leander* made replie,
> You are deceav’d I am no woman I. (II.179-192)

This passage is remarkable for the beauty of its language, which is buoyant, blissful, breathless, and ecstatic. The repetition of the word “And” at the beginning of several lines uses anaphora, or the repetition of a word in successive clauses, to drive the rhythm of the poem and carry the reader away in multiple directions, as each new “And” launches a new movement and new action performed on Leander/Ganymede. This passage aligns our view that of Neptune, who seems to be the subject of rapture in this poem. However, Leander’s reply stops the rhythm of the passage abruptly, through his succinct “I am no woman I.” The repetition of “I” serves to punctuate the overflow of Neptune’s desire. He does not share in Neptune’s rapture, thus asserting
his agency through refusal. Leander is naïve and understands Neptune’s desire for
him as a confused heteroeroticism that has chosen the wrong object. As discussed
earlier, queer rapture blurs the boundary between subject/object and
homoerotic/heteroerotic, rendering the question of agency indeterminable.

The poetics of movement and countermovement, release and recall, and give
and take, that shape the form and content of “Hero and Leander” are also echoed in
the gift-giving in which the Neptune episode culminates. Neptune gives Leander not
only promises and caresses, but material gifts, including “Helles bracelet,” and other
“gawdie toies.” Gift-giving binds Leander to Neptune because his gifts incur a debt
that Leander must repay. Marlowe concludes the homoerotic rupture/rapture of the
Neptune episode with the following commentary on the gift:

Wherefore Leanders fancie to surprise,
To the rich Ocean for gifts he flies.
’Tis wisedome to give much, a gift prevaiies,
When deepe perswading Oratorie failes. (II.223-226)

Following the erotic lines of Neptune’s seduction and treatment of Leander, this
passage suggests that Neptune gives Leander gifts to solicit sexual favors from him.
The patron figure (Neptune) secures the “ganymede’s” (Leander) commitment to him
through the economy of gift-giving. Like the experience of rapture, gift-giving binds
them in an unstable relationship, obligating both to give themselves over to an
economy of unending, unbounded movement, like the sea.

The Erotic Gift and Infinite Debt in Dido, Queen of Carthage

Marlowe elaborates on the homoerotic poetics of the gift in Dido, Queen of
Carthage (1585-86) by staging an economy of gift-giving that involves touching,
gestures, promises, and material objects. In this *Aeneid*-inspired play, Marlowe again includes an invented Ganymede scene that is not found in Virgil’s text. The boy-actors of the Children of the Queen’s Chapel performed the play, rendering the Ganymede scene particularly erotic.177 A contemporary Renaissance text, *The Children of the Chapel Stripped and Whipped* (1569), satirized the eroticism of the plays performed by this company, complaining that: “youths profane the Lord’s day by lascivious writhing of their tender limbs, and gorgeous decking of their apparel, in feigning bawdy fables gathered from the idolatrous heathen poets.”178 This passage expresses not only antipathy toward the eroticized bodies of boy-actors, echoing anti-theatricalist views that will be expanded upon below, but also toward the effeminate, luxury attires and objects staged in the private, indoor theaters in which the children’s companies performed. The luxury objects gifted in the play attest to the high production values of the Children of the Chapel company.179 It further underscores the way in which material objects, the exchange of touches, and gifts are suggestive of a rapturous transport (albeit in negative terms), a nexus that will be central to my analysis below.

Critics have traditionally dismissed the opening of the scene of gift-giving between Jupiter and Ganymede, perhaps because of its explicit homoerotic content. The work of Shepherd and Goldberg—two critics who have taken the opening scene of *Dido* seriously—locate it in relation to the larger economy of gender relations in the play, such as the later scenes of gift-giving between Dido and Aeneas, in which

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177 Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey, introduction to *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, by Christopher Marlowe, xiv.
178 Quoted in Orgel, xiv. No further bibliographic information, as the original document is now lost.
179 Romany and Lindsey, 565.
objects are fetishized and expressive of gender relations and power.\textsuperscript{180} My analysis of \textit{Dido} focuses exclusively on the opening Ganymede scene, arguing that Marlowe translates the rapture of Ganymede onto the stage through the symbolic act of gift-giving.

Homoeroticism vibrates in the first stage directions and lines of the play, in which the first “gift” given is that of touch and gesture. The opening stage directions read: “Here the curtains drawn; there is discovered Jupiter dandling Ganymede upon his knee, and Mercury lying asleep” (1.1.1 s.d.). The verb “dandle” means to “To move (a child, etc.) lightly up and down in the arms or on the knee” or to “To trifle, play, or toy with,”\textsuperscript{181} and contains clearly erotic connotations. Dramatic form here allows Marlowe to use embodied gesture as a means of theatricalizing eroticism. At a later moment, Ganymede offers a hundred hugs to Jupiter, suggesting that touch and flesh constitute gifts just as much as material objects do.

The dialogue between Jupiter and Ganymede conveys homoerotic desire through expressions of love, beauty, and the offering of gifts. Jupiter speaks the first lines of the play: “Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me: / I love thee well, say Juno what she will” (1.1.1-2). These first lines recall Marlowe’s pastoral poem “The Passionate Shepherd to his Love,” which begins with the shepherd’s invitation, “Come live with me, and be my love,” and continues with his offering of luxurious

\textsuperscript{180} Simulations of the opening scene include the gift-giving of Dido and Aeneas, the adult-boy love relations throughout the play (Dido and Cupid as Ascanius, Nurse and Cupid), the various fetishized objects exchanged between lovers (the jewels, clothing, and wedding ring that Dido gives to Aeneas), and representations of male/female relationships. Simon Shepherd, \textit{Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre}, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 193-195. Jonathan Goldberg, \textit{Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities}, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{181} OED, s.v. “dandle, v.” 1a and 3.
gifts, pleasures, and delights to his beloved.\textsuperscript{182} Jupiter’s invitation to Ganymede to come “play” recalls the movement of Ganymedean rapture, in which the ravisher takes the ravished subject, who is carried away or transported by the event. Although significantly less excited than the poetic language of rapture in “Hero and Leander,” the demand to come and “dandling” of Ganymede are nonetheless suggestive of an invitation to rapture.

The ensuing verbal exchange between Jupiter and Ganymede concerns Juno’s abuse of Ganymede, who whines that the goddess hit him while he was filling Jupiter’s cup, causing him to bleed. Jupiter expresses great indignation at Juno’s actions:

\begin{quote}
I vow, if she but once frown on thee more,
To hang her meteor-like ’twixt heaven and earth
And bind her hand and foot with golden cords (1.1.12-14)
\end{quote}

Jupiter’s performative utterance “I vow” is part of the gift-economy, introducing the category of the promise into the nexus of gift exchange. It is offered as something that will appease the youth, make him feel beloved, and position him above Juno.

Ganymede responds,

\begin{quote}
Sweet Jupiter, if e’er I pleased thine eye,
Or seemed fair, walled-in with eagle’s wings,
Grace my immortal beauty with this boon,
And I will spend my time in thy bright arms. (1.1.19-22)
\end{quote}

Ganymede points to his beauty as the cause of Jupiter’s vow/gift, and invokes the language of capture by recalling his state of being “walled-in with eagle’s wings” during his abduction. This line is suggestive of Ganymede’s submission to Jupiter, who maintains the power to keep him in his possession. Ganymede quickly invokes

his obligation to give back by offering to surrender his body to Jupiter’s “bright arms” upon the fulfillment of Jupiter’s promise. This passage demonstrates the way in which, according to Marcel Mauss, gift-giving includes the obligation to give, to receive the gift, and to give back something of equal or greater value. Ganymede’s erotic gift must then equal or exceed the value of the promissory gift offered by Jupiter.

The episode of gift-giving between Jupiter and Ganymede is suggestive of unbounded eroticism, an active giving over to the event, and the unstable power relations to which the gift gives material or symbolic form. Marlowe here literalizes or materializes the erotic relay found in “Hero and Leander,” through the economy of the gift and patronage relation. The discovery of Ganymede in Jupiter’s arms at the start of the play as the curtain at the rear of the stage is drawn reveals a dyad imbued with Ovidian eroticism. This staging of gifts and touches must be understood against the backdrop of Renaissance patronage and prostitution, as implicated in networks of economy and power, even as it suggests an experience beyond these limits. Gift-exchange in Dido is suggestive of the unbounded eroticism found in Neptune’s encounter with Leander, and of an even more active giving over to the experience of rapture.

Jupiter offers Ganymede gifts of the immortals that are saturated in magical properties. These objects are themselves saturated, as Shepherd maintains, in “private

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183 Jean-Luc Marion is a French phenomenologist most well known for his concept of the “saturated” phenomenon, of which “the gift” is one example. Marion’s discussion of “the gift,” and particularly the erotic gift, is provocative in that it offers the possibility of escaping the stable paradigm of patronage. Marlowe’s theatrical representation of gift-giving is suggestive of the excessive and “saturated” character of rapture and eroticism. Jupiter and Ganymede give themselves over to unbounded eroticism and rapture through gift-giving. Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, in Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). “On the Gift,” in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism.
and public meanings” and “personal feeling.”

His offering further recollects his rapturous abduction of the youth:

> From Juno’s bird I’ll pluck her spotted pride
> To make thee fans wherewith to cool thy face;
> And Venus’ swans shall shed their silver down
> To sweeten out the slumbers of thy bed;
> Hermes no more shall show the world his wings,
> If that thy fancy in his feathers dwell,
> But, as this one, I’ll tear them all from him,
> [Plucks feather]
> Do thou but say, ‘their colour pleaseth me’. (1.1.34-41)

Jupiter’s language seduces by evoking his power over the other gods. His gifts exceed the value of goods produced by humans and are saturated in magical properties to match the gift of transportive eroticism that Ganymede offers. All feathers, these gifts allude to Jupiter and the rapture by recalling his transformation into an eagle. They likewise recall the feathers of the winged soul in Plato’s description of Ganymede in *Phaedrus*. As the recipient of such gifts, Ganymede gives himself over to a gift economy that is now explicitly evocative of erotic rapture.

The rapturous gift-giving that takes place between Jupiter and Ganymede enables the boy to transgress the Olympian power hierarchy by surpassing Juno as the King’s favorite. Jupiter confides,

> Hold here, my little love! [Gives jewels.] These linkèd gems
> My Juno wore upon her marriage-day,
> Put thou about thy neck, my own sweet heart,
> And trick thy arms and shoulders with my theft. (1.1.42-45)

By giving Ganymede Juno’s wedding-day jewels, he replaces her with the beloved boy and stages a second wedding to him. To “trick” is “to dress, array, attire; to deck,

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184 Shepherd, 195.
prank; to adorn (usually with the notion of artifice),”\textsuperscript{185} drawing attention to the theatricality of their rapturous union. The term also denotes trickery and cheating, which are echoed in Jupiter’s “theft” of the jewels, and call attention to the nature of theater itself as trickery. The illicit nature of their relationship is grounded in the disruption of Jupiter’s marriage to Juno; their gift-giving thus enacts a transgressive disruption of heteroerotic relations. Shepherd argues that the relationship between Jupiter and Ganymede is based on economic gain and shaped by “the interests of masculine social power.”\textsuperscript{186} While Ganymede certainly gains economic profit and increased power through his relationship with Jupiter, however, this reading reduces their relationship to one simply of power, although the text suggests deep erotic and affective ties, expressed through the circuit of gift exchange. This circuit is unending: Ganymede asks for still more gifts, offering hugs in exchange. The economy of the gift-exchange is infinite, always demanding more of its subjects, transporting them into new power dynamics, shifting hierarchies, and unsettling relations. As we shall see, Marlowe’s final Ganymede, found in \textit{Edward II} (1592), likewise transgresses boundaries and hierarchies in the political sphere through a transport enabled by the unbounded circuit of the gift.

The Politics of Rapture in \textit{Edward II}

We have seen how Marlowe’s poetry and drama manipulates the classical myth of Ganymede in order to express the mutability and unboundedness of erotic rapture. \textit{Edward II} troubles the power dynamics between the lovers and suggests,

\textsuperscript{185} OED, s.v. “trick, v.” II.5.a.
\textsuperscript{186} Shepherd, 204.
without ever defining, the overlapping of homosociality, friendship, favoritism, homoeroticism, and sodomy. Court favoritism, for example, is expressed through a homosocial and homoerotic practice of gift-giving. As Mario DiGangi writes, “Although the term ‘ganymede’ might signify in this period any erotically subservient male, it could also be used in the sense most proximate to that of its mythological source: the favorite servant of a king.”187 Yet the Ganymede figure in this play is not fixed as either Edward, the King, or Gaveston, his favorite; rather, the two figures constantly shift between giver and receiver, ravisher and ravished, and active and passive. Since rapture is a movement that destabilizes boundaries between subject/object, active/passive, and self/other, power shifts continually between the participants. Rapture thus enacts transgressions in the political sphere, such as Edward’s imprisonment and murder or Gaveston’s quick ascent to the top of the status hierarchy. The rapturous relation between Edward and Gaveston is thus figured as a transgression of social order and hierarchy, translating rapture into sodomy.

We can see this instability at work in the very first lines of the play, which are spoken by Gaveston, but which are in fact the words of Edward written in a letter to, and read aloud by, his favorite. The King’s letter recalls Gaveston to England from his exile in France, imposed by Edward’s father Longshanks. Gaveston ventriloquizes Edward’s words, “‘My father is deceased; come, Gaveston, / And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend’” (1.1-2). The language of this letter positions Gaveston in close proximity, both politically and physically, to the King as his equal and his “friend”: the kingdom is to be shared. Yet Gaveston’s French descent and low birth

render him a problematic favorite in the view of Edward’s nobles and peers. Stirred by a passion that consumes him, Edward uses his authority to elevate Gaveston’s station above that of the peers, to become a “peer” or equal of the King himself. In so doing, he renders favoritisim subversive, rather than supportive, of the social order.

Later in the same speech he says,

What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston,  
Than live and be the favourite of a king?  
Sweet prince, I come; these, these they amorous lines  
Might have enforced me to have swum from France,  
And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand,  
So thou wouldst smile and take me in thy arms. (1.3-9)

Gaveston’s exuberance at having received this letter is clearly expressed; yet the spectator is unable to fix the precise terms of his relation to Edward. His desire to be the favorite of the King and benefit from patronage, political power, and proximity aligns Gaveston with Ganymede, who likewise benefited from Jupiter’s patronage on Mount Olympus. Yet Gaveston’s comparison of himself to Leander positions the King in the feminized role of Hero, as if the King were his “ganymede” or minion, rather than vice versa. As if this weren’t troubling enough, the speech further unsettles the erotic bond between King and minion by evoking the sexual ambiguities that rupture Marlowe’s “Hero and Leander.” As we have seen, in that poem, Marlowe’s invented Neptune passage renders Leander a homoerotic Ganymede, the object of Neptune’s rapture, while his vigorous pursuit of Hero renders him a heteroerotic figure. Gaveston’s identification with the figure of Leander in the above passage thus troubles any clear reading of his relationship to Edward. One

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consequence of this identification that is consistent throughout the play is Gaveston’s positioning of himself as the receiver of gifts and favors. Just as Leander/Ganymede receives gifts from Neptune, Gaveston receives gifts and titles from Edward. Yet Gaveston’s oscillation between active and passive roles renders Edward’s gifts more than love-tokens or tools of kingly seduction, turning them into vehicles of Gaveston’s own social ascent and ambition.

Edward is depicted as giving himself over rapturously and unrestrainedly to his bodily appetites and desire for Gaveston. At their first meeting upon Gaveston’s return to England, Edward refers to himself as “Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston!” (1.142), suggesting a breakdown of boundaries between self and other. Upon Gaveston’s later banishment by the nobles, Edward similarly says, “Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words. / Thou from this land, I from my self am banished” (4.117-118). The beloved Piers Gaveston can “pierce” Edward with his words, suggesting his ability to insert himself into the King both physically and affectively. Edward’s language demonstrates the degree to which he has given himself over to, and is carried away by, his rapturous desire for Gaveston, having been swept up in the kind of madness that Plato describes in *Phaedrus*. Indeed, Edward expresses a willingness to abandon his wealth, power, and kingdom: “And could my crown’s revenue bring him back, / I would freely give it to his enemies / And think I gained…” (4.309-311). In Act 1, Mortimer Junior calls Edward “a brainsick King” (1.124) for defending Gaveston’s right to remain in the Kingdom. He later says, “The King is love-sick for his minion” (4.87), suggesting that Edward is
mad over and obsessed with his beloved. Metaphors of sickness suggest that Edward’s unbounded desire has overtaken him:

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,  
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops’ hammers,  
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain  
And makes me frantic for my Gaveston. (4.313-316)

Edward figures his state of ravishment in physical and mythological terms, describing his heart as a block of iron upon which the Cyclops hammers, beating his heart as the noise of clashing metals drives him to madness for Gaveston. The rapture consumes Edward, and he gives over to this violent, unsettling state. Negative connotations of rapture as disease, at once unease and sickness, arise from Edward’s status as king and “head” of the body politic. As the “head” (i.e., the king) is unbalanced, and puts personal pleasures above the well-being of the state, the body politic is figured as diseased.

Gaveston disrupts Edward’s family by replacing Queen Isabella as his beloved, recalling Ganymede’s disturbance of Jupiter’s marriage to Juno on Mount Olympus. Upon Gaveston’s return to England, Isabella makes this allusion explicit, complaining,

Like frantic Juno will I fill the earth  
With ghastly murmur of my sighs and cries,  
For never doted Jove on Ganymede  
So much as he on cursèd Gaveston. (4.178-181)

Although Edward dotes on Gaveston, his desire not only aligns him with Jupiter, as Isabella imagines, but also with Ganymede, for as we have seen he is figured as the passive recipient of Piers Gaveston’s piercing influence. Isabella later acknowledges this instability when she says to Mortimer Junior, “He [Edward] claps his
[Gaveston’s] cheeks and hangs about his neck, / Smiles in his face and whispers in his ears” (2.51-52). Isabella figures King Edward as a doting lover who “hangs about [the] neck” of Gaveston, a description that effeminizes and infantilizes the King by suggesting his small size, youth, and dependence on his lover. These lines further recall the opening scene of Dido, Queen of Carthage in which Jupiter dandles Ganymede on his knee.

Despite Isabella’s grief, the noblemen surrounding King Edward are noticeably unaffected by the homoeroticism of his relationship with Gaveston. In fact, they even conceptualize it as participating in a tradition of man-boy love. Mortimer Senior justifies the young king’s enjoyment of Gaveston as a minion. He locates their relationship within a tradition that includes Alexander and Hephaestion, Hercules and Hylas, Patroclus and Achilles, Tully and Octavius, and Socrates and Alcibiades (4.393-398). He argues that Edward will stop this kind of favoritism with age and maturity. After all, the figures he lists were all conquerors, rulers of empires, heroes, and philosophers who influenced the cultural traditions of Europe. Mortimer Senior understands homoerotic relationships to be a fundamental aspect of European culture and integral to the social order – provided that they do not disturb that order. As Mortimer Junior’s response makes clear, however, Edward’s relationship with Gaveston does disturb the social hierarchy because he has unduly elevated a foreign, low-born favorite, wasted the treasury of the realm on extravagant fashions, thereby making a mockery of the status hierarchy and his true-born noblemen.

Scholars, most notably Gregory Bredbeck and Jonathan Goldberg, have argued that Gaveston’s transgression of class boundaries constitutes the most serious
crime of the play. Gaveston, a French man, is “base and obscure” according to Lancaster, which is to say that he is of low birth (1.100). Edward’s gifts of material goods and titles enable Gaveston’s class transgression, and it is the elevation of political status that causes the nobles to banish him from the kingdom. The rapture of Ganymede in this play is expressed through the twofold transgression of Gaveston’s ascent to power and the King’s descent and deposition. Soon after his arrival, Edward says to Gaveston, “I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain, / Chief Secretary to the state and me, / Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man” (1.153-155). A few lines later, he says, “Thy worth, sweet friend, is far above my gifts, / Therefore to equal it, receive my heart” (1.160-161). Edward offers Gaveston titles, political power, money, and safety, while suggesting that Gaveston is more valuable than any of these gifts. Despite his position at the top of society, Edward describes himself as an unworthy patron. Gaveston at first feigns humility, saying that the titles offered exceed his worth. However, he says shortly after that he thinks of himself “As Caesar riding in the Roman street, / With captive kings at his triumphant car” (1.172-173). Gaveston’s identification with Cæsar is suggestive not only of his political ambitions, but of his homoerotic proclivities by referencing Cæsar’s purported same-sex relations with the King of Bithynia, mentioned in Chapter Two, in which Cæsar was the passive partner, the younger man, and cupbearer. The reference seems to suggest that Gaveston stoops to conquer, as Cæsar did, that he begins as King’s “cupbearer,” but has imperial ambitions that reverse this relationship. Furthermore, his reference to
“captive kings” is suggestive of Edward’s passion for and obsession with Gaveston, who has captivated the King.\textsuperscript{189}

Edward’s unrestrained bestowal of gifts on Gaveston, which enables the latter’s transgression of the status hierarchy, angers Mortimer Jr., who says to his uncle,

\begin{verbatim}
Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me,  
But this I scorn, that one so basely born  
Should by his sovereign’s favour grow so pert,  
And riot it with the treasure of the realm  
While soldiers mutiny for want of pay. 
He wears a lord’s revenue on his back. (4.4-1-406)\textsuperscript{190}
\end{verbatim}

Mortimer is careful to note that Edward’s “humour” (i.e., his passion for Gaveston) does not disturb him because it might one day be purged. Rather, it is the upward mobility enabled by Edward’s gifting of expensive material goods and titles to a man of low birth that renders him indignant. The money spent on Gaveston robs the Kingdom, leaving it in need. Mortimer’s claim that he wears “a lord’s revenue on his back,” which was a trope of the period used to signify new wealth, suggests the bolstering of his political power. Mortimer contrasts this excessive and wasteful demonstration of wealth and power with the impoverishment of the King’s soldiers, who are examples of dutiful and loyal subjects ensuring the safety of the kingdom. Unlike these men, Gaveston accessorizes his body with the latest fashions. Mortimer is further angered by the theatricality of these gifts and the shows that Gaveston and Edward stage for each other. He mentions “idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows,

\textsuperscript{189} Mario DiGangi argues that the power relations between Edward and Gaveston are not simply hierarchical because Edward’s patronage is a public demonstration of wealth and power that depends on the agency of the King’s favorite. This dynamic might be applied to gift-giving, in which the favorite’s display of gifted luxury objects is a demonstration of the King’s power. DiGangi, 110.
\textsuperscript{190} Mortimer later criticizes Edward’s gift-giving in Scene 6 lines 156-159.
/ And prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston” (6.154-155). Mortimer’s criticism here
draws on anti-theatrical arguments of the period to suggest the sodomitical nature of
Edward’s relationship to Gaveston. Mortimer describes Gaveston as wearing an
“Italian hooded cloak, / Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap / A jewel of more
value than the crown” (4.412-414), which are presumably gifts from the King. The
specific objects here are suggestive of sodomy, which was understood to be an import
from Italy and France. The yoking of Gaveston’s French descent and extravagant
fashions pairs outlandish fashions with outlandish sexual proclivities. Mortimer’s
critique of fashion and accessorizing extends to the theatricality of King Edward’s
court, followers, and even his soldiers, of whom Mortimer complains, “And then thy
soldiers marched like players, / With garish robes, not armour” (6.180-181). The term
“players” refers to actors, suggesting that by wearing theatrical, “garish robes,” these
soldiers merely play at war. Mortimer likewise criticizes the King, who, “Bedaube
with gold, rode laughing at all the rest, / Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest /
Where women’s favours hung like labels down” (6.182-184). Edward makes himself
a theatrical spectacle in battle, whose body is adorned with luxurious and feminine
objects. Bray identifies a literary tradition of constructing the sodomite as a lover of
material objects, cosmetics, and perfume, suggesting a relationship between excessive
erotic appetites and the consumption of fashion.

Mortimer’s anti-theatricalism echoes Puritan tracts of the sixteenth and early
seventeenth century that expressed great anxiety over the theater’s power to
effeminize men and ravish its spectators. Chief among their fears was that male

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192 Bray, Homosexuality, 34-35.
spectators and actors were subject to gender transformation through watching the spectacle of cross-dressing. Stephen Gosson’s *School of Abuse* (1579) argues in similar terms to those of Mortimer that English men need no adornment to be good soldiers. He views theatrical costumes as a sign of the decline of masculinity.\(^{193}\) Philip Stubbes’ 1583 tract, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, goes even further to claim that boy-actors who wear clothing of the opposite sex risk being turned into hermaphrodites.\(^{194}\) Mortimer’s critique of Edward’s and Gaveston’s theatricality likewise draws on contemporary anxieties about gender mutability, and the fear that men could be effeminized through the clothing they wore.

Anti-theatricalists likewise expressed anxiety about the theater’s power to ravish spectators through theatrical spectacle. In a discussion of *Bacchus and Ariadne* in his *Playes Confuted in five Actions* (1582), Gosson describes the play’s audience as mimicking the actors as if they had become the actors themselves, expressing fear that they would not only imitate what they had seen onstage but that the theater had the ability to transform spectators.\(^{195}\) Such fears, according to Laura Levine, recall the Renaissance belief in the mutability or malleability of the self, a belief that is highly Ovidian.\(^{196}\) Levine underscores the Renaissance belief that “watching leads inevitably to doing” and that “watching leads to taking on the identity of the person watched.”\(^{197}\) The anti-theatricalists feared that there was no essential gender, increasing their fears over the hermaphroditic boy actor who “becomes the

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\(^{196}\) Levine, 16-17.

\(^{197}\) Lavine, 13.
embodiment of all that is frightening about the self.” Gosson’s *School of Abuse* makes the claim that the theater is “effeminate” and effeminizing, performing “effeminate gesture[s] to ravish the sense, and wanton speache[s] to whette desire to inordinate lust.” Theater not only effeminizes spectators, but provokes “unnatural” desire in them, ravishing their senses, and transgressing the boundary between representation and reality.

This power of the theater to ravish spectators, who are carried away or transported by what they see onstage, is further linked to sodomy. Fearing spectators’ imitation of the sodomitical behavior of actors, Stubbes writes of spectators, “every one bringes another homeward of their way verye friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the Sodomits, or worse. And these be the fruits of Playes and Interluds, for the most part.” Stubbes suggests that theatrical spectacle has the power to ravish spectators, carrying them away to engage in, or “play,” sodomy. Goldberg defines Stubbes’s use of the word sodomy as “debauched playing that knows no limit.” Such playing has the ability to transgress divisions between representation and reality, natural and unnatural, and active and passive. Finally, in his 1633 tract *Histrio-mastix*, Prynne claims that sodomites dress boys in women’s clothing on the all-male Elizabethan stage for their own homoerotic pleasure.

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198 Levine, 19.
199 Levine, 19.
200 Levine, 19, 15.
201 Stubbes, as quoted in Levine, 22.
203 William Prynne, *Histrio-mastix: The Player’s Scourge or Actor’s Tragedy*, as quoted in Levine, 22.
Gaveston’s second speech in *Edward II* recalls these anti-theatricalist arguments, but does so with great irony, as he discusses the spectacle that he will stage for the King upon his return to England:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians, that with touching of a string
May draw the pliant King which way I please.
Music and poetry is his delight;
Therefore I’ll have Italian masques by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
And in the day when he shall walk abroad,
Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns
Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay;
Sometime a lovely boy in Dian’s shape,
With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
And in his sportful hands an olive tree
To hide those parts which men delight to see,
Shall bathe him in a spring; and there hard by,
One like Actaeon peeping through the grove,
Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
And running in the likeness of an hart,
By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die.
Such things as these best please his majesty. (1.50-70)

Gaveston plans to employ the rapturous effects of dramatic poetry and music, decried by Puritan commentators, to seduce and transport the King (who is susceptible to and delights in these pleasures) in whichever direction he pleases. Music is particularly ravishing in its ability to penetrate the ears of the listener while simultaneously having no physical form. His reference to “Italian masques by night” is suggestive of sodomy, an import from Italy, as well as the darkness of night during which illicit sex acts might be committed. In staging “sylvan nymphs,” “satyrs,” and “Dian,” his pageant recreates Ovid’s myth of Diana and Actaeon, in which Actaeon sees Diana bathing nude. Enraged, she transforms him into a stag, at which point Actaeon’s
hunting dogs violently ravish his metamorphosed body. Ovid writes of the scene, “He would dearly have loved / to watch, instead of enduring, his own dog’ vicious performance” (3.247-248). Ovid emphasizes the theatricality of this event and the spectacular pleasure of watching violated bodies. Marlowe’s Diana is a nude boy actor adorned with feminine accessories. Dressed as a woman, he holds an olive branch to hide “those parts which men delight to see,” an ambiguous phrase that may refer to the body of the boy-actor or of Diana, thereby transgressing boundaries of sex and gender. Gaveston positions himself as the one staging this rapturous spectacle, which renders him as the active ravisher of Edward. Like Actaeon, Edward will be transformed, transported, and violated by watching a theatrical performance, foreshadowing the sodomitical form of his murder.

Towards the end of the play, King Edward is deposed and imprisoned in the bowels of the castle, where he sits in the “channel water” where “the filth of all the castle falls,” such as “foul excrements” (22.27, 24.56, 22.26). The language is suggestive of feces, fundament, and anus, recalling his sodomitical transgression. Mortimer sends Lightborne, whose name is an anglicized term for “Lucifer,” to kill Edward. Despite the empathy that Lightborne shows Edward, the king is fully aware of Lightborne’s intent, and offers him the gift of a jewel, his final precious object, to dissuade the assassin from killing him. The debt that this gift would incur, he hopes, will “change [Lightborne’s] mind and save [his] soul” (24.87). Upon Edward’s realization that he must die, he says, “I am too weak and feeble to resist; / Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul” (24.107-108). In giving himself over to death, he invokes God, suggesting the rapture of his soul and its translation to heaven. Edward
abandons life, his self, and his title, moving beyond the boundary that separates life and death.

The method of the king’s murder is anal penetration by a red-hot iron poker. The stage directions render this violent rape in ambiguous terms: “They seize Edward and hold him down, laying the table on him. Lightborne murders him with the spit. He screams and dies” (24.112 s.d.) It seems likely that Lightborne’s two assistants, Maltravers and Gourney, press the table onto Edward’s reclined body, and stamp on him. Lightborne simultaneously penetrates Edward’s anus with a hot iron poker, transgressing the divisions between the sodomitical pleasure of anal penetration and death by violent rape. This rape recalls the principle of contrapasso in the Inferno, in which the punishment fits the crime: Edward is punished for submitting to penetration, or being pierced by Piers Gaveston.

According to Patricia Fumerton, “By freely giving up the gift, the giver always experiences a kind of death. The gift, in essence, dies to him when it departs from his hands; and since a part of him is invested in the gift (he gives his trust in giving his gift), a part of him dies as well.” Such is the fate of Edward, the ravished and lovesick King who gives himself over to his rapturous desire, gifting everything he has, his very self, to Gaveston. Lightborne, who some critics have read as a double or foil of Gaveston (directors often cast one actor to play both roles), gives Edward

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204 Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles, editions of which appeared in 1577 and 1587, supplied Marlowe with his historical material, including the mode of Edward’s death, which is explicitly described in the Chronicles. Alan Stewart, “Edward II and Male Same-Sex Desire,” in Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 83.

205 Fumerton, 34.
the gift of death by anal penetration, yoking together pleasure and pain. Both orgasm and the eternal suspension of desire, Edward’s death is, in one phrase, *la petite mort*. 
IV
Enfleshing Ganymede

A savage passion for a great beauty is not always a bitter mortal error, if it can then leave the heart melted so that a divine arrow can easily penetrate it.
—Michelangelo, Rime

Michelangelo’s drawing, the Rape of Ganymede (see fig. 1), now in the Royal Collection at Windsor, is an unfinished draft of his presentation drawing. He created it for his beloved, the young Tommaso Cavalieri, whom he was teaching to draw. The epigraph to this chapter is taken from a sonnet written by Michelangelo for Cavalieri that expresses concepts of Ganymedian and Platonic rapture. Traditionally read as a neo-Platonic allegory that unites body and soul in its ascent to heaven, the drawing has strong homoerotic resonances, especially when analyzed in relation to Michelangelo’s biography.

Ganymede is suspended in air, expressive of serenity and contemplation that recalls Dante’s dream of Ganymede, yet with a more explicitly queer eroticism focalized on the enfleshed body. Ganymede’s body is open, receptive, and relaxed while simultaneously being clutched by the sharp claws of his captor. His body is in the eagle’s grasp, and literally becomes part of the eagle through the intertwining of their forms, which twist around one another, forming a dyad that is no longer divided between human/animal, self/other, active/passive. For example, Ganymede’s arms not only rest on the eagle’s wings, but become an integral part of them. The bodies are

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207 Saslow, 19.
209 Barkan, 84.
braided together along the vertical axis of the drawing, such that the viewer follows this line down from the head to the feet, pausing at the genitals. The bird’s and the boy’s genitals are aligned such that the bird penetrates Ganymede in flight, rendering this a moment of truly sexual rapture. Ganymede’s thighs are spread and remarkably distant from one another, signifying sodomy through their openness and the bird’s positioning behind him. Michelangelo renders Ganymede’s feet claw-like in this flight, during which the two bodies collapse into one. The intertwining of poles and the fusion of oppositions, queer rapture is, in Michelangelo’s drawing as well as the literary representations this thesis examines, a rupture full of erotic, social, and political potential.

By tracing interpretations, re-imaginings, and re-writings of Ovid’s myth of Ganymede, I have demonstrated how queer rapture transgresses the boundaries within texts, traditions, and cultures, as well as how the semantic excess of the myth troubles the best intentions of poets. This unbounded topic has extended into several disciplines of scholarly inquiry, including religion, philosophy, aesthetics, and history, taking up questions that are central to contemporary queer studies. Some further questions raised by the preceding chapters that might be explored in future scholarship are: Is Ganymede’s homoerotic rapture inherent to Christian conceptualizations of rapture that one finds in St. Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 12, or Thomas Aquinas’s discussion of Paul’s rapture in Summa Theologiae? Is there a queer aesthetic of rapture that might be built around troubling yet productive

\[210\] Barkan, 89.
\[211\] Barkan, 89.
aesthetic/political ruptures or the traversal of the body/spirit dyad? What metaphors exist in contemporary culture for rapturous transport, and how might we queer them?
Illustrations

Figure 1. Michelangelo (1475-1564), Rape of Ganymede. Windsor Castle (Windsor Castle, Royal Library. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II). Data courtesy of University of California, San Diego.
Works Cited


