Beauty, Masculinity, and Love between Men: Configuring Emotions with Michael Drayton’s Peirs Gaveston

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Let me start by suggesting that early modern men had a problem with love – a problem that had its roots deep in classical and medieval culture. Let us take it in five easy steps. Emotions were considered to be bodily reactions to outward stimuli. Love, one of the most common of these emotional reactions, was caused by perceiving something good in the world. Good could be sensed with any of the five senses, but the most powerful was sight, and the good perceived by sight was, most often, beauty. The most beautiful objects detected by sight, and so the ones that most had the ability to arouse love, were human beings, especially women. Those most powerfully affected by the beauty of women were men, which made men potential slaves to their affects and affections, and rendered the heady mix of beauty, love and lust an acute dilemma in men's everyday lives.

This account is of course a simplification; both in theory and in practice things were more complicated. Yet this train of thought seems never to have been far from the minds of those commenting on beauty, love and sexual desire. It worked as a standard resource for interpreting gender relations, sensory perceptions and emotional reactions – as a kind of master narrative for plotting the emotional life of both literary characters and actual living persons, extending implicitly backwards and forwards from any of its discrete components.

What I want to do in this article, however, is queer the heteronormative agenda of the standard account of early modern sexual love, and discuss male emotional reactions to male beauty. The gender scheme described above was very prominent in early modern English popular texts, despite learned access to the classical tradition where both beauty of men and love between men were much discussed and appreciated. But more popular thinking had its way of dealing with these topics too. The poet Michael Drayton's (1563–1631) historical complaint poem *Peirs Gaveston, Earle of Cornwall*, published in 1593, presents us with one such negotiation. While telling the life of Gaveston, the friend and lover of the early fourteenth-century King Edward II, it suggests that male
In the latter part of my article, I will discuss the ways in which Gaveston's looks could contribute to our understanding of beauty and the cultural role it played. However, in order to understand the importance of beauty in early modern culture, we must consider the ways in which emotional experience and social events were understood in the context of emotional processes.

By looking at the role of beauty and the emotions in the production of emotions, we can see how these processes are interrelated. Emotional experiences are born from outward triggers, and these triggers can trigger emotional responses. Emotional responses can then trigger further emotional experiences. This cycle of emotional processes continues, leading to a complex network of emotions and experiences.

In order to understand early modern emotional experiences and their articulations, we must also consider the role of beauty in these processes. Beauty was seen as a way to enhance emotional responses and to create a sense of connection between people. Beauty was often used as a way to facilitate social relationships and to create a sense of community.

The role of beauty in early modern culture was not just a matter of aesthetic appreciation. Beauty was seen as a way to create a sense of identity and to express one's social status. Beauty was also used as a way to communicate one's emotions and to create a sense of intimacy between people.

In conclusion, beauty played a crucial role in early modern culture. By understanding the ways in which beauty was used to facilitate emotional processes and to create a sense of identity, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context in which early modern society operated.
private bond between the two young men and emphasizes its main character's good looks in an unprecedented way. This impression is further enhanced by a first-person narrative voice: *Peir Gaveston* is a fictional autobiography. In his choice of genre, Drayton was influenced by the *Mirror for Magistrates* – a popular collection of complaint poems where historical and legendary figures recounted their lives, loves and sins. While telling his life story from beyond the grave, Drayton's Gaveston gives the main role not to his political choices but to his outward appearance and how it affected other people. What he offers us is an emotional history of a certain kind of masculinity – or at least that is how we are meant to read it here.

Gaveston starts his account from his early youth and the beginnings of his relationship with Edward, then a crown prince, and recounts the progression of their relations from pure youthful friendship through a deepening attachment to a sodomitical partnership. As was typical in the complaint genre, Gaveston's telling of his life reveals an innocent youth corrupted more by circumstance than his own volition, but taking full responsibility for his grave sins and thus tilting the narrative towards a confessional exposé. We could even read Gaveston's story as an imaginative witness statement: where early modern courts had trouble sentencing perpetrators of sexual crimes for lack of evidence and confession, in literary portrayals 'sex offenders' like Gaveston could plead guilty while also offering compelling reasons for their behaviour.

While presenting his gradual descent into deadly sin, Drayton positions Gaveston both as a questionable sexual predator engaging in a sodomitical relationship, and as a universally understandable victim of the all-powerful effects of beauty. The basis of Gaveston's negotiation of both his intimate relationships and court politics lies in embodiment – the way in which his body interacts with other bodies, be it through gazes, gestures or sexual pleasure. The most important trigger for these interactions, as presented by Drayton, was his outward appearance. This is how Gaveston describes himself:

My tender youth yet scarce crept from the shell,  
Unto the world brought such a wonderment,  
That all perfection seem'd in me to dwell,  
And that the heavens me all their graces lent:  
Some aware I was the quintessence of nature,  
And some an Angell, and no earthly creature.

The heavens had limit'd my face with such a die  
As made the curiost eye on earth amazed,  
Tempring my looks with love and majestie,  
A miracle to all that ever gaze,  
So that it seem'd some power had in my birth  
Ordained me his Image here on earth.  

Although, read on its own, Gaveston's self-image may sound nothing short of smug, it is not only vanity and pride he feels; beauty is what explains his life. It is indeed the grounds for him having a 'lived body' at all, however fictional. Drayton constructed for his protagonist an identity that was wholly based on conceptions of beauty and its emotional power, and if that was not a typical way of delineating a male identity, neither was it a novelty: early modern people saw questions of beauty to be absolutely central to constructing female identities, and Gaveston's vacillation between pride and shame is an exact parallel to how women were thought to manage their looks socially.

To reach this conclusion, we might want to approach identity in the way delineated by Joan Scott in her article *Fantasy Echo*. For Scott, identity is produced in a process of echoing where cultural fantasies are invoked to inform the process of identity formation – for Scott's purposes, the category of 'woman' and its different reverberations are the most interesting. For a sexual and emotional identity in its early modern formation, the site of the echoing centre, or imagined 'voice', is in the body and how it was conceptualized. In Gaveston's case, his particular form of embodiment, the fantasy of beauty, was assembled as it was projected towards others and as others reacted to it. Beauty became a bodily understanding, built on echoing perceptions between self and others, but it also constituted a quality of the lived body, tangibly present in an individual's daily life. In other people, the presence of beauty necessarily invited a corresponding emotional reaction, love, and that emotional reaction was understood as being in direct relation with bodily action – to be precise, the sexual act arose as a response to another body's beauty. Beauty was, then, a discursive formation that could reveal how embodiment and identity were joined in early modern culture. But it was also viewed as a physical fact which triggered and forced agency and action in others.

This is clear in what Gaveston says about the reasons for the developing amity between him and Crown Prince Edward: 'With this fayre bayte I fishe for Edwards love,' My dainty youth so pleased his princely eye.' Gaveston's beauty is not only the basis for his imagined self but for his relations to all others. Because he is so divinely beautiful, everybody, both men and women, must love him. The most fateful of these loving reactions comes from his master, Edward. The bait of beauty is overpowering, and Gaveston himself cannot not use it – it forces its presence on every encounter and every significant episode of his life. But he also uses it very deliberately to fish for affection and to lavish others with his favours – using beauty as a social tool could prove irresistible to good-looking people even if moralists issued constant warnings against it. This was indeed how beauty was believed to affect the lives of beautiful people in the early modern period.

Although early modern writers in general were not very interested in discussing how beauty worked as subjective experience, they had a lot to say about the
beautiful person’s side of things by implication. This should not surprise us: they were mostly men, after all, and more interested in what perceiving beauty did to them in the most typical of gendered contexts. Perhaps the most direct formulation was that of the Italian humanist Tommaso Buoni, whose half-humorous compilation of aesthetic knowledge, The Problems of Beauty was translated into English in 1606: those who were the most beautiful were also the most frequently loved, which excited in them a more loving disposition towards all and sundry. As both the most loved and the most loving, the most beautiful were, all in all, the most fortunate people in the world.9

Although Buoni’s text seems to envision the beautiful as female, its ‘vicious’ circle of beauty’s powers is not unlike Gaveston’s way of living his extraordinary body. Edward’s love for him, according to Gaveston’s own opinion, was born out of his beauty. Gaveston, on the other hand, needed no special incitements to enflame his passions: Edward’s love for him made him fall in love in return. Although beauty works as the initial instigator of love, its power spins into motion a reciprocal display of affection.

I would hesitate to generalize that this would be a usual way of conceptualizing the fact of living in a beautiful (male) body. Quite the contrary, it is an exceptional way of explaining a relationship between two men. It is, however, the paradigmatic model for presenting the emotional and sexual bond between a man and a woman. I would suggest that Drayton’s poem made sense to its contemporary readers specifically because the early modern repertoire of emotion talk included the connection between being beautiful and being loved.

Interestingly enough, Drayton’s Gaveston also presents his sodomitical fall through the imagery of outward appearance. When the horrors of sexual sin take over his life, the first to go is the ‘image of perfection’, his white beauty blotted with ‘the black pencil’ of immorality. The metaphors used to set forth his dilemma repeat the vocabulary of light, brightness and sun, all central ingredients in perceiving and describing beauty.10 The emphasis on the visual continues in the curious language of dissection used to describe Gaveston’s death: when the envious courtiers who had so disapproved of Gaveston’s and Edward’s relationship pursue him, they ‘anatomize’ his life and ‘embowel’ his youth with ‘their curious eyes’.11 Loss of reputation and social condemnation receive a bodily guise, closely related to the annihilation of beauty, where the most typical formula of extolling female beauty, the blazon, glides along the surface of the female body, taking it apart in separate exquisite fragments, sentencing Gaveston for his sinfulness is an anatomical project with a suggestion of a counter-blazon, a de- ecoration of bodily beauty that not only defames the surface but reaches towards the inner corruption of sinful good looks.12

It should not surprise us then that Drayton’s Gaveston conceptualizes even his own death as an undoing of his beauty. Even in death he is Adonis, the embodiment of male beauty and love, but he is also a breathless, headless body whose fair alabaster skin is stained with his own blood and gore. What remains is his soul, upon which the sins committed and experienced during his life will have stamped their mark. To himself and to the Almighty, the dead Gaveston no longer appears beautiful: he is ‘scared’ and ‘botched’, ‘filthy, ugly, and deformed’, a horrid opposite of his living self. This opposite, ‘the loathsome dunghill’ of bod- ickness, was of course what each beautiful body would turn out to be, according to medieval and early modern popular theology, if only we were able to see through to the inside of its glossy surface.13 Happily, however, to those still living Gaveston’s beauty never faded: even in death he still had — or indeed was — exactly the same divinely beautiful body that could be portrayed with conventional expres- sions, familiar from descriptions of female beauty.14

Imagining sin as bodily decay was a handy way to discuss morality in early modern culture, although more frequently with respect to women. An interesting parallel to Gaveston’s loss of looks can be found in the story of Jane Shore, another guileless younger tempted and forced by her beauty to succumb to a sinful partnership with a king. Where Gaveston gazes at his own body after death and reflects on the looks of his body and soul, his female double Jane weeps, blushes and shrouds herself in a ‘sheet of shame’, even as a ghost. Both Jane and Peirs present the reader with a personal history of misguided sexuality; both too react to their sins after their death in a bodily way. This vacillation between life and death allows both to alternate between titillation and lamentation, exposing their sexuality and condemning it at the same time.15

Now why all this emphasis on looks? I would like to argue that the reasons for Drayton’s choice may lie in his attempt to portray his protagonist as not only a distant and stylized figure of a sinner but as a character the reader could sympathize with. This was also typical to other stories in the complaint genre. Without the text seducing the reader to feel for the unfortunate characters of these moralities, empathy would not lead him to examine his own sinfulness, which was at least the overt explanation for the usefulness of these texts. Titillation and excitement were surely behind their popularity too, but one cannot deny completely their edifying aims. So, Drayton’s Gaveston is not so much a political climber taking advantage of a silly monarch’s infatuation, as a supposedly credible figure giving account of his mistakes, explaining them through an inevitability built into the discourses of beauty and affect in sixteenth-century culture. The mechanism is exactly the same as in renditions of the Jane Shore story: the sexually risqué life of the royal mistress had begun because men could not leave her alone. Jane herself only succumbed after much coaxing — and indeed coercion, since one could not very well say no to a king’s express command,16 Where Jane lapsed when forced, Peirs was seduced by existing intimacy and friendship, but both were victims of their beauty. Not only were they to be
condemned for their sins, both political and sexual; they could also be understood and even sympathized with.

By letting Gaveston tell his own story, Drayton also invites the reader to follow his particular ways of reasoning and accounting for his actions. Alan Bray, in a different context, has seen rationalization and justification of one’s own behaviour within the prevailing moral code as one of the choices an individual could make in the face of society’s condemnation of (homo)sexual desire. His example is the Rev. John Wilson, of Arlington in Sussex, an orthodox but unconventional clergyman who adjusted his views of his own sexual practices to moral values, claiming that his preference for buggery kept him from the more threatening sin of consorting with women. Although the moves that Drayton’s Gaveston makes in order to make his choices understandable are not perhaps as drastic, the same technique is undoubtedly at play. Appealing to the discourses and theories of the unbreakable link between beauty and love justified Gaveston’s and Edward’s behaviour, and Gaveston let himself partly off the hook by acknowledging the limited choice he and his partner had in the situation. He juggled the conflicting discourses on love and sexuality in a way that prioritized his own interests.

What is clear, however, is that the fictionalized Gaveston, like other early modern representations of homoerotic desire, never attributed his actions to a ‘homosexual’ inclination. Gaveston’s and Edward’s sexuality was not determined on the basis of their desiring men, mainly or only. In Drayton’s telling, they became sodomites because they fell in love and acted like lovers do; they did not fall in love and desire each because they were sodomites. The implication for their desire could be found in beauty. In that way, sodomy was the result of object choice, not of choosing, specifically, a same-sex object. Even if restraint was prescribed by the moral code, the popular belief in beauty’s almost supernatural power worked towards rationalizing and naturalizing the youngsters’ attraction towards each other, despite the revulsion and condemnation that sodomy, in cultural terms, implied in early modern England. For this to work, an implicit or explicit reference to emotion theory, with its organization of affects and triggers, was needed.

If we want to talk about early modern subjects’ sexual identifications, then, we need to let go of our own categorizations and look for the early modern categories against which the operations of identification could function. As the division into hetero- and homosexual identity is not of much use in figuring early modern sexuality, we need other ways of conceptualizing the origins of desire in that culture. What the early modern writers stressed, indeed where they found an explanation for sexual feelings and actions, was the beauty of the human body. Not everyone possessed it in the same amounts, and according to emotion theory and literary representation at least, this indicated different projections of identity and action.

Violating Scott’s elegant thinking only slightly, I hope, I would like to put ‘fantasy echo’ to work in a concrete setting and suggest that an early modern sexual identity could be based on the kind of embodiment which was then seen as primarily anchored in beauty. The outward appearance of an attractive body emanated its quality to others’ perception, then echoed back as an emotional and sexual reaction, again inviting a response and offering materials for a construction of a sexual identity. And this echoing was, of course, a continuing process, present in all human interactions. What Gaveston suggests to us is that his handsome frame was what informed his understanding of his self and his sexuality. Acts of sodomy were the physical manifestations of the irresistibly beautiful body in which he lived. It was not ‘homosexual desire’ which led him to a sexual relationship with his partner; it was his beauty and the king’s inability to resist it.

In this way, another level of echoing may be at work in our attempts to understand early modern sexuality: the play of categories has not been transformed beyond all recognition, but our queering voice echoes back from the past in unexpected formations. As historians have already learned, when we ask the past about ‘homosexuality’, early modern texts may answer back with different constructions – ones we have termed ‘sodomy’, ‘homoerotic desire’ or ‘erotic friendship between men’, for example. Beauty offers a categorization for desire from a different perspective, and is gendered in a different way. With beauty, the desiring subject imagines his object as beautiful and finds a vocabulary for his emotions and actions in that principle. Although beauty was gendered primarily female, its potential to delineate a male identity as well is clear from the Gaveston poem. Perhaps this would also suggest the need for more critical work on the role of beauty and its different temporal echoes in queer history more generally.

Love and the Cultural Uses of Beauty

Bruce Smith sets the stage in his book on Homosexual Desire by asking what kinds of ‘love games’ men desiring men could play in early modern England – what were the special rules, objectives and strategies of such games? Looking from Peirs Gaveston’s perspective, beauty seems one of the key concepts through which such games could be initiated – a ‘rule’ by which all participants had to play. In fact, the whole emotional, sexual and social process that went into male-male erotic relationships could be narrated through the conceptual matrix of beauty. We come, then, to the second part of my story, and can start looking for the cultural scripts and structures that informed the use of beauty when delineating emotions and gender.
As we have seen, what love meant, according to early modern emotion discourse, was the desire for something good perceived in the world; beauty was the ultimate good that could be detected by sight. What made beauty such a powerful instigator of love was the relationship emotion theory had to conceptualizations of the senses: sight was understood as the sense that affected a person in the quickest and most direct way possible— one could and should admire a person’s inner beauty and goodness as well, but that took some time and effort to detect.21 The idea that bodily beauty produced love and desire was so well known that one felt no need to justify it; in countless early modern texts it was enough to just praise someone’s beauty in order to imply that spectators as well as readers could follow the attraction that beauty called forth.

The gendered division of subject and object positions in early modern beauty and emotion theory was generally very clear. Women were determined as the beautiful sex, and men as the privileged spectators of that beauty. Various rationalizations for this state of affairs emerged, but the most frequent was extolling women for their weaker and more delicate bodies; their lack of physical and mental strength was made up for by their delightful looks. Women’s beauty thus resulted from the hierarchical positions in which the (male) seer and the (female) seen were generally placed:

...this glorious Idea drowne out from the secret temper of the graces, nature bestowed more prodigiously upon women then men, as creatures more worthy and excellent: the richest gold hath the rarest colour, the purest stones are most cleare, the sweetest Flowers most pleasing to the eye: and women as the purest quintessence incalculated from all other living things, are therefore the most beautifull and fairest; yea in their own sex, beauty is the touchstone of vertue, and the fairer a woman is, the fuller of good qualities.22

If beauty was understood as a feminine characteristic, the desire to possess it was a male agent position and entailed the power of the spectator to determine what was and what was not beautiful, and what kinds of reactions beauty produced. The desire for beauty was, indeed, a central tenet of male sexuality.

The clarity of this gender division is of course partly an effect of who was writing, and who was imagined as the reader, of early modern texts. If romance was a genre particularly favoured by women readers, then it comes as no surprise that that was also where the number of beautiful male characters was the greatest. Needless to say, most descriptions of either male handsomeness or its effect on a spectator are presented from the female point of view. Drayton’s text reaches for a different perspective.23 Here the union of beauty and love has a definite erotic tinge no matter the gender of the people experiencing it. Gaveston’s description of his life with Edward is quite explicit compared to most texts dealing with desire between men:

My youth the glasse where he his youth beheld,
Roses his lippes, my breath sweete Nectar showers,
For in my face was nature raynest field,
Richly adoru'd with Beauties rarest flowers.
My breast his pillow, where he laide his head,
Mine eyes his booke, my bosome his bed.
My smiles were life, and Heaven unto his sight,
All his delight concluding my desier,
From my sweete sunne, he borrowed all his light,
And as a flie play’d with my beauties fier.
His love-sick lippes at every kissing qualme,
Cling to my lippes, to cure their griefe with balme.24

Early modern culture encouraged close and affectionate friendships between men, particularly on higher levels of the social ladder, and rarely regarded them as a danger to heterosexual ideals.25 Kissing, cuddling and sleeping together may well have been familiar behaviour in these intimate friendships, but Gaveston’s insistence on beauty gives Drayton’s account a different tone. Yet it is also a far cry from the classically inspired renderings of Plato’s Symposium, for example, where the model for male–male love is usually taken to come from. Gaveston does not pretend that his beauty elevates its spectators—he evokes an earthy and lustful gaze, not an expression of the beautiful male intellect reaching towards its God via the work of beauty, as neo-Platonists might have suggested.

Drayton in fact lets Gaveston compare his relationship with Edward directly with the more typical passionate relationships men had with women—his reference point is social life, not neo-Platonic theory:

Who ever had his Ladie in his arms,
That hath of love but felt the miserie,
Touching the fire that all his sensces warmes,
Now claps with joy her blushing lavorie.
Feeling his soule in such delights to melt,
Ther’s none but he can tell the joye, we feel.26

As Mark Breitenberg has suggested, in the early modern period ‘the cultural codes in which desire is expressed are more often based on heterosexual models even if individual practices are not always consonant with that model’.27 Here, too, knowledge of love between a man and a woman would help envision what went on between the two young men. Drayton’s chosen strategy was to speak in the tradition of heterosexual desire, marking the love between two young men as something that needed an extra gesture of interpretation in order to be understood and accommodated. The imagined reader, here, was not necessarily someone experientially familiar with homoerotic desire, but he (and it was a ‘he’ holding a lady in his arms) was expected to identify with the experience by refer-
ring to his own sexual pleasure. What was it that made the interpretive gesture of crossing the gendered sexual prescription possible? The key, again, was the appeal to beauty.

Beauty, then, was a gendering device that worked in quite a complicated manner. Despite its being classed as a predominantly feminine characteristic, it could also reside in a male body and produce its customary sensations and passions in both male and female viewers. Yet on the discursive level its feminine quality was overriding: male beauty worked in the same way as the more conventional female beauty. Beauty’s femininity was the standard gendered matrix that accommodated male beauty when needed, as a particular variation of the norm. Even if sex could not determine the force of one’s beauty or whom it affected, its workings were never independent of understandings of gender.

Turning the tables a bit, then, how did women look at Gaveston? Drayton’s text is mostly silent on this, but the general assumption would have been that women, too, felt desire and love in the face of male beauty. Emotions raised by beauty in their own sex would have been somewhat different; early modern male writers, at least, suggested that women felt either envy or pride, not love and desire, when evaluating their sisters. Gaveston’s situation was in fact highly complicated. He was so beautiful that even women looked at him with not just desire and jealousy, but indeed envy. The beautiful Gaveston usurped the place reserved for female bodies and stole men’s gazes away from women. Women also have a central role in Drayton’s depiction of Gaveston’s fall: where those who could experience the effects of his beauty could understand and accept his actions, ‘grave matrons’ emerge as his gossiping, whispering enemies. Elderly women were typically envisioned as beyond sexual interests; they no longer yearned for the pleasures of sex, they could no longer instigate desire in men, and love produced by male beauty could no longer touch them. This cultural stereotype was why Drayton could portray them as beyond Gaveston’s powers. Where men could feel the effects of beauty in their bodies until the bitter end, aging women found the door slammed on their face almost as soon as their reproductive period was at an end. The political import of beauty was closely tied to gender and age.

In any case, the possibility of a young man’s beauty inviting affection, friendship and erotic love was not unknown in Renaissance texts — we need only think about Shakespeare’s sonnets or Marlowe’s plays. But when Michel de Montaigne, in John Florio’s translation of 1613, discussed pederasty in his essay Of Friendship, he condemned the Greek custom as not true friendship because it was only based on the beauty of the beloved boy: it is ‘simply grounded upon an external beauty; a false image of corporall generation,’ whereas proper emotional bonds of friendship existed between equals in a truly voluntary relationship. Despite Montaigne’s negative attitude, what remains clear is the idea that youthful beauty could and did arouse desire in same-sex spectators. Even though Gaveston’s and Edward’s relationship, as described by Drayton, by no means followed the Greek habit — they were the same age, for example, and neither was in a sexually subordinate role — the rationale behind their love was the same as that depicted by Montaigne. Drayton, however, departs from Montaigne’s Aristotelian objections by seeing the love of men both as a sin and as a true, if misguided, form of friendship.

As Bruce Smith has noted in relation to Christopher Marlowe’s play, the power games between King Edward and his favourite are not straightforward, and neither does Gaveston nicely fit any of the period’s homoerotic stereotypes. Despite his subordinate status, he is not a boy, a servant, an effeminate companion or a minion. The erotic and emotional components of their relationship, together with the political power that Gaveston has appropriated in various ways, make Edward’s position, as well, quite complicated. What are we to make of the power play of this sinful friendship, specifically as it appears in Drayton’s story?

One noteworthy dimension in Gaveston’s fascination with his own body is that — again completely within the heteronormative imagery — he experiences his beauty as the empowering agent which gives him control over others, especially Edward: his beauty was the lodestar to Edward’s thinking, his looks were the pilot to Edward’s wandering eye — in fact, his hand was the racket and the king was his tennis ball. Edward’s attraction to Gaveston raises the latter from a subordinate position into a ruler of the ruler, just like beautiful women were imagined to lord over their admiring husbands and lovers. Early modern women, too, seem to have thought that beauty was almost the only ‘natural’ force that could give them authority over men. The young Gaveston, politically and socially inferior to the crown prince, climbed on the social ladder with the help of his good looks — a perennially feminine course of action, if we are to believe the long-term political paranoia of our gendered culture. But he also illustrates another Renaissance anxiety: the threat that a close male friendship between the monarch and his subject posed to traditional understandings of hierarchy and status.

Gaveston is a man of his time in feeling that his social advancement is not wholly correct and justified but constitutes a politically questionable misuse of beauty’s emotional powers. Competing for position was an integral part of manhood, but good looks were not supposed to interfere with social hierarchy, certainly not if the partner witnessing the beautiful subject was a king. This indeed is the problem most texts about Edward and Gaveston seem to determine as the cause of their fall. Their sexual relationship was certainly sinful, but most portrayals of this couple pay more attention to the political problems of their intimacy. Gaveston had too much influence over Edward — influence that should have been reserved for the aristocracy, and for men much older than him.
Questions of state and questions of the monarch’s personal relationships were inextricably linked, in Elizabeth’s England as well as in James’s, only a few years after Drayton’s Gaveston was published.36

In early modern culture, intimacy between men, whether brought about by friendship or sex, often seems to have had this potential for disruption of order. At court, where male friendships had a specially normative and formative function but where social status, too, was paramount, such relationships were fraught with ambiguity. The young prince, superior to any of the courtiers, was in an especially problematic situation: his friendships with aristocratic youths were indispensable, but once these relationships acquired the potential for being interpreted as sodomitical, they offered powerful weapons for criticism and control. Gaveston, then, embodies both the male images that Alan Bray saw as the basis for the Elizabethan dilemma of male-male relationships, the masculine friend and the sodomite.39 In Drayton’s text, Gaveston indeed plays with both of these roles and creates tension within the story by suggesting the moral combat involved in his gradual slippage towards the sinful side.40 It is important to note that these two figurations are not separate. The dividing line may have been between the morally and socially cultivating kind of friendship and its distorted sinful equivalent, but the sodomite was still a friend.

But where most Gaveston texts, including Marlowe’s version, deal with the political implications of erotic male friendship, Drayton was concerned with its causes.41 The reason for Edward’s unorthodox behaviour was not disregard for political correctness or the wishes of his aristocracy, but the forceful effect of Gaveston’s looks. Compared to standard depictions of men being ruled by their erotic passions for women, there is nothing special as such in Edward’s emotional weakness. Succumbing to passion caused by the beauty of the beloved, and at the same time supposedly relinquishing all pretensions to social power, even reveling in the subordinate position of the lover in the face of the beloved, was a pose early modern men seem to have delighted in. Without trying to diminish the power of this vocabulary to represent men’s emotions and experiences, one can say that the willing suspension of male mastery hardly resulted in actual changes in the power hierarchy between the genders. Beloved women remained subordinate to their loving male partners.42 Assuming such a position in the face of a male courtier, however, had somewhat different consequences. If the beauty of the intimate male friend overran both reason and convention, the result was social disorder, with the king being subordinated, both emotionally and politically, to the favourite. Beauty indeed became a politicized fact.

Gaveston certainly seems to have made Edward feel weak in the knees, but was he weak in a gendered sense as well? It has often been stated that sexual desire in any form was considered a lapse of masculine control – if not a feminized state then at least it was a less manly, passionate, sensual and unreasonable state.

Whether desire was directed at a woman or a man, sensual pleasures diminished one’s rational and moral capabilities.43 Yet to call these ‘fond affections’ feminine or to claim that men who temporarily gave up on control and restraint in sexual matters lost their masculinity misses the point. Looking at discourses on sexual love and beauty, it is clear that presenting men as helpless victims of the beauty of the desired object is an integral and necessary part of manhood.44 The ideals of emotional strength and social control could be held up only with the help of their repressed others. Claiming irresponsibility and powerlessness in the face of the sexual object was a way of relinquishing the demand that manliness must always be controlled. It also shifted responsibility for sinful sexual actions to the person seen as instigating lust, the socially and sexually subordinate other, be it a woman or a beautiful young man. When stressing Gaveston’s beauty instead of his hunger for social advancement, Drayton makes Edward more of a man and less of a king.

Another interesting factor in this power play between men is the gendered position of the desired subordinate Gaveston. It is fairly typical of the early modern language of homoerotic desire that the younger or socially inferior partner is presented as ‘sodomized’ and thus in the social and sexual role of a woman: the one used and penetrated, ‘like a woman’.45 This is not the image that Drayton presents. For him, Edward and Gaveston are intimate friends and partners, not a temporary coupling of a sodomite and the sodomized. At the same time, however, Gaveston talks about himself as Ganymede, serving his master the king and retaining without flaw the patriarchal hierarchy of male status. As the socially inferior partner, Gaveston-Ganymede takes part in formulating power hierarchies not across, but within gender positions.46

Thus their relationship can perhaps also be used to question the power hierarchy of the active adult male and the feminized object of his desire. Despite early modern parlance which situated the less powerful partner at least temporarily on the other side of the gender divide, how productive is it for us to take this vocabulary at face value? Do we need to think along polarized, dichotomous gender lines and see the desired adolescents as pseudo-women, and the active partners as, in the end, traditional males turning everything they desire into ‘woman’?

In the thoroughly hierarchical early modern culture, perhaps another figuration would serve as well. When the basic tenet of masculinity was social status, the need to assert one’s place in different ways became crucial to early modern masculine identity. Sexuality and desire by no means stayed outside this system.47 Ideologies of masculine virility demanded that adult men dominate their sexual partners, but not everything men dominated needed to be a woman. Do we not accept a decidedly heteronormative and dichotomizing view of sexuality if we claim, together with our early modern texts, that the boys of sodomitical
couplings were the 'feminine' partner? Drayton's representation of Edward and Gaveston is an example of how love between men could be figured without loss of masculinity – although the hierarchical aspects of their relationship point towards other instances of shifting power.

We come back, then, to the way Alan Bray, Bruce Smith, Mario DiGangi and Michael Rocke, among others, have conceptualized early modern homoerotic desire. The ties of hierarchical status, personal service, age and youth, and gender were constructed around any intimate early modern relationship. In relationships between men, the potential disruptions that reversals of these hierarchies could cause were of a different order than in relationships between men and women. Whatever the imaginary authority that women were able to gain through their beauty, the primary fact of their gender and its subordinate status could not be forgone in early modern culture. For men, the reliance on other kinds of hierarchy to organize the relations of intimate friends made beauty's powers potentially revolutionary.

After the history of our unfortunate couple has been told from Gaveston's perspective, Drayton gives the last word to Edward, the inconsolable king who has lost his love. In his farewell words, Edward describes Gaveston in the way that male intimates thought about each other: as a 'companion' and 'sweet friend', as 'soul's delight' and the source of all his mirth, indeed as a 'second self'. At the same time, the emotional attachment that Drayton imagines for his protagonist is that of marriage, and the loss of the beloved is experienced as widowhood. Yet these two were not and could not be joined in any formal way. In the eyes of their family and friends, they were grave sinners and behaved intolerably in view of social hierarchy. Yet in Drayton's imagination at least, anyone who had ever loved was expected to understand them.

In a recent article, Mario DiGangi reflects on why early modern same-sex relationships and the stigma attached to them seem so incoherent, and answers by suggesting that 'there was no discrete discourse or site of "queerness" in that culture'. No stable sexual identity based on same-sex object choice can be found; neither can we ascribe clear boundaries to sexual acts and the conceptualizations they were given on the basis of our own categories. In DiGangi's terms, 'queerness could subtly, unpredictably, fluctuate into and out of visibility' in the early modern practices and representations that we find in our texts. The ways in which bodily beauty figured in early modern men's emotional lives is one such site of fluctuating queerness.

One can certainly start unravelling the mystery of Drayton's luminously, brilliantly beautiful Gaveston by pointing towards the gendered norms of understanding beauty. Where the standard 'woman' was imagined as beautiful, and individual ugly women as exceptions to the rule, a beautiful man was experienced as a singular anomaly, as an exception to the male norm. Men could indeed be less or more attractive, but evaluations of their beauty were not central to determining their social worth. Following this rule, men's emotional or sexual reactions to other men's beauty could be viewed as exceptions as well, as an inevitable but unusual response to the emergence of a singular beautiful individual.

But if a man was beautiful enough to incite this sort of reaction, the early modern mind was quite willing to conceptualize men's reactions to other men as the perfect parallel to their love and attraction to beautiful women. This, at least, is the way in which Drayton's Gaveston explains the love between him and Edward – as a completely natural and understandable consequence of his exquisite looks. The ultimately sinful partnership slips in an astoundingly easy way into the grand framework of beauty and heterosexual desire. The role of beauty as the power behind love and sexuality was so manifest that it made a man's sexual love for another man not only possible but unavoidable.

If beauty could make sodomitical acts understandable in a heteronormative context, then its emotional power must be viewed, at least partly, as a principle beyond sex and gender. The threat proposed by homoerotic desire was channelled into the familiar story of social and gender hierarchy, where beauty marks the subordinate object who nevertheless comes to hold an affective power over the admiring subject. In this way, the game of gender that men desiring men played was rendered much less threatening than it would have seemed if placed squarely under the rubric of sodomy. But if Gaveston and Edward can unsettle our views of how beauty was gendered, they also, by their very digression from the norm, seem to redirect our gaze back towards the normative gender positions where men looked and desired, and women and other subordinates were created beautiful to allow that gaze and desire. What goes unquestioned is the position of the male lover whose eyes were the wounded and delighted recipients of the beloved's beauty.


50. A. Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 69. Findlay's analysis does, however, take into account the possible effect of the performance of vindiciveness and anger on members of the audience. This is an aspect that is missing in my analysis here, and which I will take up in my current research project *Moving Scenes*.

9 Korhonen, 'Beauty, Masculinity and Love between Men: Configuring Emotions with Michael Drayton's *Peirs Gaveston*'


3. Raphael Holinshed says nothing about Gaveston's looks, but mentions that Edward was 'indifferently tall of stature, strong of bodie, and healthfull'. R. Holinshed, *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlands, and Irelande* (London, 1577), pp. 847–51, 884. According to John Stow, the king was 'fayre of body, but vnestfast of maners'. J. Stow, *A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* (London, 1565), f. 105'. Christopher Marlowe, in turn, does not describe the outward appearance of the pair in any detail; Gaveston is compared to Helen of Troy by Lancaster, but the only characters in the play who are explicitly called fair, mostly to mark their high status, are queens. See C. Marlowe, *The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second* (London, 1594).

Interestingly, Drayton also described the reign of Edward II after Gaveston's death in *Mortimeriad*, giving hardly any role to beauty. M. Drayton, *Mortimeriad* (London, 1596), see e.g. sig. B3r–B4v; N1r. On different emphases in Marlowe and Drayton, see also S. Gianvallone, 'Barnfield, Drayton, and Marlowe: Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Elizabethan Literature', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 16.2 (1981), pp. 9–24.


able to make sense of his protagonists. Drayton did not have a questionable sexual reputation, but we have no record of him being married either. Anne Lake Prescott in ODNB notes Drayton's partiality to male beauty and his relish in imagining homoerotic desire, and suggests that this may be a signal of his own feelings. Interestingly, Bernard Capp has found him mixed up in a rather sedgy affair: accused of incontinence with one Mrs Mary Peters in her room in a lodging-house, Drayton appeared in court and denied the whole thing. If, as seems likely, Mrs Peters's landlord had cooked up the accusation in order to extort money, we have no idea if the case speaks about Drayton's sexual interests at all. What it does say is that, for contemporaries, his sexual involvement with women was believable. But even that, considering the nature of same-sex practices in early modern culture, in no way resolves where his preferences lay. B. Capp, 'The Poet and the Bawdy Court: Michael Drayton and the Lodging-House World in Early Stuart London,' Seventeenth Century, 10:1 (1995), pp. 27–32.


34. Drayton, Peirs Gaveston, p. 165.
De amicitia, and it could also be found in Erasmus's Adagia and Thomas Elyot’s The Boke Named the Governaunce, for example. Shannon, Sovereign Amity, pp. 3–5.

DiGangi, ‘How Queer was the Renaissance?’, p. 142.

10 Kaartinan, ‘“Pray, Dr, is there Reason to Fear a Cancer”? Fear of Breast Cancer in Early Modern Britain’

1. To Jurin, Clonfert, 1 June 1733, Letters from Mordecai Cary, MS 6140, Wellcome Library (hereafter MS 6140), f.1.
3. For an overview of the history of emotions, see Barbara Rosenwein’s important recent essay in which she suggests we should study ‘emotional communities’. See B. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, American Historical Review, 107:3 (2002), pp. 821–45.
4. In this chapter I discuss ideas presented from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, that is, in the ‘long early modern period’.
8. J. Rodman, A Practical Explanation of Cancer in the Female Breast, with the Method of Cure, and Cases of Illustration (Paisley, 1815), pp. 56–7.
9. Anon., Treasure of Pure Men. Here beginneth a Newe Booke of Medicines Intituled or Callid the Treasure of Pure Men which was woven many Dyverse Good Medicines for Dyverse Certaine Dyseases as in the Table of this Present Booke more Playnly shall Appere. The Booke of Medicines (London, 1626), p. 28.
11. The most important reason for this practice was to keep alive the first child’s memory.
12. The biographical details are merely a suggestion given by the internet databases. There seem to have been two Mordecai Carries in London around the time – either the records are confused or there indeed were two men of the name.
13. To Jurin, Clonfert, 1 June 1733 (MS 6140), f. 1, ff.1–1v.
14. To Jurin, Clonfert, 9 June 1733 (MS 6140), f. 2.
15. To Jurin, Clonfert, 1 June 1733 (MS 6140), ff.1–1v.
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