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***FAYRE FANNAND FAX UNBEFOLDES  
HIS SCHULDERES (FAIR FLAPPING  
LOCKS ENFOLDING HIS SHOULDERS):  
THE TREATMENT OF EFFEMINATE HAIRSTYLES  
IN MEDIEVAL LATIN  
AND MIDDLE-ENGLISH LITERATURE***

The historians studying the ‘private history’ of the Middle Ages stress the importance of physical appearance in the culture of the time. This attitude had its reflection in the literature, especially in the romance. People were judged by their appearance and their status was clearly indicated by their clothes and physical appearance, firstly the face and the hair, and secondly the shape of the body. The looks manifested a given person’s social position and wealth. The beautiful was interpreted as good, the ugly as evil. The medieval aesthetics implied a certain integration of values leading to associating the two features: beauty and kindness as representatives of one quality. Kindness and nobleness was demonstrated by the physical appearance, whose perfection was enhanced by lavish clothes. In the literature of the time the characters become unreal in the ideal garments adorning their perfect bodies. Indeed particularly Arthurian literature is replete with elaborate description of the characters in terms of their physical appearance and a lot of space is devoted to the style, colour and texture of the clothes worn by them. To quote Umberto Eco, ‘there is literary evidence of the connection between the lively visual imagination of the poet and of

the painter', and the specific example he gives is one of the multiple descriptions of clothes in Chrétien de Troyes' romances<sup>1</sup>.

The question of hair is particularly significant in those descriptions, as Danielle Régnier-Bohler insists in *A History of Private Life. Revelations of the Medieval World* when she writes that 'hair was an important element of a person's self-image'<sup>2</sup>. When scrutinizing somebody's physical appearance primarily the hair was taken into consideration. In the descriptions of women it was treated as a highly gendered object. Its purpose was to manifest the angelic quality of a lady and her utmost attractiveness combined with innocence. Régnier-Bohler insists that 'blond hair was considered a canonical ingredient of beauty, as is indicated by the numerous words for blondness and the many heroines whose names connote blondness, such as Clarissant, Soredamor, and Lienor'. However she also writes that 'some very elegant women were nevertheless described as *a little brunette*'<sup>3</sup>. Such opposing expectations could lead to paradoxical situations, when a perfect woman was described in reference to both of those types of hair at the same time. It clearly happens in the case of the Polish mariolatric sermons written by the so-called Paterek (Jan of Szamotyły) in the sixteenth century. One has to remember that the Polish Middle Ages ended later than in Western Europe, hence the sixteenth-century literature also has to be taken into consideration as it is done by Teresa Michałowska in her *Middle Ages*, an outline of the literary history. In sermon VI Paterek bases his description of Virgin Mary on the treatise *De laude Beatae Virginis* attributed to Albert the Great when Paterek writes about her hair as being yellow and black<sup>4</sup>. He explains afterwards that the yellow and black colour of the hair is realized in its changing quality: in Mary's youth it was fair and then changed into black, which is a proof of her perfection visible even in her bodily form. Yet, the impression remains: Mary's hair constituted a paragon of feminine beauty precisely because it was both very fair and very dark, which was practically realized in the changes it underwent.

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<sup>1</sup>/ U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. H. Bredin, New Haven and London 1986, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>/ D. Régnier-Bohler, *Imagining the Self*, in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2: *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. G. Duby, trans. A. Goldhammer, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 1988, p. 361.

<sup>3</sup>/ D. Régnier-Bohler, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>4</sup>/ T. Michałowska, *Wielka historia literatury polskiej: Średniowiecze* [*The History of Polish Literature: Middle Ages*], Warszawa 2002, p. 630.

In Arthurian literature the characters are also defined primarily in terms of their physical appearance which later is completed with the delineation of their personality matching the looks. An example of such a description, which is particularly relevant since it broaches on the significant question of hair, is the passage introducing the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The fourteenth-century alliterative poem contains some elaborate passages describing the characters' social rank by dint of presenting their splendid clothes that enhance the nobleness of their facial features. The Green Knight is described in terms of courtly fashion in the scene introducing this character to the reader. The portrayal of the whole body is preceded by that of the hair. Such a presentation remains in accordance with Régnier-Bohler's statement that precisely the hair was the dominant feature on the basis of which a given person was judged. The knight is ostensibly a fashion follower which confirms his social status and the fact that he belongs to the courtly culture:

Wel gay was this gome gered in grene,  
And the here of his hed of his hors swete.  
Fayre fannand fax umbefoldes his schulderes;  
A much berd as a busk over his brest henges,  
That wyth his highlich here that of his hed reches  
Was evesed al umbetorne abof his elbowes,  
That half his armes theunder were halched in the wyse  
Of a kynges capados that closes his swyre.  
The mane of that mayn hors much to hit lyke,  
Wel cresped and cemmaed, wyth knottes ful  
mony  
Folden in wyth fildore aboute the fayre grene,  
Ay a herle of the here, an other of golde. (179-190)<sup>5</sup>

[Very gay was this great man guised all in green,  
and the hair of his head with his horse's accorded:  
fair flapping locks enfolding his shoulders,  
a big beard like a bush over his breast hanging  
that with the handsome hair from his head falling  
was sharp shorn to an edge just short of his elbows,  
so that half his arms under it were hid, as it were

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<sup>5</sup>/ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, eds. A. C. Cawley, J. J. Anderson, London, Vermont 1976; all the lines of the original refer to that edition.

in a king's capadoce that encloses his neck.  
The mane of that mighty horse was of much the same sort,  
well curled and all combed, with many curious knots  
woven in with gold wire about the wondrous green,  
even a strand of the hair and a string of a gold<sup>6</sup>.

The description is differentiated as it refers not only directly to the hair of the stranger, but also to the mane of his horse which resembles the knight's hair in many respects. The mane is artistically curled, that is 'wel cresped and cemmed' [well curled and combed] (188), and adorned in the way that has an air of artificiality, specifically because of the 'fildore' [gold wire] (189) intertwined with the hair whose colour is natural. The poet elaborates on the 'faire fannand fax' [fair flapping locks] (181) of the knight by describing the horse's mane at the next stage of the portrayal. The horse's arrangement of the hair seems to be the continuation of the Green Knight's courtly hairstyle. Thus the description is more varied: the emphasis is placed on both types of hair and the knight's locks are portrayed through the image of the mane which is a cultural construct, in comparison with the natural quality of hair as such.

Another well-known example of a literary character sporting a sophisticated courtly hairstyle is Chaucer's Squire, who is described as a figure 'with lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse' (1:81)<sup>7</sup>. Such a hairstyle was stereotypically associated with dandyish squires, who, to quote Nicholas Boron, are 'asoté . . . des femmes' [besotted with women]. Other writers, such as Alanus de Insulis, interpret such hair as a sign of foppishness<sup>8</sup>.

However, in Eastern Europe the fashion concerning masculine hairstyles was more varied than in the western countries. In Poland during the early Middle Ages short haircuts were the dominating ones, especially among the gentry whose short hair signaled their feudal relationship to their liege lord. The traditional Polish hairstyle consisted in the hair trimmed over the ears and generally kept short. Yet, at the beginning of the fourteenth century the Western fashion started to be transmitted from both Germany and the other non-Western countries where the tendency in terms of hair had always been similar

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<sup>6</sup>/ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*, trans. J. R. R. Tolkien, ed. Ch. Tolkien, London 1990; all the translation of the lines is taken from that edition.

<sup>7</sup>/ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson, Oxford 1987; all the numbers of the lines from *The Canterbury Tales* refer to that edition.

<sup>8</sup>/ Cf. J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire. The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, Cambridge 1973, p. 119.

to the Western one: in Hungary or Russia<sup>9</sup>. The cultural clash was inevitable when fashionable men started sporting long locks instead of the hair shortly cropped over the ears. Gender anxiety appeared as a result of the domination of 'effeminate' men at the courts of Europe, since that issue was signaled by various authors and it was conceived of as a social or even a moral problem. Especially the hairstyle was the most direct manifestation of the new fashion, more telling than the clothes worn at the courts of the rulers and in the streets, though their significance cannot be underestimated, either.

The Western European fashion found its direct reflection in the moralistic literature which started to be written as early as in the twelfth century, with Nigellus de Longchamps' *Speculum stultorum* being one of the first literary works created within that genre. The genre of *de statu hominum*, or estates writing emerged as the result of a new division of the highly-hierarchized medieval society: the classification into various states instead of the older hierarchy of *oratores*, *bellatores* and *laboratores*. The basis of this division consisted not only in various social classes and their different occupation, but also in the separation into the two sexes. Women constituted another estate, separate from all the other ones. Characteristically, each of the estates had its own vice, yet, the *cupiditas* admonished by Chaucer's Pardoner in his tale was common to all of those human 'classes'<sup>10</sup>. Generally the definition of estates literature represents the following characteristics, as it was defined by Jill Mann on the basis of Ruth Mohl's formulation:

First, an enumeration of the 'estates' or social and occupational classes, whose aim seems to be completeness. Secondly, a lament over the shortcomings of the estates; each fails in its duty to the rest. Thirdly, the philosophy of the divine ordination of the three principle estates, the dependence of the state on all three, and the necessity of being content with ones' station. And last, an attempt to find remedies, religious or political, for the defects of estates. However, these characteristics are by no means to be found in every piece of estates writing<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>/ T. Jurek, *Fryzura narodowa średniowiecznych Polaków* ['Medieval Poles' national hairstyle'], in: *Scriptura Custos Memoriae*, ed. D. Zydorek, Poznań 2001, pp. 635-651.

<sup>10</sup>/ T. Michałowska, *Wielka historia literatury polskiej: Średniowiecze* [*The History of Polish Literature: Middle Ages*], p. 254.

<sup>11</sup>/ R. Mohl, *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, quoted in: J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire...*, p. 3.

One of estates literary works was *Antigameratus*. That didactic poem written by Nicolaus Frowinus Cracoviensis, a German living in Cracow was created later than *Speculum stultorum*, more specifically before 1346. The poem constituted a part of the widely-known canon of Latin works which were used to educate students throughout the European Middle Ages. Frowinus belonged to the so-called *classici novi*, whose works replaced the canon originating from the antiquity. The *gameratus* from the poem's title could very likely mean 'an adulterer'. One of his characteristic features was his physical appearance, which again proves that the looks were the primary factor in judging people. In the poem the adulterer treated as a type is severely criticized and ridiculed because of his demeanour and the impression he makes on the 'decent' male onlookers and the ladies. The significant detail his hairstyle constitutes is a sign to be interpreted in the same way as his whole body is a type of manifesto or simply a conundrum to be deciphered. The author solves the riddle easily since the looks are more telling than words, as it can be inferred from the description.

The figure of the courtly knight along with his sophisticated hairstyle and clothes may be associated with the terrifying *androgyme*, a liminal creature who disrupts the 'divine' order of the universe. The disruption starts at the microcosmic level: that of the private sphere of one's physical appearance. Moreover, literal monstrosity has very specific implications for the medieval human: it may directly result in moral hideousness, since transcending the boundary between the masculine and the feminine, or the human and the non-human, leads to moral chaos and a disruption of the fixed order. If we take into consideration the medieval tendency to assess an individual on the basis of the appearances, the *semi-vir* will always be treated as a potential sinner. He is defined on the basis of his looks and the impression they make on the observers. His actual identity realized in specific actions is not important: he is defined in terms of the hairstyle and clothes and interpreted on the basis of those signs.

Such a definition of the fashionable nobleman conceived here as a type and not a concrete person is visible at the outset of the speech the author of *Antigameratus* addresses to the sinner:

25. Te retrahis luci non tonsus, ut est fera luci.  
Ac in fronte comis uultum quasi bestia comis.  
Es Sodemesque comes, si sic te uertice comes.

Nam prior hic gestus a crinibus est ita gestus.  
Ob quod per turpes gestus te non ita turpes.  
26. Est fatue mentis, quod fit noua barbula mentis.  
Firmer hoc edo, quod te similem facis hedo.  
Mente par es follies, capulum tibi stat quasi follies.  
Hoc cur si queries, aio: uomitum quia queries.  
More plebes Iude iam pileus est tibi Iude.<sup>12</sup>

The bestial quality of the courtier manifesting itself in his similarity to a boar ('ut est fera luci', l. 25), to an unspecified beast ('quasi bestia comis', l. 26), or to a goat ('quode te similem facis hedo', l. 31) corroborates with the statement that the 'semi- vir' disrupts the boundary between the binaries, the gender binary being only one of many. He is neither human nor fully bestial, since he wears sophisticated clothes simultaneously with the long hair and the (excessive) beard. Too much culture seems to dehumanize him in the sense of making him animal-like. The garments complete the image of a contemptuous adulterer since they enhance the monstrosity of his appearance. They expose the body to an excessive degree and deform the figure, in contrast to 'sensibus hauris' ['sensible (modest) outfit'] (42) that is recommended by the author.

35. Significans frauds caueas, ne quos ita frauds.  
Per scapulas nudas quasi leno lubrica nudas.  
Hoc reprobato sane, quia mentis hoc est male sane.  
En rudis est uestis, qua te gamentice uestis.  
Quod patet ex arte, quia stringeris hac nimis arte.  
40. Vestibus hijs artus nimis angis corporis artus.  
Carne tua farte, stringent saccum quasi far te.  
Sensibus hoc hauris: manice sunt ut canis auris.  
Per uarias rugas has ut femoralia rugas.  
Ex peciis sartis has nunc itasic modo sartis.  
45. Hinc similem monstro fore te per talia monstro.  
Pecillum cur tum strictum fers tum quoque curtum?  
Hoc, demens, larga, tunc pelles frigora larga.  
Dicere, queso, uelis, cur uelas baltea uelis.  
Hac ratione peris, et idem facis, improbe, peris.

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<sup>12</sup>/ *Nicolaus Frowinus: Antigamentus*, ed. M. Meior [not yet published at the time of writing this article; I would like to thank Professor Mieczyslaw Meior for making his edition and translation available to me as well as pointing to me other texts vital for writing this article – without his invaluable help it would not have been written]; all the other quotations have been taken from that edition.

The description of the ‘scapula nuda’ [naked arse] (36) is an attempt at presenting the grotesqueness of the courtier’s body. The Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque includes the emphasis not only on defecation as a grotesque activity, but also on the lower parts of the body as such. The carnival body, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White insist, is an image of impure corporeal bulk with . . . its lower regions (belly, legs, buttocks, and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, ‘spirit’, reason)<sup>13</sup>.

Hence the expression: ‘Uomito quia queris’ [‘You suffer from vomiting’] (33) can be read as the first indication of the adulterer’s grotesqueness. The excessive prominence of the body is a completion of the excess signaled by the act of vomiting. The clothes that are too short and make the figure too noticeable lead to an even more grotesque image, and finally to making oneself ridiculous when both the health is imperiled in winter (‘hoc, demens, larga, tunc pelles frigora larga’) (47) and the money that is carried with oneself (‘hac ratione peris, et idem facis, improbe, peris’) (49). The courtly hairstyle and the garments matching it become the source of figurative destruction- the courtier becomes a monster (‘hinc similem monstro fore te per talia monstro’) (45) in the eyes of the rest of the society:

50. Te deridet anus, cum bis tibi cingitur anus;  
Es nam peior equo, loculo qui cingitur equo.  
Cur hinc inde dicas in ueste geris, michi dicas.  
Has ubi uis signa: manie sunt utique signa.  
Est reprobus finis hic, quo tunicas modo finis.  
55. Per uarias zottas nam sic uelut histrio zottas.  
Sensu non salue, cur das michi gutture salue?  
Et facis hoc uane, quia mentis es utique uane.  
Flentis more canis canis nouaca rmina canis.  
Ad noua sic apte, tu symea diceris apte.

The use of the word ‘anus’ [arse] (50) again places the emphasis on the description of the lower bodily parts. The ‘art’ (culture) visible in the hairstyle and the garments as its completion leads to the blurring of the gender categories. A woman ridicules the *gameratus* (50) since he transgresses the boundaries of gender. If he is effeminate, he can just as well be called a horse (51), a dog (58) or a monkey (59). The threat of cross-dressing and subsequent cross-gender is

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<sup>13</sup>/ P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London 1986, p. 9.

so dangerous that it leads to defining such a courtier as a trans-human creature, or the sign (53) of monstrosity. Fixed gender binaries are defined as belonging to the realm of nature and a means to define the human, while blurred gender categories seem to be associated with art in the sense of culture and lead to the individual's bestiality and monstrosity.

Hair is treated here as another part of the body deformed by fashion. The deformity is associated with the question of gender as due to the hair the courtier becomes a trans-gender creature, neither a man nor a woman (since the feminine laughter separates him from women), remaining on the margin. Thus the hair and its owner remain highly ambiguous signs, practically impossible to classify under one heading. His status is that of a deformed man, both excessive in his manifestation of gender traits and lacking in them. The gender he manifests by sporting long curly hair is not his own – the effeminacy leads to deficiency in masculine qualities.

Such an analysis of the function of hair as a gendered object may be supported by the following extract from a historical source, *Chronicon aulae regiae* (also known as *Chronica Wencelsai*), a description of the practices of masculine fashion followers in Bohemia:

Sunt quidam istorum mirabilium inventorum, qui more barbarorum barbas longas nutriunt nec has radunt. Sunt et alii, qui dignitatem deformando virilem morem secuntur in crinibus per omnia muliebrem; alii crines suos in latum more lanificum perticunt in rotundum aurenusque diffundunt; alii calamistro crines tornant, ut comit fuit primitus est abrasus.

[There are some of those amazing inventors, who in the mode of barbarians grow long beards and do not shave them off. There are others who are separated from the masculine mores by their deformity and they have particularly feminine hair; others curl their hair in the mode of the ones who weave wool and they spread it around their heads; others curl their hair with hot curlers to make it courtly, therefore it is carefully arranged.]<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>/ *Chronicon aulae regiae (Chronica Wencelsai), Die Königsaal-er Gechichts-Quellen mit den Zusätzen und der Fortsetzung des Domherrn Franz von Prag*, hrsgg. von J. Loserth, Wien 1875 (*Fontes rerum Austriacarum Scriptores*, vol. VIII), p. 469; the translation is mine.

The ‘deformed’ ones are shown as marginalized, or as a matter of fact voluntarily placing themselves on the margin, outside the fixed boundaries of gender. Their practices are complicated, more complicated than those of women: the curling of hair resembles the actions of wool weavers and not simply of the women who want to be fashionable. They misshape their bodies to make them androgynous: the result is the body which is neither masculine nor fully feminine.

As far as Latin literature written in Poland is concerned, Nicolas Oloch (misspelt as Olochoch in the only remaining manuscript containing his poems) undertook the topic of courtly fashion in his *De curie miseria* [*On the misery of the court*]. His criticism seems to be a continuation of Frowinus’ *Antigammatius* and generally a Polish reaction to the European literary trend consisting in ridiculing the courtly culture. Yet, in our discussion of hair as a gendered object Oloch’s voice in that debate has to be taken to consideration.

Hunc curia laudat, quanto quis comptior etat,  
Dampnificat illum, qui brevem gerit pilum.  
Namque curiote ut femina sunt modo compti,  
Idcirco ratione carent et omine.  
Et possum dicere, suspendi quod sine reste  
Pendulo e vertice possent inque pilo,  
Quem in fronte gerunt; comas quasi bestia comunt:  
Sunt igitur socii Sodome ac vicii.  
Nempe prior gestus a crinibus est illa gestus-  
A vertice comit ad aures nunc qui vilis. (l. 15-24)<sup>15</sup>

The situation at courts is presented as even more extreme: in the fifteenth century when Oloch wrote his poem not only were artificial hairstyles praised, but also short hair was condemned. The comparison to animals appears here as well (‘comas quasi bestia comunt’) (21). Pointing to Sodome as the place of origin of a long-haired courtier is as controversial here as it is in the poem by Frowinus, where the author thus addresses the adulterer: ‘es Sodomesque comes, si sic te uertice comes’ (27). Recently there has been a debate of a kind among Polish historians concerning those references to sodomy. Jacek Wiesiolowski maintains that these are actual hints at homosexual practices such

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<sup>15</sup>/ R. Ganszyniec, *Polonolatina VII*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1927, R. 24, quoted in: T. Jurek, *Fryzura narodowa...*, pp. 635-651.

hairstyles could imply<sup>16</sup>. Tomasz Jurek summarizes such a viewpoint as exaggerated, even though his only argument against suggested homosexuality is the fact that such references to the courtly hairstyles were common in the estates writing<sup>17</sup>. Probably this clash is associated with the two extreme standpoints the two scholars adopt: Wiesiowski writes that such references were *obviously* an indication that homosexual practices had taken place, whereas Jurek excludes such a possibility altogether and claims that any allusion of that kind is a cliché which does not reflect any real-life situation.

Two treatments of the topic of homosexuality are juxtaposed in those interpretations of *Antigameratus* and *De curie miseria*. Wiesiowski treats the references to Sodome as literal, whereas for Jurek the homosexual practices are only figurative: the hairstyles suggest the possibility of such practices and that is precisely their role as symbols of moral corruption. In the same way as in the most famous bird debate *The Owl and the Nightingale* one monstrosity leads to another one, both of them referring to the owl from the perspective of the nightingale. Tamara A. Goeglein insists that ‘not only are owls freaks of nature and, thus, literally corrupt, but their moral monstrosities can be said to emerge from their actually “monstrous” condition’<sup>18</sup>. The same regularity seems to apply in the case of fashionable courtiers: their ‘monstrous’ hairstyles are signs of their moral corruption and their actual homosexual or heterosexual behaviour is insignificant. They are mere signs of the disruption of the gender binaries and their hairstyles may be read as an indication of their non-normative sexual behaviour. Yet, a very important fact has to be taken into consideration here: at the time when those literary works were written sodomy (*sodomita fornicatio*) and bisexuality (*tam apud masculos quam apud feminas cordisque mechation et turpis effusio seminis*) were included in the general lists of all the sins *anybody* might commit, *The Book of Cerne* being one of those catalogues<sup>19</sup>. In the Middle Ages there was no notion of homosexual identity as such and no figure of ‘a homosexual’ conceived of as an individual. Carol Vance claims that ‘although sodomy occurred and was punished . . . , it was viewed as a result of carnal lust to

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<sup>16</sup> / J. Wiesiowski, *Ubiór i moda*, [‘Clothes and fashion’] in: *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej XIV-XV [The culture of medieval Poland in the 15th and 16th centuries]*, ed. B. Geremek, Warszawa 1997, pp. 32-50.

<sup>17</sup> / T. Jurek, *Fryzura narodowa średniowiecznych Polaków...*, pp. 635-651.

<sup>18</sup> / T. A. Goeglein, *Monsters and Universals in “The Owl and the Nightingale”*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1995, no. 9412, pp. 190-206.

<sup>19</sup> / T. Michałowska, *Ego Gertruda*, Warszawa 2001, p. 35.

which any mortal could fall prey, not as an act committed by a particular type of individual, the “homosexual”<sup>20</sup>.

Another example of such a character to whom the distinction between the literal homosexuality and the figurative one does not apply is, as Carolyn Dinshaw writes, Chaucer’s Pardoner, who ‘shows the inadequacy of the very categories – masculine/ feminine, letter/ spirit, literal/ figurative’<sup>21</sup>. The Pardoner is precisely the character the narrator of the *General Prologue* has doubts about as far as his gender identity is concerned. The identification is somehow blurred if the narrator introducing that character to the reader claims: ‘I trowthe he were a geldyng or a mare’ [‘I believe he was a eunuch or a homosexual’] (691). Effeminacy (here resulting from biological conditioning and not only fashion) and homosexuality are grouped under the label of non-normative behaviour and the differences between the two are insignificant. The similarity between the two consists in the fact that the two identities are associated with the lack of the masculine/ feminine distinction. The effeminacy or homosexuality of the Pardoner does not have to be interpreted as either literal or figurative. The man looks like a homosexual so that potential can be realized in practice, but it is not necessary.

*The Canterbury Tales* is another medieval literary work where clothes constitute an important element of the characters’ description. To quote Dinshaw again, ‘we find that clothing is an important index of broader significance in Chaucer’s poetics’<sup>22</sup>. The characters can be interpreted through their clothes, only to mention the famous red stockings worn by the Wife of Bath. The Pardoner, being a particularly ambiguous figure from the point of view of gender, as a literary character can also be analyzed through his physical appearance:

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,  
But smothe it heeng as a strike of flex;  
By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,  
And therwith he his shulderes overspradde;  
But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.  
But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,  
For it was trussed up in his wallet.

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<sup>20</sup>/ C. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Towards a Politics of Sexuality*, in *Feminisms*, eds. S. Kemp and J. Squires, Oxford 1997, pp. 327-335.

<sup>21</sup>/ C. Dinshaw, *Eunuch Hermeneutics*, in: *Chaucer*, ed. C. Saunders, Oxford 2001, pp. 314-324.

<sup>22</sup>/ *Ibidem*, pp. 314-324.

Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;  
Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.  
Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.  
A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe. (1: 675-685)

He is another fashion follower with a questionable gender identity, yet, his efforts to look fashionable are ridiculed as being misdirected. Hair is an important element of his physical appearance, and as a matter of fact that detail dominates the whole description. The hairstyle is grotesque in being excessively courtly. His hairstyle seems to be the exact reverse of the Squire's one. The amount of hair on his head does not allow the Pardoner to look attractive when it is let down in 'thynne . . . colpons' [thin strands] (679). The man wears a hood 'for jolitee' [to make an attractive appearance] (680), but the effect he achieves is opposite, with his yellow and flax-like hair. The portrayal the reader gets is precisely the opposite of that of a fashionable courtier. The deficient hair implies moral deficiency and a potential of corruption existing in that character.

The Pardoner's potential homosexuality does not have to be realized in practice: it is neither fully literal nor figurative, neither the question of the spirit that character embodies nor the actual letter, as Dinshaw claims<sup>23</sup>. This ambivalence is maintained when the expectations towards the Pardoner on the part of the other pilgrims are presented after the Host addresses him:

"Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner", he sayde,  
"Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon."  
"It shal be doon, ° quod he, "by Seint Ron  
yon!  
But first," quod he, "heere at this alestake  
I wol bothe drynke and eten of a cake."  
But right anon thise gentils gone to crye,  
"Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!" (6: 317-324)

Harry Bailly judges the Pardoner by his physical appearance and expects 'som myrthe or japes' [some mirth or jokes] (318), whereas the others straightforwardly accuse him of intending to tell a 'ribaudye' (324). The phrase: 'beel amy' (317) may refer to the courtly culture the Pardoner aspired to be a part of and to French as the language of that culture in England. What is even more im-

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<sup>23</sup> / C. Dinshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 314-324.

portant than such an introduction to the prologue and the tale is the fact that *cupiditas* constitutes the topic of the tale. In the prologue itself the Pardoner formulates the message of his tale as: ‘*Radix malorum est cupiditas*’ (334). It has to be remembered that in the genre of *de statu hominum* writing cupidity was the sin common to all the strata of the society. The term ‘couetyse’ (2375) appears also in the context of Sir Gawain’s sin in the poem we have already mentioned. Jane Gilbert discusses that quality as both cupidity and ‘strong sexual desire; concupiscence, lust’<sup>24</sup>. In Middle English the word ‘coveitise’ refers not only to the longing to possess material objects, but also bodies treated as gendered, sexual objects. If we treat Pardoner’s *cupiditas* in such terms, even the topic of his tale is a tell-tale one. Robert P. Miller has shown that eunuchry was as a matter of fact used as a metaphor for ‘radical wanting, radical desire, that is cupiditas’<sup>25</sup>.

The mockery present in the description of the Pardoner originates in the estates writing in the same way the descriptions in *Antigameratus* or *De curie miseria* do. Jill Mann points out other stereotypical details of an effeminate man’s description: his ‘voys . . . as small as hath a goot’ (688) and ‘no berd . . . ne nevere sholde have;/ As smothe it was as it were late shave’ (689-690). She insists that ‘not only the carefully arranged hair, but also the Pardoner’s smooth face come from satire on fops – as is appropriate, since it is effeminacy of which they are accused’<sup>26</sup>.

The Pardoner’s body is a text, presented as a flawed one in the sense of being grotesque and deprived of the ‘natural’ dignity Chaucer’s Knight possesses. The Pardoner’s hairstyle is shown as an element of the carnival body, deformed and universally ridiculed. His existence on the border of the masculine and feminine or even outside those binaries marginalizes him in the society of the pilgrims, which is a metaphor of his marginalization in the whole social hierarchy. His hairstyle is a highly gendered object, marking his ambition to look feminine, which is not fulfilled since the man makes himself ridiculous. Paradoxically, he would be even more ridiculous for the pilgrims if he achieved the feminized looks he aspired to.

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<sup>24</sup>/ J. Gilbert, *Gender and Social Transgression*, in *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, eds. D. Brewer, J. Gibson, Cambridge 1997, pp. 53-69.

<sup>25</sup>/ R. P. Miller, *Chaucer’s Pardoner, the Spiritual Eunuch, and the Pardoner’s Tale*, quoted in: C. Dinshaw, *Eunuch Hermeneutics...*, p. 314-324.

<sup>26</sup>/ J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire...*, p. 148.

At present it cannot be overruled whether the references to homosexuality were only figurative, or maybe actual homoerotic practices were at their bottom. Nevertheless, excluding such a possibility from the interpretation of both the didactic poems written in Latin in Eastern Europe and such literary works as *The Canterbury Tales* seems to be an attempt at suppressing the potential homosexual themes that may be found there. Michel Foucault named such a practice as ‘repression of sexuality’, by the term ‘sexuality’ meaning homosexual practices that had been present in our culture since antiquity. Hair seems to be precisely an object which can be treated as a taboo one, since it is strongly gender-marked and has certain sexual implications. When courtly masculine hairstyles are considered, they are definitely the primary gendered object broached on when describing people, yet, the gender they indicate is highly ambiguous and difficult to define. Such a situation corroborates with the statement that the latter Middle Ages were the time of a crisis of certain binaries. Felicity Riddy identifies that phenomenon as the source of gender anxiety:

In the latter part of the fourteenth century there seems to have been a crisis of gender categories as well as a crisis in the configuration of nature and culture. The boundaries between masculine and feminine were particularly unstable and the meanings assigned to them particularly problematic.<sup>27</sup>

As we noticed in the descriptions of fashionable hairstyles, those two dichotomies: nature/ culture and masculine/ feminine were very unstable. Hair was described as artificial even though it was more ‘natural’ than the clothes or any other fashionable detail. Gender was the cultural category, yet, the descriptions presented it as belonging to the domain of nature, whereas the individuals in whom the gender distinction was blurred were ‘unnatural’, therefore monstrous. Hair as a gendered object was supposed to be interpreted by the onlookers. However, reading it as a text was impossible as that text was ambiguous and impossible to classify as either masculine or feminine, entirely natural or artificial. Effeminate men could neither be defined as humans nor as monsters. The hairstyles placed them in between, on the borders of various clear-cut distinctions they could not be assigned to.

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<sup>27</sup> / F. Riddy, *Nature, Culture and Gender in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in: *Arthurian Romance and Gender*, ed. F. Wolfzettel, Amsterdam and Atlanta 1995, pp. 215-225.

### Streszczenie

Symboliczna rola wyglądu zewnętrznego w średniowieczu została już wielokrotnie zauważona przez tzw. „historyków idei”. Zjawisko to znalazło także odzwierciedlenie w literaturze staropolskiej. W literaturze średnioangielskiej istnieją interesujące opisy utrefionych włosów męskich. Ta moda dotarła także na wschód Europy, wywołując moralne kontrowersje, co zostało utrwalone w utworach stanowych. W Polsce powstał wtedy *Antigameratus* Mikołaja Frowina. Autor najprawdopodobniej zwraca się przeciwko „cudzołożnikowi”, porównywanemu do zwierząt i noszącemu nieskromne odzienie. Ważnym elementem opisu są długie, starannie ułożone włosy. Takie same włosy, chociaż sprawiające żalosne wrażenie, ma Sprzedawca Odpustów w *Opowieściach kanterberyjskich*, co, jak to zostało ujęte w krytyce dzieła Chaucera, sugeruje praktyki homoseksualne.