JOHN GOWER

Confessio Amantis

Volume 3

edited by
Russell A. Peck,
with Latin translations by
Andrew Galloway



TEAMS
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JOHN GOWER

Confessio Amantis

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

Confessio Amantis 35

Book 5: Avarice

i. On Avarice 35
- Tale of Midas 38
- Punishment of Tantalus 43
- Jealousy of Lovers 44
- Tale of Vulcan, Mars, and Venus 49

ii. Religions 51
- The Chaldeans 51
- The Egyptians 52
- The Greeks 54
- Idol Worship 68
- The Jews 70
- The Christians 73

iii. Covetousness 78
- Tale of Virgil's Mirror 80
- Tale of the Two Coffers 85
- Tale of the Beggars and the Two Pastries 87
- Covetousness of Lovers 89
- Tale of the King and his Steward's Wife 93

iv. Perjury 98
- Tale of Achilles and Deidamia 100
- Tale of Jason and Medea 106
- Tale of Phrixus and Helle 128

v. Usury 131
- Tale of Echo 135

vi. Parsimony 137
- Tale of Babio and Croceus 140

vii. Ingratitude 142
- Tale of Adrian and Bardus 144
- Tale of Theseus and Ariadne 150

viii. Rapacity 156
- Tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena 157

ix. Robbery 168
Tale of Neptune and Cornix 170
Tale of Calistona 172
x. Virginity 175
Agamemnon and Criseide 176
xi. Stealth and Pilfering 178
Tale of Leucothoe 183
Tale of Hercules and Faunus 185
xii. Sacrilege 188
Sacrilegiousness of Lovers 190
Tale of Paris and Helen 194
xiii. Prodigality 203

Book 6: Gluttony
i. On Drunkenness 209
Drunkenness of Lovers 211
Tale of Jupiter and the Two Casks 216
Prayer of Bacchus in the Desert 218
Tristram and Isolde 219
Marriage of Pirithous 220
Tale of Galba and Vitellius 221
ii. Delicacy 223
Delicacy of Lovers 224
Tale of Dives and Lazarus 231
Nero's Sensuality 235
iii. Sorcery and Witchcraft 237
Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus 240
Tale of Nectanabus 249
Zoroaster 261
Saul and the Witch 261
Alexander and Aristotle 262

Book 7: Education of the King
i. On Education: The Three Parts of Philosophy 264
ii. Theory, the First Part of Philosophy 265
Theology 266
Physics 267
Mathematics 268
iii. Four-fold Creation 269
Four Elements 270
Four Complexions 273
Four Servants of the Heart 275
Four Divisions of the World 276
iv. Astronomy 279
Seven Planets 281
Twelve Signs of the Zodiac 286
Fifteen Stars 293
Authors of Astronomy 297
v. Rhetoric, the Second Part of Philosophy 298

vi. Practice, the Third Part of Philosophy 301
vii. Truth, the First Part of Policy 303
Esdras on the King, Wine, Women, and Truth 305
Tale of Alcestis 308
viii. Largess, the Second Part of Policy 309
Tale of Julius and the Poor Knight 311
Tale of Antigonus and Cinichus 312
Flattery 313
Tale of Diogenes and Aristippus 315
Triumph, Humility, and the Roman Emperors 318
The Emperor and the Masons 319
Tale of Ahab and Micaiah 321
ix. Justice, the Third Part of Policy 325
Emperor Maximin 327
Gaius Fabricius 327
Emperor Conrad 328
Carmidotirus 329
Cambyses 330
Tale of Lycurgus 330
First Law-Givers 333
x. Pity, the Fourth Part of Policy 335
Tale of Codrus 336
Tale of Pompeius and the King of Armenia 337
Cruelty of Siculus 339
Dionysius and his Horse 340
Lichaon 340
Nobleness of the Lion 341
Tale of Spertachus and Thameris 342
Tale of the Mountain and the Mouse 345
A Time for War 346
Gideon 347
Saul and Agag 350
David and Joab 351
Solomon's Wisdom 352
Courtiers and the Fool 354
Folly of Rehoboam 355
Wisdom and the King 358
xi. Chastity, the Fifth Part of Policy 360
Sardanapalus 362
David 363
Cyrus and the Lydians 363
Counsel of Balaam 364
Lecherous Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom 366
Tale of Tarquin and Aruns 368
Tale of the Rape of Lucrece 372
Tale of Virginia 380
Tale of Tobias and Sara 384

Explanatory Notes 387

Textual Notes 485

Reference Index to Volume 3 491

Subject Index to Volumes 1–3 499

Bibliography 527

Glossary 539

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It is with gratitude that I dedicate this volume to the memory of Otto Gründler. I met Otto in 1987 when I first became affiliated with TEAMS and was appointed chair of the newly created Editorial Board. Over the next decade we worked closely together, planning the Middle English Texts Series and the other publications that TEAMS has sponsored. Otto was a founding member of TEAMS and served as President of the organization at the outset, then, for several years, was Treasurer. His passing leaves us all with a deep sense of loss. He was a magnificent visionary.

Finally, I wish to thank the hundreds of Gower scholars who have already made use of the first two volumes of the edition, and hope they accept my apologies for being slow in completing this third and final volume. But "now hit ys doon."



In Memoriam
Otto Gründler
(1928–2004)

INTRODUCTION

These olde worldes with the newe
Who that wol take in evidence,
Ther mai he se th'experience,
What thing it is to kepe lawe,
Thurgh which the wronges ben withdrawe
And rihtwisnesse stant commended,
Wherof the regnes ben amended.
— *Confessio Amantis*, 7.2702–08

We all get sucked into history in the end!
— Derek Pearsall[1]

In the Introduction to the second volume of this edition of *Confessio Amantis*, I explored Gower's use of dramatic, performative devices in the staging of "the self's effort to claim its own estate" (vol. 2, p. 39), pointing to Derek Pearsall's remark that Book 4, with its wealth of well-wrought Ovidian tales and its vigorous impersonation of Amans, is "much the best book" in the *Confessio*.[2] But although Book 4 is a high point, the culmination of the first half of the poem, it is a very particular kind of high point, one enlivened by the vivacious characterization of the desire-laden Amans, who is eager to please and be pleased.[3]

Book 5, which begins the second "half" of the poem, takes the reader in another direction. Gower alters his earlier structural patterns to shift the focus from confession and impersonation to education — education in good rule — with emphasis on the means, rather than the effect. The shift is no great jump. Rather, it is a subtle turning from a lively critique of Amans' lusty "would-be" behavior (he never actually succeeds in much) to a less dramatic, more sobering assessment, especially in Book 7, of what constitutes the laws of right behavior "wherof the regnes ben amended" (7.2708). The mode changes from that of the dramatist to that of the historian. Gower's historiographics have been an ever-present actant[4] in the voicing

[1] Private correspondence, 18 June 2004.

[2] Pearsall, *Gower and Lydgate*, p. 17, as cited in the second volume of this edition of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (hereafter *CA*), p. 31.

[3] One of the best discussions of Amans as a literary creation is Burrow's insightful analysis of Amans in terms of the French *Dits amoreux* tradition ("The Portrayal of Amans," pp. 6–24). See also Cowling, "Gower's Ironic Self-Portrait."

[4] I have borrowed this useful term from Greimas who, in his *Sémantique structurale* (pp. 172–91), attempts to get at the voicing of functions within a narrative or argument by means of reformulation of units of meaning that he thinks of (casts) in terms of *dramatis personae* that act within a morphological matrix. Working from folklorist Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Greimas defines

of his argument, ever since the beginning of the Prologue, where estates theory became a more philological component of the poem's political *sentence.* But now his manipulation of our consciousness of history and how it matters moves quietly toward the forefront, gradually turning what had seemed to be minor digressions on the history of labor (Book 3) and the history of invention (Book 4) into a carefully crafted agenda in estates history marked by a fresh rhetorical strategy. The shift leads to a second, less dramatic, high point than that of Book 4, but a new plateau, nonetheless, in the more cerebral Book 7, a wisdom book on the instruction of the king.

The first three books of the *Confessio* are organized according to a confessional paradigm of one sin (and her brood) per book; the innuendoes of the sin are enlarged upon through a family scheme that Gower had devised in his first major opus, the *Mirour de l'Omme* (c. 1376–79).[5] Genius, through his exempla, demonstrates how sin and its fivefold progeny eagerly invade territory that once belonged to humankind but which, now that it has been colonized by sin, needs reclamation. Genius attempts to accomplish this amendment by means of his inquisitorial exploration of desires and effects. In the second half of the poem he develops a new proceeding. This change in strategy began with the discussion of labor in Book 3 (Wrath);[6] then, at the end of Book 4 (Sloth), after Genius has exorcized the five children of Sloth, the coming divergence is made more explicit as Genius adds two additional subcategories — Somnolence and Tristesse (Despondency), as if to break the mold of the *Mirour* to precipitate different structural procedures that will define the second half of the *Confessio*.

Book 5, devoted to Dame Avarice, is by far the longest book in the *Confessio*.[7] As in the earlier books, Genius begins with a general definition of the sin by means of an exemplum,

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the character of an idea through the function of its actants. Actants are akin to motifs, but are more precisely focused on the morphology of voicing.

[5] The story of Sin in *Mirour de L'Omme* goes like this: The Devil gives birth to Sin (lines 205 ff.), then, enamored of her, enjoys pleasant entertainment whereby she gives birth to a son, Death. Her son incestuously copulates with her, and she gives birth to the Seven Deadly Sins (241 ff.). These seven daughters are then espoused by the Devil (who gives Hell as the dowry) to World (757 ff.). They approach World in a grand processional, with each Sin riding on one animal while holding another: Pride, on a lion, carries an eagle; Envy, on a dog, carries a sparrowhawk; Anger, on a boar, bears a cock on her fist; Sloth, on an ass, holds an owl; Avarice, on a badger, takes a goshawk on one fist and a merlin on the other; Gluttony, with kite on hand, rides a wolf, followed by Drunkenness whose rein she holds; and Lechery, on a goat, carries a tethered dove. Once married to World, each Sin gives birth to five offspring: Pride, to Hypocrisy, Vainglory, Arrogance, Boasting, and Disobedience (949–2616); Envy, to Detraction, Sorrow-at-other's-Joy, Joy-for-other's-Grief, Supplanting, and False-semblance (2617–3852); Anger, to Ill-Temper, Contention, Hatred, Strife, and Homicide (3853–5124); Sloth, to Somnolence, Laziness, Slackness, Idleness, and Negligence (5125–6180); Avarice, to Covetousness, Rapine, Usury, Simony, and Stinginess (6181–7704); Gluttony, to Voracity, Delicacy, Drunkenness, Superfluity, and Prodigality (7705–8616); and Lechery, to Fornication, Rape, Adultery, Incest, and Wantonness (8617–9720). But we are not left hopeless before such an onslaught, for, meanwhile, Reason weds the Seven Virtues (Humility, Charity, Patience, Prowess, Generosity, Measure, and Chastity), each of whom mothers five helpful children, enabling life in the world to seem less desperate.

[6] We should acknowledge, however, that all the actants of the change are anchored in the Prologue, particularly in the discussion of the three estates and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of history. Gower the historian is present in the poem long before Gower the dramatist makes his presence known.

[7] Book 5 is 7844 lines long; Book 7 is next with 5438; then Book 4, with 3712. Book 6 is the shortest, with 2440 (not counting the Prologue, with 1088 lines, as a book).

in this instance the story of ill-fated Midas. The tale tells how Midas' sense of kingship (i.e., a kingship that should define the spiritual/political properties of his personal being as well as that of his realm) gets displaced by an avaricious preoccupation with gold. It is normal for the soul to yearn for sufficiency, but Midas, in his myopic greed, confuses wealth with security.[8] The king becomes a money man, rather than mentor, as avarice destroys all the estates he governs. No longer do "mete and cloth" suffice (5.320); only gold seems to satisfy his tyrannical appetite, a fate that brings disastrous consequences to himself and his kingdom.

But how is it that presumably rational people can become so pathetically ruined by such obvious folly? For Gower, sin is a psychopathic condition. Genius bolsters his story of Midas with an account of Tantalus, thereby shifting the mode from a social effect to a psychological one. Tantalus, who has everything he needs for a good life, imagines he suffers from a deep-seated deprivation. His appetite becomes insatiable and leads to an internally profound sense of need. Genius describes the depravity in terms of uncontrollable appetite:

Lo nou, which a wreche,	*what a punishment*
That mete and drinke is him so couth,	*evident*
And yit ther comth non in his mouth!	
Lich to the peines of this flod	
Stant Avarice in worldes good:	
He hath ynowh and yit him nedeth,	
For his skarsnesse it him forbeideth,	*stinginess; denies*
And evere his hunger after more	
Travaileth him aliche sore,	*Afflicts; sorely*
So is he *peined overal*. (5.388–97, emphasis mine)	*tormented (made wretched)*

Though he has enough, it perpetually *seems* that he needs more, and, because of what amounts to a twisted sense of insufficiency, his labor gives him perpetual pain: "He hath ynowh and yit him nedeth" (5.393). Though he may be "peined overal" (5.397), his torment is self-induced.

As in the first half of the poem, after establishing his general definition of the sin, Genius goes on to the particular applicability of Avarice to lovers, where, in this instance, the loverly equivalent is Jealousy. Jealousy, like Avarice, is an insatiable possessiveness, the guarding of an illusory personal domain that may or may not be one's own. Such a "misease,"[9] Genius observes, is feverish obsession (5.577 ff.) that alters the vision of the jealous person by means

[8] On the disruptive in-roads of capitalism as it displaces feudal ideology whereby money, rather than feudal love and loyalty, becomes the new index of social achievement, see Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice." Where Pride had always ranked first of the sins ever since the fall of Lucifer, now, in the fourteenth century, Avarice seems the subtler, more pervasive corruption, the main contender for the number-one ranking among the sins. And, though prominent like newfangledness among all estates, it is especially prominent among churchmen who should be the most wise, self-sacrificing guides to society, but now seem the most debased. Note, for instance, Chaucer's corrupt churchmen like the Friar, Summoner, Pardoner, and Monk, or the prominence of Lady Meed and her magnetism in the Visio section of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*. See Yunck, *The Lineage of Lady Meed*; Baldwin, "The Medieval Merchant"; and Dean, *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*.

[9] According to the *OED*, *misease* remains in modern usage into the twentieth century as a term for "distress, affliction; trouble, misery; extreme suffering or discomfort," as well as "uneasiness or disquiet"; with earlier connotations of "need, want, and poverty." It serves Gower well as a psychological term for the fretted anxieties of the soul upon which the chances of the world so persistently play.

of "feigned enformacioun / Of his ymaginacioun" (5.593–94).[10] The example Genius gives of such a self-induced, self-informing Jealousy is the Ovidian Tale of Vulcan and Venus, where Vulcan's jealousy causes him more pain than the vengeful harm he perpetrates upon his wife. The example leads Amans to question the tenets of pagan theogeny. In response, Genius gives Amans a lesson in the history of religions, the longest digression in the poem (5.747–1970).

Gower places this history of religion in Book 5 for a specific reason, namely, his acute reaction to venality within the Christian Church. We can establish a better understanding of the intensity of his concern by returning to the *Mirour de l'Omme*, where, after describing the seven deadly sins and presenting remedies for each, the protagonist turns his attention to the three estates. Since mankind's relationship with God should be one's premier concern, Gower begins his remarks with the second estate, the Church, commencing first with the Court of Rome:

> I believe firmly that the rights of the head of Holy Church under God, if that man conducts himself rightly, are placed above all others. But this position is now changed, for what was humility is now pride, and one can see that what used to be liberality has now turned into covetousness. . . . What I intend to write here is not from myself only, but is rather *the murmur, complaint, voice, and cry of all Christian folk*. . . . Simon is now reigning with gold and silver in the court of Rome, so that the case of the poor, despite all clamor, shall not be heard. (*MO*, lines 18433–55, emphasis mine)[11]

Gower continues his critique, contrasting the venality of modern-day prelates, who would let "everyone perish rather than let a single finger of [their own] hand be injured," with the pagan king Codrus who "himself suffered martyrdom for the safety of his subjects" (*MO* 20003–12).[12] In *Confessio Amantis* Book 5, the tone of Gower's religious history is perhaps less angry than it was in the *Mirour*, but, tinged as it is with mockery of the admixture of superstition, piety, and greed, whether among the foolish pagans, with their belief in the incestuous promiscuity and bestiality of the gods, or among Christians who abuse God's sufferance thinking to make themselves more rich, it is no less bitter.

Just as Gower shifted the governing trope in *Mirour* from the domestic (Sin's household) to a political arena (the three estates), so in Book 5 of the *Confessio*, instead of moving the confession forward by means of the familial trope of Sin and her offspring, as he had done in the first half of the poem, Gower now shifts to a political configuration — Dame Avarice with her

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[10] See Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, especially his introduction (pp. 1–21) with its discussion of "enformacioun" and "informatio" not as "inert bodies of knowledge," but rather as "the action of transmitting and receiving knowledge" (p. 2), whereby forms are brought into the mind for effect (p. 8). Simpson sees this instructional process as being for Gower essentially Platonic, akin to the discussion of form and its inception in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, a process shaped by Aristotelian lore, especially in Book 7 of the *Confessio*.

[11] Gower, *Mirour de L'Omme* (hereafter *MO*), pp. 253–54. The whole of Gower's lengthy ethical history on the condition of Holy Church (*MO* 18421–21780) focuses on Avarice that runs throughout the papacy and the whole Court of Rome, infecting cardinals, bishops, archdeacons, deans, priests, annuellers, friars, and students — in short, the whole of the establishment. It must have seemed to Gower that the venality of the Church in the early 1370s had become progressively worse in the later 1380s, despite the efforts towards church reform by the radical Wycliffites, of whom he strongly disapproved.

[12] Compare Gower's use of the same example in *CA* 7.3163 ff., where Codrus, albeit a pagan king, is his principal exemplum for the fourth point of policy, Pity.

court and "servantz manyon" (5.1971–75). This broadening of the domestic to include political typology culminates in Book 7 with the education of the king, especially in terms of good and false counsel. Dame Avarice, like Lady Meed in *Piers Plowman*, is patroness of all vices. It is as if the account of the religions of the world has launched Gower's project into estate satire where we examine Avarice's twelve devious courtiers,[13] beginning with Covetoise, False Witness, Perjury, and Usury, then continuing with Parsimony (Skarsness), Ingratitude (Unkynde), Ravine, and Robbery, and concluding with Stealth, Michery (Pilfering), Sacrilege, and Prodigality. (With more than twice the number of categories — from five children to twelve courtiers — this book is more than twice the length of most others.) The political trope (the court) fits in with the poet's overarching criticism of the three estates in the Prologue, where he discussed the State (Prol. 93 ff.), the Church (Prol. 193 ff.), and the Commons (Prol. 499 ff.), but not just the three estates — rather those estates as Gower critiques them at about the time of the Merciless Parliament.[14] Although Book 5 includes several of the finest and most original tales in Gower, there is a significant increase in short exempla that scarcely qualify as tales at all, but are more akin to a homiletic technique that serves Genius well as he turns attention toward social and political concerns rather than love matters or theatrical twists of the psyche.

Book 6, on Gluttony, is the shortest book in the *Confessio*. It discusses only two kinds of the sin, Drunkenness and Delicacy, then speculates on the indulgences of sorcery and witchcraft to conclude with the Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus and the Tale of Nectanabus. This latter tale is one of the pivotal stories in the whole of the *Confessio* in that it sets up Book 7, where Genius explains to Amans, at the lover's request, how Aristotle taught Alexander. The device enables the poet to shelve his confessional drama in order to focus on ethics, bringing the educational substructure to its culmination. Some readers might feel cheated by Gower at this point, as he puts aside his greatest character creation, Amans. The decision is in a way like Plato's when he leaves behind the philosophical drama of *The Symposium* and *The Republic* to turn his attention, instead, to the writing of *Laws*.

Book 7, like *Laws*, is, in its quiet way, a triumph. As Gower shifts from playwright to social counselor his mode of rhetoric changes from his usual tale-telling to historical examples based on "real" kings from Roman, Greek, and biblical history, some of whom rule well, some abominably, while others just muddle through for reasons that Genius, armed with the *Secretum Secretorum*, the Bible, Valerius Maximus, Brunetto Latini, Livy, Seneca, and others, explicates.[15] The effect is encyclopedic and of interest in terms of the coherent educational

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[13] Avarice's court might well be seen as a subversion of the wastrel court surrounding young Richard II. I have noted elsewhere that Amans in his youth-oriented court bears some likeness to young Richard, who is said to have invited the older poet to his barge to talk about poetry ("Politics and Psychology of Governance," pp. 229–30). It is amusing to imagine what Richard, age 18 or so when the event would have happened, might have looked like in his courtly finery. Or, if we prefer to think of Amans, even at the beginning, as an old man, a "faitour" disguising himself as young, the Court of Avarice, nonetheless, would figure well as Richard's court, with its preoccupation with fashion and *dit-amoreaux* affectations paid for by the labor of the people. On the extravagance of fashion and costly show in Richard's court, see Eberle, especially her discussion of *Richard the Redeless* ("Politics of Courtly Style," pp. 170–73).

[14] See Galloway, "The Literature of 1388 and the Politics of Pity."

[15] The list is long, including Arphaghes, Manachaz, Zorobabel (1 Esdras 3–5), Ahab, Josaphat, Saul, Agag, David, Amalech, Phineas, the evil Rehoboam, and Solomon in his evil days when he foolishly divided the kingdom (from 3 Kings [1 Kings] 11), Julius Caeser, Trajan, Conrad, and lesser Ro-

principles that, although diverse, are brought together by measure of the questions they raise.[16]

GOWER THE HISTORIAN

"We all get sucked into history in the end," Derek Pearsall writes. This proposition is true for Gower at all phases of his life. Though he may begin hither and yon, the issue he explores always resolves itself into some form of cultural history, especially as it pertains to law.[17] According to both the *OED* and the *MED*, Gower is the first writer to appropriate the Latin word *historia* into English as the neologism, "history." That borrowing is not surprising, however, since, more than any of his literary contemporaries, Gower thinks and acts like a historian. Chaucer's term for history is "story," which involves for him the reading of the past, usually from books, in an effort to recover models that reflect upon our own lives. Gower uses the same techniques, but goes beyond them to assemble cultural and scientific data in order to get a handle on both past and present. It is perhaps noteworthy that five of the six times he uses the word "histoire" in the *Confessio* he rhymes it with "memoire." The two concepts are, indeed, intimately connected. Memory is first in a trinity of human faculties,[18] providing the Intellect and Will (the other two) with the basic material from which they suppose. Any act of memory is inevitably a kind of storytelling, as thought and imagination use recollected experiences to document and comment on particular historical events, either directly or subversively. History and memory are correlevant for Gower, for when a king forgets his office to become courtier, the whole kingdom becomes "faitour" to its honest mission, a situation about which Gower is deeply disturbed, given the expensive waste of money and talent that seems to pervade the royal court.[19]

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mans like Pompeius, Maximin, Gaius Fabricius, Carmidotirus (from various sources like Brunetto, Seneca, Livy, etc.), others from Greece, Persia, and the East like Cyrus, Cambises, Lycurgus, Codrus, and cruel leaders like Leontius, Siculus, Lichaon, and Spartachus — the list goes on to embody a cameo political history of borders of the Mediterranean region over several hundred years.

[16] On Gower's skill at discovering connections without compromising difference, see Fisher: "The most impressive feature of Gower's moral philosophy that emerges from careful study of the text of his works . . . is not its high idealism, nor its concern over the relations between the individual and society, nor even its progressive views on social justice under the rule of law. It is rather the unity and coherence of Gower's world view and the success with which he managed to infuse into a heterogeneous mass of conventional material a personal vision capable still of commanding our respect" (*John Gower*, p. 203).

[17] One is again reminded of Plato, where, so often, the argument of his dialogue ends, as in *Crito*, with some form of civic law addressing the one who has questions. In Book 7 (the intellectual plateau of the second half of *CA*), there are ninety-two specific references to law, more than twice as many as in any other book, the second being the much longer Book 5, with thirty-five. And, as I hope to demonstrate in my discussion of individual tales, the workings of contracts and agreements constitute the subtext of most plots as the teller shapes the governance of "history" itself.

[18] See St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Books 9–11. See Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck, vol. 1, pp. 5, 9–15, for further discussion on Gower's use of the term "history" and his views on brain functions.

[19] Gower uses the term "faitour" repeatedly to get at the falseness at the core of so much civic behavior. From the outset of the poem it is the term with which Venus labels Amans (1.175–79). See Calin on Gower's powerful opposition to the courtly ethos ("John Gower's Continuity," p. 100), as he mocks it through the "luftalking" of "faitours."

Gower is a historian of many sorts, thinking at times like a political analyst, at times like a judge or court of justice, and at other times like a chronicler or compiler of instructive exempla. He thinks of history in terms of "evidence" (7.2703), evidence that enables him to plot the events of time (or of a life) in an effort to assess its meaning. He is a master at taking the long view even as he looks to immediate resonances in "the present time which now is" (8.258). He goes to books of antiquity like a sorcerer seeking out voices he might consult. Always he thinks of such findings as evidence — evidence that might be used in a trial.[20]

When he gathers lore and strategies from popular sources and attempts to find common echoes that reverberate in ever-present oral traditions — "the murmur, complaint, voice, and cry of all Christian folk," as he puts it in the *Mirour* passage cited above — Gower the historian behaves like a folklorist. This voice of the people, what Middleton speaks of as a public voice, which so often resonates throughout the *Confessio*, puts a distinctive stamp on Gower's style and the way in which he utilizes his sources.[21] He is, indeed, a political analyst, an estates historian, but he is a folk historian, too, as he tallies the voice of the people[22] and the public functions that deploy themselves as the actants of folklore. As Middleton observes, "this poetic voice is vernacular, practical, worldly, plain, public-spirited, and peace-loving — in a word, rather than courtly or clerical in its professed values and social allegiances" (p. 98). Such a voice differs from the private, more individual voicing of Chaucerian characters, but rather, like a figure of the folk, is a voicing of diverse cultural strands as if they were components of a communal psyche.

Much has been written about Gower's use of sources — almost, at times, a custodial use, as the notes to this edition would hope to make clear. This custodial mentality is a key feature of the *Confessio* as historian Gower compiles exemplary materials — his stories — the way a librarian might, to create a cultural repository of what is necessary if the culture is to remain intact and survive. Gower compiles with a purpose — the welfare of his audience. He is a collective mediator of lore and law. But there is a twist to this side of Gower that invites both intellect and heart to break down the walls of his mental repository to open outwardly upon the vistas of nature — meadows, forests, and a vast unexplored and unsecured

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[20] One might think of the protagonist of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, who reads the story of Seys and Alcyone, then looks back over its details, wondering "yf it were so" (*BD*, line 233), where one calls upon one's powers of judgment to validate experience.

[21] See Middleton's classic essay "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," where she links Gower's notion of the "common" or "commune" with Cicero's *res publica res populi*, where "the public good, or commonwealth, is the people's affair, in the sense that 'people' are considered not as a herd, assembled in any sort of way, but as *a people*, bound by agreement as to law and rights and associated for mutual benefit or expediency" [Cicero, *De re publica* 1.25.39]. "Common" denotes "the commonwealth as a whole, the community or fellowship, the populace or citizenry, as well as the 'common people'" (p. 100). Middleton defines this public voice as distinctive of Ricardian writers, especially Gower and Langland, emphasizing its situating itself in a medial position, between lust and lore or the nobility and the commons, etc., for a kind of experiential immanence located within history rather than as a transcendent notion. See also David Benson's expansion of the idea in *Public Piers Plowman*.

[22] Ferster, "O Political Gower," p. 42, is especially useful on this point as she discusses "the people" as counselors to the king. *Vox populi, vox dei* ("The voice of the people is the voice of God") is a recurrent aphorism in *Vox Clamantis*, which concludes: "What I have set down is the voice of the people [*plebis*], but you will also see that where the people [*populus*] call out, God is often there" (*VC* 7, ch. 25.l.1470, trans. Stockton, p. 288).

space that exceeds his own predilection. That is, Gower is astutely aware that "history," whether in old texts or folk experience, is constructed out of "memory" by individual writers and readers who plot for particular purposes. He knows that all documents of the past, the written and the oral, are open to trial and judgment and are relative to the times in which they were produced as well as the times in which they are heard once again.

Like a good historian, Gower's powers of invention are often most potent when he takes the kernel of antiquity and reshapes it to a new context. But even his most derivative compilations require us as readers to consider the varieties of derivation from which the compilations evolve — oftentimes from great writers of former times like the "Ovide poete"(who is so often named),[23] or Statius or Benoît (who so seldom are identified); sometimes from non-literary texts such as Brunetto Latini's *Trésor* or Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* ("The Governance of Kings and Princes"); and sometimes as well from non-textual sources, the experiential voice of the people. All such evolutions (whether literary or oral) are insistently cultural, as Gower uses them, but they deliberately include in their historicity elements of what we would now label "folklore."[24]

Like a good folklorist, Gower listens to what he thinks the voice of the people might be, the voice of the common people and their common law, a voice "which mai noght lie" (Prol. 124), simply because it is the authentic thing itself, that bundle of shared values beyond the individual, the voice of God — *vox populi, vox dei*. He also looks to the lore of experience, the lessons to be seen through behavior.[25] For Gower, folklore is a "science," the lore (wisdom) counterbalanced against the desires (lust) of the people.[26] From the outset of the *Confessio* Gower announces that he would speak "[s]omwhat of lust (desire), somewhat of lore (wisdom)" (Prol. 19). As a writer, he is, most certainly, aware of the cultural relativity of any historian's views. His sophisticated notion of storytelling is always alert to the politics and

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[23] Gower uses the word "poete" seven times in *Confessio*, always in conjunction with Ovid — "Ovide the Poet" (1.386, 5.878, 8.2719) or with Ovid's poetry (2.121, 5.5231, 5.6713, 5.6804).

[24] Or, perhaps, I should say "folklaw." (N.b., the multiple meanings of "lore" in Middle English.) The term "folklore" is a nineteenth-century invention, coined in 1846 by William Thoms for a discipline he labeled, as he puts it, with "a good Saxon compound, Folklore, — *the Lore of the People*" (*The Athenaeum*, No. 982, August 22, 1846, p. 862), a phrase that sounds like something taken right out of Gower in some *vox-clamantis* mood. Thoms is attempting to establish a discipline for exploring oral tradition. If there were anyone in fourteenth-century England who approximated what Thoms meant by folklorist it would be Gower, a writer who celebrates and legitimates the voices of popular culture. Though he never uses the specific kenning "folk-lore," the two components of the folklore compound appear hundreds of times in Gower's poem, as actants within the *vox-populi* paradigm. He looks upon the dicts and sayings of the people (albeit largely through books), their proverbs and commonsense responses as a means of penetrating modes of everyday behavior. The content is not likely to be particularly sophisticated, i.e., what the "comun poeple" say and do provides the illusion of a living text, even as it borrows hand-me-down clothes of the past. Such a record may not be analytic, but it certainly may be analyzed.

[25] I'm thinking here of such behavior as the shame Vulcan feels "Which oghte for to ben a lore / For every man that liveth hiere, / To reulen him in this matiere" (5.704–06), where experience itself becomes "lore."

[26] See Prol. 19. *Science*, a means of knowing, is a favorite term of Gower (forty-three references in *CA*) to identify the wisdom of a discipline, whereby a people can glue their culture together or think of themselves as a people. It is a function within behavior that fixes the grammatology of being, enabling actants, the acteur, and the audience to interrelate. See Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women," p.17n34.

civic ordinances projecting from all actions. But he is also aware that even the most objective historicizations are relative to the goals and predilections of the historian. That is, Gower knows that history is culturally produced; but, at the same time, especially from his folklorist view, he insists that there *are* universals, and that they are *not* confined to issues of religion, faith, or aesthetics. Within his political vision law supplies humankind with what for him are the universals necessary if life is to be orderly — divine law, to be sure, and natural law, too, but also the very human common law.[27] Good laws sustain good lore.

BOOK 5: AVARICE

Perhaps more than any single rhetorical ploy in Gower, it is the folkloric instinct that makes his tales so different from their sources. It is this same instinct that sets him apart from Chaucer, Langland, and the *Gawain*/*Pearl*-poet.[28] I will not be able to talk about many of the tales that appear in Books 5–7, but those that I have singled out I have chosen, in part, because of their diverse forms of historicity — tales that comment on government and the function of law(s) within nature and politics, especially as such detail applies to the reign of Richard II; tales that draw upon sources of past ages, now made current as they address the experiences of Amans (Gower's Everyman) and his audience; and tales that use folkloric techniques that add an immediacy through the ever-present voice of the common people.

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[27] On the universality of natural law, see Gratian, Dist. 5 ante c.1 (Friedberg I, 1): *Naturale ius inter omnia primatum obtinet et tempore et dignitate. Cepit enim ab exordio rationalis creature, nec variatur tempore sed immutabile permanet* ["Natural law is foremost among other laws in antiquity and dignity. For it has its primary source in the reason of creatures, and does not alter with time but remains immutable"]. Elsewhere in the *Decretals* he relates natural law to customary human practice: *Humanum genus duobus regitur, naturali uidelicet iure et moribus. Ius naturae est quod in lege et in euangelio continetur, quo quisque iubetur alii facere, quod sibi uult fieri, et prohibetur alii inferre, quod sisi nolit fiere* ["Humankind is ruled by two things, that is, natural law and custom. Natural law is what is contained in the law and the Gospels, by which each person is commanded to do to another that he would wish done to himself, and is prohibited from doing to another what he would not wish done to himself"] (Dist.1 ante c.1 [Friedberg, I,i]). Isidore makes a similar differentiation (akin to Gratian's) between natural law and custom: *Ius naturale est commune omnium nationum, et quot ubique instinctu naturae, non constitutione aliqua habetur* ["Natural law is common to all nations and is held everywhere by the instinct of nature, not by some written constitution" — Isidore of Seville, *PL* 82.199.] This "instinct of nature" creates a sense of the universal in the individual. The distinction between the individual and the universal poses a *questio* that pervades all of Gower's writings. One principal difference between divine law and natural or positive law is time. Natural law is more universal than written constitutions, but, nonetheless, its presence is temporal. People perceive natural law by "natural intention" (*instinctu naturae*), but this inborn instinct is expressed primarily through experience, which is individual and temporal. Instinct may be plotted (that is, it is always subject to narrative), and that plot, not the instinct itself, is what we consider ourselves to be. The twelfth-century glossator on the *Decretum Gratiani* explains the matter this way: *Est itaque naturale ius vis quaedam humanae creature a natura insita ad faciendum bonum cavendumque contrarium* ["Natural law is therefore a certain force planted by nature in human beings so that they work towards good and avoid its opposite"]. The functional concept here is *towards*; in the time world, we are always working *towards* something, yearning *towards* some goal. For citation and the translation of the legal texts, see Barr, "Treatment of Natural Law," pp. 50–51. See also Olsson, "Natural Law."

[28] I have written about folkloric materials in the Tale of Florent, a tale with no known direct source, but one of Gower's most successful individual stories (see Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women").

Some of the tales have well-known literary backgrounds; others come from more obscure places. But they all stand as part of the exemplary evidence that Gower assembles in *Confessio*, his cultural treasury, written "in oure English . . . for Engelondes sake" (Prol. 23–24).

The Tale of Adrian and Bardus

The Tale of Adrian and Bardus comes as close as any in the *Confessio* to being a bona fide folktale. It has literary sources, though Gower uses them freely, adding folk touches of his own, especially in the latter part of the tale when the emperor Justinian brings his applicable laws into Bardus' world of chance to make possible the folktale's perquisite happy ending. Macaulay (3.502–03) notes with regard to the Tale of Adrian and Bardus,

> This story, which is of Eastern origin, is told near the end of the *Speculum Stultorum* (i.e. *Burnellus*), with which Gower was acquainted, as we know from the *Vox Clamantis*. The names there are Bernardus and Dryānus, and the animals are three, a serpent, an ape, and a lion. A similar tale is told by Matthew Paris, under the year 1195, as related by King Richard I in order to recommend liberality in the cause of Christendom. In this the rich man is Vitalis, a Venetian, and the poor man's name is not given. The animals in the pit are a lion and a serpent. Vitalis thanks his deliverer, and appoints a time for him to come to his palace in Venice and receive the promised reward of half his goods; but when he comes, he is refused with contumely. The magic qualities of the gem which the serpent brings are not mentioned in the story of Vitalis.[29]

In this folktale of the rich man and the poor man, Gower seems to be working less from a specific source than from a recollection that is modified by actants he knows from other folk stories. This tale, despite all its fantastic components, puts us in the presence of the daily struggles of the poor. Through its lore Gower perpetually reminds us of legal structures that sustain the kingdom despite class inequities.

Like other folktales, the Tale of Adrian and Bardus studies wish-fulfillment — evil wishes as well as harmless and benevolent ones. Bardus works hard as a woodcutter, hoping to survive life's struggles. His wife shares his goals and aspirations. Adrian, on the other hand, is a loner who imagines himself superior to others. He is incapable of friendship or gratitude. He takes whatever anyone would give, but never returns in kind. He presumes he is a law unto himself and thinks nothing of breaking contracts or committing perjury. He is blind to any benefits that kind deeds to others might offer, and, in his ingratitude, "he fell unwar into a pet [pit] / Wher that it mihte noght be let [made known]" (5.4945–46). His ingratitude is a self-imposed dilemma, like that of Tantalus, from which he will never, in truth, recover, even though Bardus gives him a new start by pulling him out of the pit.

The crux of Gower's story is "th'emperour Justinian" (5.5127) and his law. He is a just leader, a man who is quite the opposite of Adrian. His concern is with his people and a well-run kingdom. He demonstrates admirably the ideal of kingship that Genius will later explain, namely, "[w]hat thing it is to kepe lawe / Thurgh which the wronges ben withdrawe"

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[29] It is noteworthy that just as Gower commonly uses tales to exemplify to the people the behavior of kings, real English kings used tales for a comparable purpose: to explain human behavior to the people for ethical purposes. In addition to Macaulay's reference to Richard I mentioned here, there are accounts of Edward I staging folk stories for political ends at feasts and before his counselors, discussed by Loomis in "Chivalric and Dramatic Imitations of Arthurian Romance," pp. 91–92, and in his "Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast."

(7.2705–07). When Justinian learns of the magic gem that returns to its purse even after it has been sold, "he let sende for the man, / And axede him hou that it was" (5.5128–29). He hears patiently the whole story and indicates that he will himself redress the situation. The emperor works according to law, calling Adrian before his "court of juggement" (5.5143) where "the lawe hath diemed and ordeigned / Be hem [By them] that were avised wel" (5.5152–53). Justinian may be wise as Solomon, but, rather than acting arbitrarily, he works in the English way, through laws and wise judges. The case is one, we are told, that

> Stant in the memoire into this day
> Wherof that every wysman may
> Ensamplen him, and take in mynde
> What schame it is to ben unkinde; *ungrateful*
> Agein the which reson debateth,
> And every creature it hateth. (5.5157–62)

Gower shows a fine sense of legal precedent, precedent remembered not just by men of law in their law books but by "every wysman," who looks to such rulings for "ensample." In Gower's folktale, rather than some fairy godmother, it is the law, living within cultural "memoire" that guarantees the happy ending — the law administered by a good king and his "court of juggement." The tale thus becomes a study in good rule that functions through the auspices of a good king, an idea that voices, throughout the *Confessio*, an abiding subtext.

It is indeed remarkable how often the plot of English popular romance hinges upon the integrity of the king and his laws.[30] If the king is weak, selfish, or unjust, the future of his kingdom will be bleak indeed. In this regard, the Tale of Adrian and Bardus provides an anatomy of good rule and is an important cog in the mechanism that defines the intellectual climax of the *Confessio*. In folktales, the happiest conclusion of all reintegrates with society at large those marginalized by injustice.

Gower's tales often validate the political institution and its laws. Richard Kaeuper makes the compelling point that one of the most significant differences between England and the Continent is "the long-term growth of Royal power. Real meaning infused the widespread idea that the king of England was responsible for order and justice in his realm; from an early date this royalist ideal appeared regularly in documents by which officials remembered and acted."[31] Repeatedly, a key differentiation between an English retelling of a French popular romance and the original will be, in the English, the felicitous role of the king and his laws which provide order when the going gets rough.[32] For Gower, a good folktale emphatically

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[30] I am indebted on this point to conversations with Richard Kaeuper, who does much with narrative fiction as a mirror documenting contemporary historical concerns.

[31] See especially ch. 6, "English Kingship, Chivalry and Literature," in *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 107–20, as cited on p. 109.

[32] Contrast the simpler story of Marie de France's *Lay of Sir Launfal* with Thomas Chester's *Sir Launfal*, with its introduction of the mercantile perspective of the mayor and the hero's populist approval rating as well as the king's parliament of knights who must try Launfal in opposition to the vindictive queen; or continental versions of the story of Orpheus with the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*, where "Sir Orfewe," king of Winchester, after the loss of his queen Dame Heurodis to the king of fairy, carefully appoints his deputy, then seeks his queen. When he recovers her from the fairy king, he returns to his court in disguise, carefully establishes his deputy's loyalty and the truth of their covenants, then reveals

reinscribes political capital for the benefit of the whole community. The best happy ending, for Gowerian folktale, is the political one, when "regnes ben amended" (7.2708).

As in so many folktales, the Cinderella-like Bardus, a person so minimal that he must cull wood in the wilderness for sustenance, is elevated to a ranking member of society and is thus legitimated. Not all details of the narrative are idealized, however. A practical streak runs through Gower's story that is as revealing of his folk vision as the fantastic one. Bardus' kind act is a practical gesture, not an idealistic one. Like the better-established merchants in this proto-capitalist society, Bardus looks out for his means of survival. Self-interest is necessary, but it need not be malevolent. That is, he is a capitalist, but unlike the "unkynde" Adrian, his "kynde" has not been tainted by venality, and thus the benevolence of animal nature comes to his aid when the grateful ape and serpent, whom he first pulled out of the pit when trying to rescue Adrian, assist him with their gifts of gratitude.

Just as animals in the tale assume symbolic characteristics of a gentle nature that resents ingratitude, so does Adrian become their opposite, a mean-spirited man incapable of gratitude. In this tale, the merchants become part of the symbolic mechanism as well. They are good people who behave reasonably when they report to Justinian the odd behavior of the gem that keeps returning to Bardus' purse. They act more out of curiosity than anger. Their reasonable behavior, combined with the animals' gratitude, gets Bardus' case before the king and his court of law.

Like a good folktale, the story is strongly goal-oriented.[33] The goals are always defined by specific situations. The players and their ethics are determined by their actions. At the outset, Bardus struggles in a basically degraded, inferior position; with mercantile enterprise he works hard in hope of achieving enough wealth to find some kind of security and dignity. He looks for compensation that will justify his laborious existence. His story is quite opposite to that of Midas: he is not avaricious, but neither does he scorn material advantage. His story openly acknowledges just payment; class privilege, on the other hand, that abuses fair acquisition of material goods is deconstructed step by step. The plot is simple, transparent, even predictable: what we need, we try to obtain. That is, the plot is sententious in challenging ways as its folk

himself to his court, which welcomes him and his queen with gladness and "gode likeing" (line 599) as the whole kingdom, the royalty and all the people, celebrate together in common profit — "God graunt our *alle* wele to fare! Amen!" (line 604 — emphasis mine). See Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays*, p. 41. Other examples that illustrate Kaeuper's point might include *King Horn*, in which the title character returns to reestablish good rule in the kingdom of his father, thereby redeeming his mother, who has been hiding under a rock for years; or *Perceval of Galles*, so different from Chrétien, where the rescue of his mother and the reestablishment of good rule at home displaces Chrétien's grail quest (in both *King Horn* and *Perceval of Galles* the widowed mothers are secured in new marriages that fittingly guarantee their happiness in old age); or several of the Gawain tales, where, for example, without precedent in the Vulgate tales, Gawain brings honor to Arthur's court by his fulfilling of his quest for the Green Knight; or by dealing with the Carl of Carlisle who, in his conversion to courtesy, joins Arthur's court; or in his allowing of victory to Gologras in order to maintain honor and good rule in Arthur's court despite the king's aggressive ways; or in his saving of the king's life by marrying Dame Ragnelle, etc. — all tales that reassert the value of good law understood and embodied in good people whereby the kingdom survives by definition and by fact.

[33] On the role of goal-oriented behavior in fairy tale, see Glazer on Adlerian concepts in fairy tales: "Role of Wish Fulfillment in Märchen," pp. 64 ff. Glazer explicates two Cinderella stories, one from Limousin in France, and the other from Gümüshane in Turkey (pp. 67–75), to exemplify goal orientation.

symbolism helps us contemplate the social structures surrounding it, whereby, as the story unfolds, details such as the animals and their gracious behavior, the ingratitude of Adrian, the neediness and persistence of Bardus, the wise insights of the king, and the legal structures of the state come to mean more than they did at first.[34] It is this cohesion of the folkloric with classical rhetoric that so often sets Gower's style apart from that of Chaucer or Langland.

But before leaving this tale, one further word about its plain style. The Tale of Adrian and Bardus offers excellent examples of Gower's moving back and forth between the Latinate constructions of classical rhetoric and the rhythms of folk syntax. The tale begins with a long sentence that interrupts itself frequently with balanced clauses. Let me write the sentence as prose, to make more evident its hypotactic syntax:

> To speke of an unkinde man, I find hou whilom Adrian, of Rome which a gret lord was, upon a day as he per cas to wode in his huntinge wente, it hapneth at a soudein wente, after his chace as he poursuieth, thurgh happ, the which no man eschuieth, he fell unwar into a pet [pit], wher that it mihte noght be let. (5.4937–46)

After this convoluted setting up of the context, the tale moves into a rhythmic double-duple folk meter to describe Adrian's fall:

> The pet was dep · and he fell lowe, *pit*
> That of his men · non myhte knowe
> Wher he becam, · for non was nyh, *Where he had gone*
> Which of his fall · the meschief syh. (5.4947–50) *Who*

This is followed by two long sentences that, like the first sentence, move the plot along with periodic constructions, interspersed clauses, and skillful use of enjambment, after which the narrative moves into dialogue, with paratactic speech rhythms:

> And thus, alone ther he lay, clepende and criende al the day for socour and deliverance, til agein even it fel per chance, a while er it began to nyhte, a povere man, which Bardus hihte, cam walkende with his asse and hadde gadred him a tasse of grene stickes and of drie *to selle*,[35] who that wolde hem beie, as he whiche hade no liflode, bot whanne he myhte such a lode to toune with his asse carie. And as it fell him for to tarie that ilke time nyh the pet, and hath the truse faste knet, he herde a vois, which cride dimme, and he his ere to the brimme *hath leid*, and herde it was a man, *which seid*: (5.4951–69)

> "Ha, help hier Adrian, *here*
> And I wol given half mi good."
> The povere man · this understod,
> *As he that wolde · gladly winne*,
> And to this lord · which was withinne

[34] See Fisher, *John Gower*, p. 203, as cited in note 16 above.

[35] In the first passage (5.4951–69), I have marked instances of enjambment in italic, since by printing the passage as a prose block the run-over effect is likely to be lost. In the verse passage that follows, I have marked in italics those passages that dramatize Bardus' poverty, his just concern about material gain, and his recognition of the need for legal contracts if he is to have any hope of getting on in life. The raised dots in lines 4972 ff. mark strong caesurae, characteristic of folk rhymes in verse.

He spak and seide, · *"If I thee save,*
What sikernesse · schal I have *security*
Of covenant, · that afterward *agreement*
Thou wolt me · give such reward
As thou behihtest · nou tofore?" *promised a moment ago*
That other hath · *his othes swore*
Be hevene and · be the goddes alle,
If that it myhte · so befalle
That he out of the · pet him broghte,
Of all the goodes · whiche he oghte
He schal have evene · halvendel. (5.4970–85) *equal half*

The passages demonstrate Gower's mastery of dialogue, both direct and indirect, that, along with folk rhythms, moves the story forward and, at the same time, establishes through its folk *metier* the legal issues that become the crux of the tale when, at the end, these contractual details of the "covenant" are rehearsed at Adrian's trial. The tone is direct and simple, but the issues are more complex: this folktale, set up in terms of legal contracts, engages social commitments that are, in Gower's view, the very basis of society — the keeping of law through which the wrongs of society may be identified and remedied.

The Tale of Jason and Medea

There are many other quite wonderful tales in Book 5 besides the Tale of Adrian and Bardus — e.g., the Tale of Virgil's Mirror, the King and the Steward's Wife, the Tale of Achilles and Deidamia, and several Ovidian tales, especially the Tale of Hercules and Faunus, based on Ovid's *Fasti*. But one of the best is the Tale of Jason and Medea. As in the Bardus story, Gower draws upon the métier of folklore and its subtexts to shape the tone and consequent ethical parameters of his version of the famous story. As in Bardus, natural law and contractual law conjoin with folk components as operative universals in the tale.

Gower's adaptation is based on two well-known literary sources: 1) Benoît's *Roman de Troie*, the main plot of which Gower adheres to in the first 680 lines of the poem (the story of the golden fleece, the secret marriage of Jason and Medea, and his victorious return from Colchos to Greece); and 2) the first four hundred lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 7, from which Gower takes the basic guidelines for the last three hundred lines of his tale and its concluding events, namely, his account of Medea's rejuvenation by magic of Jason's decrepit father Eson at a great price to her own physical beauty, Jason's subsequent breech of his marriage vow as he abandons Medea for Creusa, and Medea's erasure of the effects of the broken contract by the murder of his sons in retaliation.

The effect of Gower's story is quite different from Benoît's (and utterly different from Ovid's), largely because of his strongly sympathetic treatment of Medea, a sympathy qualified by astute contractual modifications. Medea's character is developed not in a novelistic manner, the way Chaucer develops Criseyde's personality, but rather in a folkloristic way. That is, she is presented not as a "realistic" or self-reflective woman like Criseyde, nor as a schizophrenic witch, as she is in Ovid.[36] Rather, she is a configuration of female character functions of the sort

[36] Ovid's account begins with what appears to be a debate between two women, both of whom in their witchcraft can see into the future, but almost immediately we recognize that both of them are

one finds in folk typologies — the yearnings of a pubescent woman, a sense of adventure and fascination with the outside world, a strong desire for emotional commitment, and a fierce loyalty to her beloved. She embodies a young woman's need for independence from her parents, but at the same time she is deeply religious and naturally modest. She is, moreover, presented as having a practical side: she is savvy about money and has a keen sense of the workings of law. In this regard she is like the well-educated Peronelle in the Tale of the Three Questions (1.3067 ff.) or Thais in the Tale of Apollonius (8.271 ff.), a positive role model for a young aristocratic woman. She is very smart and observant. But, unlike his sources, Gower plays down her skills in witchcraft until, at the command of her husband, she is called upon to use them for what she knows will be to her own detriment, a sacrifice she is willing to make on her husband's behalf. The narrative appears to exonerate her in the end when the unfaithful Jason attempts to retaliate against her for destroying his children, but is unable to touch her; she, leaving Jason in "gret destresse" (5.4222), is given refuge in the court of the goddess Pallas.

Genius is sympathetic to Medea throughout the narrative, even though she does dastardly things: she betrays her father, robs the family treasury, and, ultimately, murders her children. But these horrendous events are the consequence of abuses against Medea, abuses defined by breeches of contract within which she, in keeping with her basically generous nature, has attempted to lead an honorable life. This is a tale about Perjury, and Jason is the perjurer. During the course of the action Medea is defined by several different contracts, contracts that the legal-minded Gower is careful to spell out. We are encouraged always to assess her actions through the situations in which she is placed. This is not to say that she makes no choices. On the contrary, she is quite clear-headed about her decisions (very different from Ovid's Medea, in this regard, who is trapped in a perpetual rant between contradictory positions she both detests and adores).

Gower's Medea is a complex bundle of social and political pressures. Her story is framed in such a way that virtually every action is given a political overtone that qualifies ethical judgment in each situation. For example, Gower develops the role of Oetes, her father, far beyond what it was in Benoît. In his dialogue with Jason when he first arrives from Greece, Oetes does all that he can to discourage the youth, fearing that, should Jason fail, the Greeks might attack Colchos in retaliation. When Jason remains headstrong, the father plays his trump card, bringing out his beautiful daughter Medea in hope of distracting Jason. This use of her virginal beauty as bait exonerates her falling in love with Jason; she does what Oetes intended — and more. She is not some witch who seduces a young man. Nature takes care of the bewitching part. She loves him and would honorably wed him (albeit without her father's blessing, but certainly at his instigation) before any sexual activity takes place. But once she is married to Jason, her life is defined by a different set of contractual expectations: she gives her loyalty to her husband, rather than her father, which is as the law would require. We may feel remorse for Oetes and his wife, after Jason preemptively leaves Colchis, taking Medea and her inheritance with him, but the politics of her decisions are rational, and she is given room to be admired for her choices. She acts knowingly, even though she is young and new at the game of life.

Gower's Medea has a strong sense of propriety and loyalty to her commitments. When Oetes commands that Jason and Medea meet, all goes exactly as he planned. Nature takes its course, and they almost instantly fall in love. But Gower's presentation of the moment is quite

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Medea: one tells about the hateful evils of predatory men who would harm her, and the other of her love of male beauty and masculine company.

different from the comparable scene in Benoît. In the *Roman de Troie* the focus is heavily on Jason's response to Medea's femininity. The poet introduces Medea through an *effictio* of womanly beauty that helps the reader to see what Jason sees — her figure, her encircling hair that sets off her beautiful eyes and lovely face, her mouth and sweet glances, her chin, her beautiful torso and lovely arms, and her rounded hips[37] (*Rom. de Troie* 1254–62).

Gower omits the description entirely. Instead, Jason simply "good hiede nam [took]" and finds in her "nothing loth" as she "softe" takes his hand in welcome and seats him publicly at table (5.3370–75). She "gan hir yhe [eye] impresse / Upon his face and his stature," for she had never seen anyone so "wel farende" as he (5.3378–81). But Genius does not fault her for her courteous behavior or her penetrating glances. She is simply observant and responsive at this naive but informing moment. Rather, it is Jason who seems at fault (if fault is to be found), for he "ne mihte noght withholde his lok" (5.3383). He has no excuse for not knowing enough to guard his eyes.[38] Ironically, this womanizing propensity is what will draw him to Creusa at the end and lead to the heedless destruction of his legacy, despite all his concern for his father.

Medea's natural affections are presented affectionately, especially her modesty, as she "with simple chiere and meke . . . wax al aschamed" when she brings Jason into her bedroom where she is "redi to bedde" (5.3476–81). But most striking at this intimate moment is not her devious, youthful passion but rather her ability to deal in awkward situations with a clear head.[39] She arranges the bedding of the bride to take place only after a marriage service in the presence of a "figure of Jupiter" (5.3485) has been performed, with her lady-in-waiting as witness. Details of the marriage contract are precisely laid out, including his swearing that while his life lasts "he wolde hire holde for his wif" (5.3492). Then, having given his word, they kiss to seal the contract. As is so often the case, we once again see the legal-minded Gower at work. Although there are many charges of indecorum that could be brought against Medea, she does work within the sufferances of divine and natural law, and common law, too, if her contracts with men are taken into consideration. The final judgment of the tale is against Jason, who swore "an oth which is noght soth" (5.4224).

There is jollity in the consummation, as they, in bed all naked, "hadden bothe what thei wolde" (5.3499). But although the lovemaking seems a mutually happy reward, a more sobering detail lurks in the background, namely the spelling out of a prenuptial agreement which stipulated that Jason would enter into the contract with her, providing that she give him the instruction and equipment necessary to survive the quest for the fleece (5.3443 ff.).

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[37] I have translated *Large e grant a la forcheüre* (line 1259) as "rounded hips," though, technically, *forcheüre* is an anatomical term for "crotch" or "groin."

[38] Jason seems to have forgotten the story of Acteon, his fellow Greek from the lands of mythology, who, in Book I of the *Confessio*, learned the hard way that when he looked on Diana as she played "naked al" in the "flod" that disaster would ensue: "Betre is to winke than to loke!" [1.363–84], Genius abjures. If only he had taken time to read that story! But Jason is not a careful reader, nor is he interested in taking time; in his avarice, he is too busy taking anything he can get.

[39] Ames' cogent observation is worth citing here: "Surely Gower was not being ironic when he described Medea as a blushing maid who naively believed Jason's oaths of fidelity or Cleopatra as a woman who had suffered for love. His comments suggest rather their acceptance into the Women's Club" ("The Feminist Connections," p. 69). My point is that Gower's Medea is conscious of her position as woman both in her political awareness and her physiological responses. In this regard she does not object or protest; she recognizes the potency of the Women's Club, which makes her destruction of Creusa at the end of her "story" all the more poignant — for both women in their "sosterhode" (see 7.4196–4209).

That agreement qualifies, at least, the headiness of the romance. Medea keeps her side of the contract. After their pleasures, she gives him precise instructions on how to deal with the fire-breathing oxen, the serpent that never sleeps, the dragon's teeth, the plowing of the teeth into a furrow from which knights will grow and be slain. (One might read the scenario almost as a prophecy of the fate of Jason and his heritage as he plants his own seed in a furrow that produces young knights who, alas, will soon be destroyed.) If he carries out the instructions well, the fleece will be his. Medea makes sure that he can remember details of the charm, then warns him that the new day approaches and he must get up so that she can give him the ring with its magical stone,[40] the ointment, and the glue that will save his life and honor: "thus Medea for Jason / Ordeigneth, and preith therupon / That he nothing forgete scholde" (5.3623–25). Finally, she leads him in communal prayers to Jupiter.

Gower adds a touching parting scene as she takes her new husband in her arms, weeps, prays again, then faints (5.3634–59). There is little sentiment of this sort in Benoît, and certainly not in Ovid, but such sentiment is an important component of the folk morphology of her sincerity — one of the actants intertwined with the legal ones. Gower's Medea is a complicated woman, not just some headstrong schoolgirl. She governs well in her domain. Gower establishes this aspect of Medea in part by means of her serving maid, who acts as go-between, personal attendant, and witness. The woman is discreet and utterly loyal to her mistress, a confirmation of the integrity of the political domain over which Medea governs so capably. Medea keeps an orderly household; she "ordeigneth" (5.3624) well for everyone in her domain, providing they uphold their end of the agreements.

After Jason sets out, Medea watches from her tower (another Gower addition) with pious, loving prayers; when he carries out her orders and succeeds, Gower rises to the occasion with striking poetic adornment:

> Jason Medea noght forgat,
> On bothe his knes he gan doun falle,
> And gaf thonk to the goddes alle.
> The flees he tok and goth to bote, *goes to the boat*
> The sonne schyneth bryhte and hote,
> The flees of gold schon forth withal,
> The water glistreth overal. (5.3728–34)

This is indeed their shining moment. From her tower Medea knows where to look and catches sight of the glint of the fleece. She is a good reader of signs and finds pleasure in her reading, recognizing his success long before anyone else knows. She sends her heart to her lover by metaphor express, as she imagines how she would help him: "If that sche hadde wynges tuo,[41] / Sche wolde have flowe unto him tho / Strawht ther he was into the bot" (5.3749–51). When Jason returns, the people, who know nothing of the circumstances, cry with one voice, "Ha,

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[40] The ring Medea gives to Jason, with its potent gemstone that protects her beloved, evokes a folk-motif found in many a medieval romance; e.g., Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*, *Perceval of Galles*, *William of Palerne*, and *King Horn*. On the magical power of gems in medieval romances, saints' lives, lapidaries, and individual lives (the stones need not necessarily be in rings), see Heather, "Precious Stones," pp. 249–64.

[41] This idea of her attending him on "wynges tuo" is not as idly girlish a thought as it might at first seem. Later, when commanded by her husband to restore Eson, she will indeed fly through the air.

wher was evere under the hevene / So noble a knyht as Jason is?" (5.3766–67). Gower projects a fine instance of common profit as nobles and commons conjoin in their joy at the marvellous folkloric moment (5.3758–59).[42] They refer to him as "a faie knight" and immediately become folk historians who create a legend within their communal imagination: "For it was nevere of mannes miht / The flees of gold so for to winne, / And thus to talen thei beginne" (5.3769–72).

Medea is, of course, the one who deserves the credit, but her quiet response is appropriate, for according to law husband and wife are one. Though he is her guardian, his praise is her praise.[43] Her pleasure in "his" triumph is one further indication of her wifeliness. We know, however, the great debt he owes his wife; we have seen how she is thrilled with all that has transpired, but we also know how casual his concerns for her are. Gower gives us a romance, but he also subverts it. Once again, we are left troubled by the plot's cruel twists.

Both Benoît and Gower give Jason a bath after he returns to Colchus (compare *Rom. de Troie* line 1999 with *CA* 5.3801–11), a comparative detail that exemplifies the differences in Gower's presentation of his heroine and her presence in the source. In Benoît we are *told* it happened; in Gower we *see* it happen, as Jason prepares for his reception at court: he "wyssh him clene as eny bon," takes a "sopp," puts on his best clothes, and "kempde his hed" to come forth "al merie and glad / Riht strawht into the kinges halle" (5.3806–11). Comparable popular romance enhancements beyond the French may be seen in Medea's shy greeting of him after his return, in the assembly where Jason gives his speech and receives praise, in the supper feast followed by their second night in the bridal chamber, and in their planning for an immediate departure after Medea obtains her dowry from the treasury.[44] Gower is superbly in control of his literary medium in this tale, a master of sentiment in many a touching scene, not just for Medea and her beloved, but for her parents as well — witness the tender weeping of her mother and the wild antics of her father when they find out their daughter has gone (5.3911–26) — sentiment that pleases even as Gower histories ethical issues and personal contracts that will unfold with startling perplexity in the end.

The conclusion of Gower's poem is loosely based on Ovid in one of the most convoluted passages in the *Metamorphoses*. Gower's relatively elaborate account of Jason's hasty nighttime

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[42] Fisher, *John Gower*, p. 196, sees this as a moment of common profit as the people, the powerful and the ordinary, respond "with o voice" (5.3765).

[43] See Pollock and Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I*, 1.485, on oneness in marriage despite male guardianship.

[44] Several critics have commented on the swift departure of Jason and Medea from Colchus and their taking of Medea's dowry with them. See Nicholson, *Annotated Index*, pp. 353–54: Eichinger, *Die Trojasage als Stoffquelle*, p. 70, notes that neither Benoît nor Guido describe the departure, suggesting that Gower uses the passage as a means of transition into his Ovidian source. Schmitz, *Middel Weie*, p. 159, considers Medea's obtaining of her dowry by taking it to be a theft, while Itô, *John Gower*, p. 89, considers it to be, instead, a confirmation of her devotion to her husband, noting her condemnation in Benoît ("Grant folie fist Medea") as she robs her father (line 2030) and also the fact that in Euripides, Seneca, and *Ovide moralisé* (7.655–78), she kills her younger brother Absyrtus, cuts him to pieces, and scatters the fragments at sea so that the pursuers will lose time gathering up the bits. Certainly, Gower gives us a more gentle portrait of Medea than any of the other treatments, where, even in this testy moment, she shows devotion and loyalty to her new guardian, as Itô remarks. We *are* told that she thinks "her father to beguile" (5.3896), but that could refer more to her marriage and her leaving without letting her father know, rather than simply the fact that she "al priveli" (5.3898) took with her "the tresor which hir fader hadde" (5.3897), details that cannot be easily ignored.

departure from Colchos, Medea's effort "hir fader to beguile" (5.3896), the parents' discovery next morning that the two have gone, and their pursuit "with caliphe and with galeie" (5.3915) provides a smooth transition between the sources. So too, Gower's repeated use of a hunting metaphor to describe Jason's triumphal venture. When he returns with the golden fleece we are told "hou Jason broghte his preie" (5.3763) back to Colchos. That night he goes forth "stalkende al prively" (5.3861) into Medea's chamber, takes his "ese" with Medea "naked and al warm" (5.3867), then flees with the treasure before dawn. When he arrives in Greece he comes "with his preie" (5.3927), which could be read as the fleece, Medea, or the treasury. The hunting trope might be understood as a sign of an admirable masculinity, but it also subverts the integrity of his relationship with his new wife, who is already being couched as the victim.

As Gower rewrites the story, with his elaborate account of loyal Medea's effort to restore the youth of Jason's father, he offers his audience some of the most musical and flowing lines in Middle English.[45] He acknowledges that the effect is mainly a "novellerie" (5.3955) as he takes his reader into a fairy realm where Medea flies by midnight with a wondrous world of stillness on every side, her head bare and her hair flowing as she begins her incantations to the wind, the sea, the land, and to Echates, goddess of sorcerie (5.3982). She rides in a chariot pulled by dragons past the mythic lands of Crete and Othrys and Olympus, as she obtains the potions and prepares for the bloodletting that will restore the youth of Eson, Jason's arthritic father. The scene is one of the most extended accounts of magic in Middle English literature. But, although Medea's effort that begins in gliding poetry succeeds in transforming Eson, it ends in blood-curdling cackling that leaves Medea old, desiccated, and exhausted, whereupon, when Peleus, Jason's uncle, dies, and Jason becomes king, he takes a younger, more beautiful wife, and puts Medea aside. When Medea strikes back she has the reader's sympathy as well as that of Pallas and her divine court that provides refuge to the abandoned woman. As Genius declares, "Lo, what mihte eny man devise, / A womman schewe in eny wise / Mor hertly love in every stede, / Than Medea to Jason dede?" (5.4175–78).[46] Her "hertly love" is not some irresponsible passion; it is more an affective piety, appropriate to a lady of her position.

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[45] Gower has often been praised for his melodious verse. See Lewis on the pleasurability of Gower's verse with its singing style and the "beauty of the architectonics," its striking imagery and efficiency as Medea, for example, upon seeing Jason returned safely "sche for joie hire maide kiste" (5.3800), where, as Lewis puts it, the whole scene comes "alive in six words" (*Allegory of Love*, pp. 200–08, n.b.. 204–06); Ricks on Gower's "use of the ordinary" — words like "soft," where Medea welcomes Jason "And softe tok him be the hond, / And doun thei seten bothe same" (5.3374–75), and "thing," when Venus says to the aged lover, "The thing is torned into was" (8.2435) — for effects that are quite extraordinary ("Metamorphosis in Other Words," pp. 26–31); and, especially, Street, whose paean to Gower's lyricism, with its musical, onomatropeic effects and sensual contrasts, is eloquent confirmation of what Skelton meant when he said that Gower "first garnysshed our English rude" ("John Gower," p. 238).

[46] It is worth contrasting Gower's sensitive treatment of Medea that is so skillfully set within complex legal and social situations with Chaucer's more satirical and sentimental tale in *Legend of Good Women*. Chaucer draws more upon Guido than Benoît, attacking Jason less through breech of contract than through mockery of his cad-like nature. By combining the story of Hypsipyle with that of Medea, he can amusingly assail Jason for betraying two women where other cads betray one, a circumstance that so angers Geoffrey that he would challenge Jason to a duel — "Have at thee, Jason! Now thyn horn is blowe!" (*LGW*, line 1383). Street gets at the difference between the two treatments of the story well when she contrasts Gower's "large tapestry woven after the plan of Benoît" with Chaucer's "woodblock," with its "strong emotional colour" and swift movement ("John Gower," p. 239).

The conclusion of Medea's story is both subversive and liberating. Gower's treatment of Medea's violent revenge upon Jason moves quite beyond the patriarchal laws of his own day, which had difficulty in deciding how to deal with women who murder their children. But it raises legal questions that might well have been of interest to the poet. Salisbury succinctly points to the difficulty that courts had in adjudicating such cases.[47] Gower seems to appreciate the law's problem in dealing with Medea, who, as a wife, was property under her husband's jurisdiction, when even into the latter part of the sixteenth century, "a wife could not be guilty of stealing her husband's goods, because in law husband and wife were one person."[48] The same rationale might be applied to Medea, who is both Jason's property and his equal through marriage; she has in her keeping his children, though their status is defined by their father. For Medea the situation has been perplexed by Jason's putting her aside, thereby breaking his marriage oath, an oath blessed by Jupiter, of him being hers and her being his for the rest of their lives. In abandoning Medea, he, in a sense, has killed her; she, by slaying his children before his eyes, simply reenacts his crime. He, as husband and guardian, might attempt to take revenge, though the law, were it invoked, might, given his guilt through perjury, hesitate. Indeed, it is Medea herself who defines the legal point as she tells Jason before she kills the boys, "Oh thou of every lond / The moste untrewe creature, / Lo, this schal be thi forfeture" (5.4212–14).[49]

Hanawalt cites numerous instances in which women who murdered their children or their husbands, for that matter, were judged to be insane and were put in the custody of others.[50] Certainly Medea would have had ample grounds for such a plea, and, given the provocation, might well have been put in the care of a convent (obviously, she could not be put in her husband's care), which is, in effect, what happens in Gower's tale, as she is received into the court of Pallas.[51]

This pagan tale gives the poet opportunity to try Medea in a court of higher justice that looks at evidence that might be overridden or disregarded in an actual court of law. This

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[47] Salisbury notes that although few cases are recorded, "infanticide and child murder [may have been] common practices simply interpreted by certain courts as misdemeanors rather than felonies. Four cases recorded in England demonstrate the presuppositions of jurists regarding women and their children in what appear to be suspect judgments. One woman was brought before a secular court for murdering her two-year-old daughter and forcing her four-year-old son to sit in hot hearth coals. Another woman beat her ten-year-old son to death but was judged to be insane. In another case, the mother tried to commit suicide, but changed her mind and killed her children instead. In a fourth case, a woman killed her two-year-old son and daughter with an axe, but was released on bail and placed under the supervision of twelve of her kin. Women were often presumed to be guilty . . . but [were] assigned only the mildest of penances because of their own status as intellectually inferior creatures. And when they were not treated like children, or considered insane or possessed by demons, the death was determined to be accidental" (*Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, p. 11). See also Hanawalt, "Female Felon," and Hurnard, *King's Pardon for Homicide*, p. 162.

[48] *Oxford History of the Laws of England*, 6.569–70.

[49] I'm grateful to Yeager for pointing out the legal terminology here (*John Gower's Poetic*, p. 121n18).

[50] Insanity was the most common plea for a mother killing her children. Hanawalt cites half a dozen cases ("Female Felon," p. 131; notes p. 139).

[51] Hanawalt cites the instance of a woman who killed her husband in bed by cutting his throat with a small scythe and breaking his skull, who, instead of pleading self-defense, "fled to a church and abjured the realm" ("Female Felon," p. 131; citing Hunnisett, *Bedfordshire Coroners' Rolls*, p. 102).

higher court comes down on Medea's side and exonerates her. Her tale does not advocate the slaughter of children. Rather, it presents the dire effects of perjury within the domestic scene, an area which might be overlooked by patriarchal rule, but which can readily be addressed *vox populi, vox dei* as she answers to a higher authority, "unto Pallas the court above" (5.4219). The childless Jason is simply left to his empty rage and lost heritage.

BOOK 6: GLUTTONY

Book 6, less than a third the length of Book 5, is essentially an extension of its great neighbor, with drunkenness and delicacy the only two subforms of gluttony to be discussed. Both are akin to the predations of Avarice. It is no surprise then that Books 5 and 6 share many of the same motifs, especially when Book 6 turns its attention from delicacy to sorcery. Drunkenness and delicacy are, like sorcery, sins of delusion and beguilement, indulgences that lead to self-destruction.

> For often he that wol beguile
> Is guiled with the same guile,
> And thus the guilour is beguiled. (6.1379–81)

Such sins of beguilement are the result of appetite, as is avarice; drunkenness and delicacy make the world seem to be other than it is, whereby one might have "so mochel of mi wille" (6.203) that "withoute blenchinge of myn yhe" he might think to see "of Paradis the moste joie" (6.205–07) and to sleep "in Goddes barm" (6.227). The primary consideration of these sins is self-gratification, like the behavior of Adrian, where the delicate "set hire chiere at no delit, / Bot he have *al his* appetit" (6.685–86 — emphasis mine). Delicacy is largely a predatory feeding of the eye (6.784, 792, 827) or the ear (6.830, 846, 895–96). Often at night (at a "reresouper" [late supper]), when Thought is the cook (6.748–49, 913–14) and when his beloved's voice lingers in his dreams as "a blisse of hevene" (6.874), Amans thinks himself at "a cherie feste" that requires "non other fode" (6.889).[52]

It is easy to see how sorcery factors into both gluttony and avarice. With all its witchcraft toward the end, the Tale of Jason and Medea might fit neatly into Book 6, though it is Jason, not Medea, who is the beguiler beguiled. In his fantasies he is, even more than Medea, who is the real thing, a would-be sorcerer who would eagerly have immediate access to his dreams and desires. Medea, moreover, does not die a victim of her sorcery, the way

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[52] One of the best discussions of Amans' delicacy is Burrow's "The Portrayal of Amans." Burrow's argument is especially fine in explaining Gower's debt to the fourteenth-century French *dits amoreux* such as Machaut's *Voir-Dit* and Froissart's *Espinette Amoureuse*, where the lover encounters his lady not always in dream but through delicate voyeurism as he watches her from afar or as near as he can get, maybe even touching her or being touched by her as she plucks a hair from his clothing. The delicate lover with his "feinte herte" (5.6945 — see also 5.6659–69) has "a distinctly unheroic temper"; such lovers "have to content themselves with winning trifling favours from their mistress by sending her little poems or doing her little services" (p. 6). Burrow contrasts such personifications with the presentation of the lover in the *Roman de la Rose*. It is the later poems of Machaut and Froissart that have the greater influence on Gower. "It is, in fact, hard to imagine this lover facing even the allegorical encounters braved by the lover in the *Roman de la Rose*" (p. 7). He is mainly a "yes" or "no" man with an active imagination filled with trifles that help to hide him (and us) from his old age.

Ulysses and Nectanabus do; rather, she controls her fate and is translated to heaven, overleaping death. Nonetheless, her tale segues readily into the sorcery tales at the end of Book 6. As Book 7 will make clear, sorcery and good kingship are contradictory concepts.

The Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus

The story of Ulysses and Telegonus illustrates the need for close attendance on rational behavior, and in this respect is a warning to kings, even good kings — a reminder that unheeded acts are often revisited upon the perpetrator. Ulysses is presented as a wise man who has been attentive to education in all areas of living. Even so, his effort is inadequate. His story begins with a catalogue of his worthiness, as knight, king, clerk, rhetorician, astronomer, philosopher, prophet, horticulturalist, physician, and surgeon (6.1396–1411). He has also studied the occult, mainly for purposes of self-defense, which enables him to deal with the two sorceresses in the tale, Calypso and Circe, who would gain power over him but fail: "Thei couthe moche, he couthe more" (6.1441). He does take his pleasures with them, but it is casual, more like a business perk than a commitment. There are no binding agreements.

After he returns to Penelope he governs wisely. His family is loyal to him, and so are his people. He has left behind, however, unbeknownst to him, a pregnant Circe, a deed of delicacy that will come back to haunt him, despite all his wisdom. As he sleeps, he "mette a swevene [dreamed a dream]" (6.1523) that "bothe his yhen fedde" (6.1522). An angelic-looking man appears before him with a "pensel" on a staff that depicts three fishes of one color in the manner of a tower. The figure embraces him as a family member might, but warns "that on of ous the deth schal take, / Whan time comth of destiné" (6.1546–47). When Ulysses asks the meaning of the pennon the dream figure says that it is a sign "of an empire"(6.1562), then disappears.

Ulysses awakens and, thinking the figure must represent his son (as it indeed does), attempts to protect himself by confining Telemachus and surrounding himself with strong body guards. But, as the Latin marginal gloss attributed to Bernardus, explains: *Plures plura sciunt et seipsos nesciunt* ["Many know many things and are ignorant of themselves"]. Genius picks up on the gloss with "A man hath knowleching / Save of himself of alle thing" (6.1567–68), a key point, pertaining to the culmination of man's need to search for self-knowledge, if he would "thenkth to ben a king" (8.2110).

This disastrous tale is filled with admirable behavior: Circe has been a good mother to Telegonus, educating him and teaching him all about his famous father. When the boy comes of age she sends him to Ulysses for training in a man's world. As Telegonus eagerly approaches the palace the one thing he is not prepared for is his father's defensiveness. Instead of a loving embrace he meets guards who refuse him entry. When he asks to see his father they, having no clue of who he might be, menace and threaten him. Words lead to blows, and the youth kills the best five of the guards. Ulysses hears the scuffle, approaches, and is pierced by the lance bearing the pennon. When he is struck, every man cries out, "The king! the king!" and Telegonus realizes, "Helas! I have min oghne fader slain" (6.1711–15) and touchingly wishes he were the one dead, instead. The dying Ulysses asks to see the youth and have the pennon's heraldry explained, whereupon he learns of Telegonus' story, forgives his new son, and, "al bledende he kest [kissed] him ofte" (6.1746). There has been no malice behind Ulysses' actions and certainly none by the boy. The fault lies only in their ignorance. With good will Ulysses introduces Telegonus to Telemachus, grants him his heritage, and dies.

The moral to the Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus defines the limitations of sorcery as a guiding principle and sets up the Tale of Nectanabus, another tale in which the son kills the father:

> Lo, wherof sorcerie serveth.
> Thurgh sorcerie his lust he wan, *desire*
> Thurgh sorcerie his wo began, *woe*
> Thurgh sorcerie his love he ches, *chose*
> Thurgh sorcerie his lif he les; *lost*
> The child was gete in sorcerie, *begotten through*
> The which ded al this felonie:
> Thing which was agein kynde wroght
> Unkindeliche it was aboght;
> The child his oghne fader slowh, *slew*
> That was unkindeschipe ynowh. (6.1768–78) *unnaturalness enough*

The moral applies equally well to both tales, insofar as sorcery offers a quick fix when the going gets tough. Genius calls it "unkindeschipe" in that the sorcerer alters nature when it does not suit him. In *Vox Clamantis*, Gower sees a connection between fate and sorcery.

> Each man shapes for himself his own destiny, incurs his own lot according to his desire, and creates his own fate (*fata*). In fact, a free mind voluntarily claims what it does for its various desserts in the name of fate (*sortis*). In truth, fate (*sors*) ought always to be handmaiden to the mind, from which the name itself which will be its own is chosen. (*VC* II.ii.203–08)[53]

This is a difficult proposition. As creatures of choice we like to believe that we are not fated, that we can figure out problems and arrive at solutions that have the capacity to carry us to our goals. Indeed, this is the essence of all educational programs. Yet as creatures of will and desire, we often too readily believe what we wish, thereby curtailing our freedom.

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[53] That Gower sees the matter as one of "desire" (i.e., the will) is crucial to his essentially Augustinian view in which thought negotiates interchanges between Memory, Intellect, and Will, with a component of Imagination (Imaginativa, Ingenium, Genius, or Invention) thrown in. (See *CA*, ed. Peck, vol. 1, pp. 8–13.) In *De Civ. Dei* V.9 Augustine writes: "Our wills have power to do all God wanted them to do and foresaw they could do. Their power, such as it is, is a real power. What they are to do they will most certainly do, because God foresaw both that they could do it and that they would do it. . . . Thus, if I wanted to use the word 'fate' for anything at all, I should prefer to say that 'fate' is the action of a weak person, while 'choice' is the act of the stronger man who holds the weak man in his power, rather than to admit that the choice of our will is taken away in that order of causes . . . called fate." Or, as Boethius explains, in giving in heedlessly to desire "that man that so dooth hath cast awey his scheeld, and is remoeved from his place, and enlaceth hym in the cheyne with whiche he mai ben drawen" (*Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Chaucer, 1.m.4.19–22). It is within this paradigm that Gower insists that the sorcerer is often trapped by his own beguilings (see 6.1389–91). "The child his oghne fader slowh" (6.1777) might be glossed as "fate," given that it is the product of choice given over to fantasy. In the Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus, and the Tale of Nectanabus as well, the sorcerer cannot foresee his death and is caught off guard by his beguilings. The philosopher accommodates his thought to accept death; the sorcerer, through his delicate revision of reality, obscures death, which then catches him off guard. See Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, pp. 130–32.

The Tale of Nectanabus

The Tale of Nectanabus is the crowning example of a king who, fearful of death, looks for quick fixes to escape bad situations.[54] He abandons his kingdom and turns to sorcery to effect his wishes. As in the Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus, his solution, though brilliant in its way, is shortsighted, a myopia established by the opening lines of the tale. Genius starts the story with a prayer to God, the High Creator, King of Kings, who "Ful many a wonder worldes chance / Let slyden under His suffrance: / Ther wot no man the cause why / Bot He the which is almyhty" (6.1791–94). God's "suffrance" of "worldes chance" requires that people show sufferance of their own before they make choices and attempt to impose sense upon the indeterminate. The slippery area (what "slyden under His suffrance") leaves room for reasonable constructions, but also for sorcery that slips past sufferance by fusing fantasy with reason to achieve an easy solution. The tale is a deconstruction of just such easy solutions to chance wonders of the world as it explores consequences along with choice, thereby helping to set up Book 7.

When King Nectanabus learns that Egypt will be attacked, he disguises himself (6.1807) and flees to Macedonia, taking with him three trusted yeomen "of his chambre" and "part of the beste good he hadde" (6.1811–16).[55] Wealth and adulation are part of sorcery's seductive appeal, to the public and to Nectanabus himself, and he uses both to his personal advantage: he has the pleasure of seducing the seductive queen at her birthday party, the thrill of getting to play God, a delicate sense of power through manipulative prophecies, and the glory not only of besting King Philip by means of clever tricks but also of getting Philip to believe his ruse to the applause and amazement of a horde of people. His skits are diverting in the way that good fiction can be as he works within patterns of expectation in people who, as the excitement of chance events mounts (the mysteriously pregnant queen, the marvelous happenings within nature, etc.), willingly suspend disbelief so that they may participate in the implausible fictions.

So it goes for Olympias, too, who is smitten from the moment she first gazes into the hypnotic eye of the sorcerer (6.1864–67). When Nectanabus impregnates her imagination by means of the dream he sends to her (along with his explication), she is receptive, flattered to imagine that a god has singled her out and wants to copulate with her so that she might give

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[54] Gower's principal source for the Tale of Nectanabus is Thomas of Kent's Anglo-Norman *Roman de toute Chevalerie*. For the account of Philip's vision of the conceiving of Alexander and for the account of Nectanabus' death Gower draws in part on a Latin source, the *Historia de Preliis*. A Middle English adaptation of Thomas of Kent's poem may be found in the metrical *Kyng Alisaunder* (early fourteenth century), and portions of the *Historia de Preliis* are translated in the Middle English Alliterative Alexander Fragments (c. 1340–70); these Middle English poems share many specific details with the plotting of Gower's poem, but it is evident that Gower worked with the Anglo-Norman and Latin versions, rather than an English translation. See Macaulay 3.519 on Gower's relationship with earlier English Alexander stories: "It would be quite contrary to [Gower's] practice to follow an English authority." See Lumiansky for accounts and editions of the Middle English Alexander poems.

[55] In Gower's source Nectanabus travels alone. Gower makes it clear that the man values privilege and the means to make a good showing, sufficient, for example, to impress a queen who is herself given to extravagance and exhibition. We might contrast Chaucer's canon and his yeoman who cannot get by Harry Bailly's astute surveillance because of their "sluttissh" appearance (*CT* VIII[G]636). Nectanabus' disguise, of which his three chamberlains are a part, is designed to make a good impression in the world's opinion, the way Chaucer's Merchant does, "sownynge alwey th'encrees of his wynnyng" to advance his "chevyssaunce" (*CT* I[A]275, 282). Nectanabus has become more a PR man than a king.

birth to the greatest king yet born.[56] The fantastic idea seems reasonable, in its way, because she has done much at her birthday feast to make herself beautiful and is eager to attract attention, "for hire list to be beholde / And preised of the poeple aboute" (6.1828–29). Her seductive appearance (her sorcery, one might say) is part of what makes her so seduceable, a fact Nectanabus is quick to assay. She thrives on adulation and, when she "schop hir for to riden oute" (6.1830), is ready to believe any flattery Nectanabus might bestow upon her.

Philip likewise is easily taken in by comparable mind tricks as he, fresh from his fantastic conquests, witnesses aberrations of nature — a dragon turning into an eagle, a flying pheasant who lays an egg mid-flight which, when it drops to earth, cracks open to release a serpent, the earthquake and eclipse and tempest at the baby's birth, and so forth. Philip, an amazing man who expects wondrous events to enhance his importance, takes such wonders in stride, as confirmation of his own fantastic triumphs.

Gower's focus on details of impregnation and mysterious birthing establishes the very rituals of magic, beguilement, and wish fulfillment. Nectanabus is the perpetrator, but, almost inevitably, he will be the victim as well, as his amazing child kills him by thrusting him from the tower wall: "Ly down there apart. / Whereof nou serveth al thin art?" (6.2311–12). Such "lying apart" is indeed a fit end for the sorcerer (a still birth, so to speak), who, in his disguises, has set himself apart with his own special rules to play god. But he is no "king of kings," despite his gulling of Philip. (The "see foul" [6.2129] in this instance is *not* some form of the Holy Spirit at an Annunciation or an angel sent from God to inform Joseph of Mary's child, but, rather, it is an actual gull.) When the child of the sorcerer once again destroys its parent, we see into the strange workings of the High Creator, who permits weird things to happen in the first place.[57] The child may be a trope of "fate" (i.e., *sortis*), but, if so, Nectanabus' death is merely a figure of "consequence," not tragedy.[58]

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[56] Olympias offers a thought-provoking contrast to Paulina in the Tale of Mundus and Paulina (*CA* 1.761–1059), a tale exemplifying hypocrisy. A chivalrous duke named Mundus desires Paulina and bribes two priests of the temple of Isis, "the godesse of childinge" (1.805), to inform her that the god Anubus desires to mate with her. She takes counsel of her husband, and they, being pious people, agree to the demands of the god. Mundus plays god, and with his "blinde tales . . . alle his wille of here he hadde" (1.927–28). The next day he boasts to her of his achievement. She goes to her chamber to weep at his "derke ypocrisie" but then tells her husband of the dissimulation. They take counsel of the emperor, who executes the priests and exiles Mundus. Mundus and Nectanabus have much in common: both are sorcerers with words who blind people to accomplish their sexual desire but also as a demonstration of their power; both are chivalrous and use religion as a means toward accomplishing their ends. The biggest difference in the stories is between Paulina and Olympias. Olympias is seduced because she wants to be; Paulina seems to be victimized by her piety, though in truth it is her piety and honest relationship with her husband and the state that saves her and her household. Comparison of the two tales establishes astute differences between true kingship and sorcery. Paulina and her husband govern themselves well and benefit from the emperor and the laws of Rome. The kingdom, as mirrored in the emperor and his people, remains intact. The fates of Mundus and Nectanabus are similar: Nectanabus abandons his kingdom and goes into exile, where he dies; Mundus abandons self rule and is sentenced to exile. We are not told of his death, but it seems inevitable that it will be in exile too.

[57] The tale is filled with spurious religious implications, such as the divine impregnation of the Virgin Mary, the mysterious son becoming the King of Kings, etc. But the sorcerer is more like a Dr. Frankenstein, whose creation, despite all his cleverness, comes back to haunt him within the realm of nature, which the sorcerer does not, in fact, control, but only manipulates.

[58] Or, if it is tragedy, it is *de casibus* tragedy, what Boethius calls tragedy of fortune in *The Conso-*

BOOK 7: THE EDUCATION OF THE KING

Genius follows the Tale of Nectanabus with short sketches of other sorcerers (Zoroaster and the "Phitonesse of Samarie" [6.2387] that Saul visited), but as he finishes, Amans picks up from the Tale of Nectanabus to inquire further about Alexander's education after the death of the sorcerer:

this I wolde you beseche,
Beside that me stant of love, *Apart from my concerns with love*
As I you herde speke above
Hou Alisandre was betawht *entrusted*
To Aristotle, and so well tawht
Of al that to a king belongeth,
Wherof min herte sore longeth
To wite what it wolde mene. (6.2408–15) *know*

This is a crucial moment in the poem in that the lover acknowledges that he yearns to know more than matters of love. He wants not simply to hear about kings (though we have noted how frequently Genius' stories are framed by matters of kingship, whether good or bad); rather, he wants to know *how* they are taught and *what* they should know. It is as if he senses a common kingship (or the potential for one) in every man, recognizing (momentarily, at least) that, if he is to get beyond illusion, beguilement, and sorceries, he is going to require different equipment from what he presently possesses.

In Book 7 Genius' instruction on the education of the king takes the listener beyond sorcery to explore possibilities of how truth and its benefits may be accomplished in deed. Thought must be trained to function rationally rather than to serve merely as fantasy's cook. To instruct the lover-now-turned-intellectual-acolyte, Genius draws upon a host of Gower's favorite sources — *The Secretum Secretorum* (a manual in which Aristotle teaches Alexander all disciplines), Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Trésor* (on subjects ranging from the history of humankind, the saints, the Holy Roman Empire, and physics and astronomy, to the creatures of the world, the ethics of Aristotle on virtues and vices, rhetoric, and regal behavior), Aristotle's treatise on meteorology, various treatises on astronomy such as Albertus Magnus' *Speculum astronomiae*, Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*,[59] Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* (a treatise on the governance of kings and

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lation of Philosophy 2.pr.1.

[59] The main literary accomplishment of Godfrey of Viterbo (c.1125–after 1202), a member of the royal chapel of Conrad III of Germany, who subsequently served Frederick I Barbarossa and Henry VI as court chaplain and notary, was a Latin verse/prose history of the world that was ultimately called *Pantheon* ("Collection of all the Gods"). Beginning with the origins of Troy and then proceeding to the origins of European peoples from the Trojans, tracing the account even into the 12th century, where he ends with the deeds of Henry VI, the *Pantheon* combines folktales, mythology, legends, popular fiction, chronicle, and moral exempla for purposes of "historical" instruction in schools. Like Gower's *Confessio*, the work has strong political objectives as well as moral ones, particularly in terms of the education of princes. Dillon ("Godfrey of Viterbo") notes that the "work took shape in several stages, of which the first was the largely verse *Speculum regum* (*Mirror of Kings*), dedicated to Henry VI and completed in 1183. *Speculum regum* was replaced in 1185 by *Memoria seculorum* (*Memory of the Ages*), subsequently renamed *Liber memoralis* (*Book of Memory*). That in turn was expanded into the

princes that Simon Burley may have used for the instruction of Richard II, just as his father had done in his education of Richard's father, the Black Prince),[60] Higden's *Polichronicon* (a massive encyclopedia — a history of the world — that Trevisa translated), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* (which Gower drew upon widely throughout the *Confessio* for lore), various mythographers (Fulgentius, Hyginus, and the Vatican Mythographers), and Jerome's Vulgate Bible, to name but a few of the gems in Gower's cultural treasury. Chaucer claims to have had sixty books at his bed's head; Gower cites them, sometimes word for word!

Genius begins his instruction with discussion of the tools of analysis. Like Aristotle, he knows that the individual needs equipment for research even as much as answers. He divides his pedagogical task into three general categories (again, an evident Aristotelian influence): Theory, Rhetoric, and Practice. Theory includes such topics as the arts, with discussion of mathematics, physics, astronomy (what it is, and how to read [use] it), music, human history, and the earth in general. His section on Rhetoric is quite short, but pithy in its observations on word power, problems of interpretation and communication, and eloquence. But the heart of his instruction is devoted to discussion of Practice in its three parts: Ethics (7.1649–68), Economics (7.1668–78), and Policy (7.1679–98). And it is this last category, Policy, with its five points, that has strongest bearing on kingship and thus receives the most attention. The five points of Policy are: 1) Truth (with its memorable adaptation of 1 Esdras 3 on "The King, Wine, Woman, and Truth"); 2) Liberality (marked by a host of short exempla from the Bible and moral treatises); 3) Justice (the heart of the heart of Book 7, with its discussion of law, common profit, the story of Lycurgus and his laws, and a list of lawgivers from the Hebrew and Egyptian to the Trojan and the Greek and then the Roman); 4) Pity (with its story of Codrus, but also observations on war, where sometimes pity is inappropriate, though usually not, and problems of finding good counsel);[61] and 5) Chastity (with its brief account of numerous

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more encyclopedic *Liber universalis* (*Book of All*), itself the basis for three successive versions of the final *Pantheon*." Godfrey includes in his chronicle such delights as the Tale of Apollonius of Tyre, stories of Alexander, and a version of the *Prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl*. His work was a source for numerous medieval writings including Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*.

[60] "Though a soldier of irascible disposition who fought alongside the Black Prince at Najera, Simon Burley, young Richard's tutor, came from a distinguished intellectual background. His kinsman Walter Burley, one of Archbishop Bradwardine's circle, a student of William of Ockham, and close friend of Richard de Bury, had been tutor to young Edward the Black Prince when he was twelve. Author of *De Deo Natura et Arte* (see Shapiro, pp. 86 ff.), Walter was doubtless an influence on young Simon's intellectual interests and a factor in Edward's naming of Simon to tutor his son and heir, Richard (see Jones, *The Royal Policy of Richard II*, pp. 160–61). Both Walter and Simon had copies of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* in their libraries, a book upon which Richard seems to have modelled his theory, if not his practice, of good rule." Quoted, with modifications, from Peck, "Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower," p. 231n43. See also Walker, "Richard II's Views on Kingship."

[61] On "the menacing and unreliable nature of pity as a political and legal instrument," see Galloway's superb discussion of "the Merciless Parliament" in 1388 and the politics of pity in the *Confessio* ("Literature of 1388," pp. 68 ff. and 90–104). Gower's position here is in keeping with the ideals of royal policy. Regularly English kings insisted that their interest and that of the people is peace, but that those who oppose the peace will be crushed. Rebellion against the king is rebellion against peace itself. Kaeuper cites Richard FitzNigel's *Dialogue of the Exchequer*, "the first administrative treatise written in Western European history (c. 1179)," which insists that "nobody must venture to oppose the king's ordinance, made as it is in the interest of peace" (*Dialogus de Scaccario*, where the king is again identified with the interests of peace, — see Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 108. In *War, Justice, and Public Order*,

violators of chastity, including a fascinating discussion of Solomon's shortcomings). Then the book concludes with three stories that exemplify the value of chaste restraint: the Tale of Tarquin and Aruns that culminates in the rape of Lucrece, where we are moved by the destructive effects upon the very heart of the community of powerful men who disregard chastity; the Tale of Virginia and Virginius, which again demonstrates abuse of the flower of virtue by an evil ruler, one who is subsequently overthrown by the people — "thus th'unchaste was chastised" (7.5301);[62] and, finally, the Tale of Tobias and Sara, where domestic virtue answers to whatever complications the fiend Asmod might use to oppose chastity.

In the *Mirour*, Chastity is the remedy against the seventh sin, Lechery. Although no single book in the *Confessio* is devoted to Lechery (one might argue that when Genius applies a love component to each of the other deadly sins, every book of the lover's confession deals this sin, thus obviating the need of a separate book for it), the three chastity tales at the end of Book 7 and the one great tale of Apollonius of Tyre in Book 8 do, in fact, explore the five children of Lechery as presented in the *Mirour*: the first daughter, Fornicacioun, is the subject of the Tale of Virginia; the second and third, Stupre and Avoulterie, are featured in the story of Aruns and his assault on his friend Collatin's wife, Lucrece. The fourth, Incest, is explored in great detail at the beginning of Book 8 and then in the Tale of Apollonius;[63] and the fifth, Foldelit, is the subject of the Tale of Tobias and Sara. All four of these tales celebrate Chastity, the remedy against Lechery. The five daughters of Chastity outlined in the *Mirour* are likewise represented in these tales, namely, Bonnegarde, Virginité, Matrimoigne, Continence, and Aspre (Hard Life), especially in the virtuous women like Sara (who keeps watch so well), Virginia, Lucrece, Thais and her mother, but also in men like Brutus (in the story of Lucrece), Tobias, and Apollonius.

The first two books of the *Confessio* and the last two conclude with very positive tales: Book 1, with the Tale of the Three Questions (exemplifying humility), and Book 2, with the Tale of Constantine and Sylvester (exemplifying chastity); then Book 7, with the Tale of Tobias and Sara (emphasizing chastity), and Book 8, with the Tale of Apollonius (emphasizing humility). But like Books 2 and 8, Book 7 ends on a downturn as Amans, despite all the good instruction and chaste counsel, puts aside reason as a remedy for his unrest, and falls back into his funk:

> Do wey, mi father, I you preie!
> Of that ye have unto me told

Kaeuper notes that Edward I "characterized law and order measures he had taken in 1305 as efforts 'to suppress the disorders, tumults, and outrages of the past which were like the start of war and which flouted the lordship of the king.' The royal sense of responsibility for the public peace could scarcely be more plain" (pp. 139–40, citing PRO King's Remembrancer Memoranda Roll 79, Trinity Recorda, m.41d; rp.: *CCR* 1302–1307, 454–55). See also ch. 3, "Growth of Royal Peace Jurisdiction," pp. 143–69.

[62] Ferster makes the important point with regard to this tale's proximity to concerns of the latter part of the fourteenth century: "To bring the story of a Roman uprising closer to the fourteenth century by turning it into the story of the deposition of a king — in a poem supposedly requested and written for Richard II — suggests that Gower was willing to be less than friendly to Richard even before he switched the dedication to Henry" ("O Political Gower," p. 36). Ferster's point is especially poignant, given the placement of the story near the end of Book 7.

[63] Incest is a major theme throughout the *Confessio* (n.b. especially the Tale of Canace and Machaire [3.147 ff.]). For detailed discussion of the motif see Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, and Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest."

I thonke you a thousendfold.
The tales sounen in myn ere, *resound; ear*
Bot yit myn herte is elleswhere,
I mai miselve noght restreigne
That I nam evere in loves peine. (7.5408–14) *am not*

Even while Genius' tales still "sounen in myn ere," Amans regresses into the chaos of "worldes chance" (6.1791), so to speak, which can be exciting, but after too many beguilements may seem depressingly fated. Here, as at the end of Book 8, where Gower turns away from the realm of fiction to speak in his own voice to pray for the state of England, there may still be recollections of the education of the king with its celebration of the redemptive propositions of law. The rapacious nature of which Hugh White speaks "fatally compromises any attempt to celebrate the things of this world as if they are not at root irreconcilable with the things of heaven," a circumstance that leads to renunciation and "a proclamation of its own failure."[64] This renunciation is not too different from the disenchantment with sorcery at the end of Book 6, given the emptiness of its consequences. With the ideas of kingship and law, that center so many of Gower's poems, still sounding "in myn ere" without touching his heart, Amans' forgetfulness leaves him in an insupportable position. He falls once again into that realm of fantasy and fiction that had left him prostrate in the woods in Book 1, wishing he were dead (1.110–50). Amans remains, like a victim of sorcery, caught up in a "love which is unavised" (7.5433). He believes he has no choices, and thus has no choices, slain, in effect, by the child of his own fantasy.

GOWER AND THE LAW

John Leland, named King's Antiquary by Henry VIII, claimed that Gower was trained at the Inns of Court, which could well be true, given the prominence of legal terminology, legal history, and legal concerns throughout Gower's writings. Although no records survive of his involvement in specific legal training or practice, he appears to have had some sort of legal connection throughout his professional life. John Fisher, Gower's modern biographer,[65] cites as evidence the poet's "description of the training of the lawyer, the degree of coif, and the privileges of serjeancy" in the *Mirour* (lines 24373ff), along with his technical descriptions of the functions of legal terms such as *plaidour*, *client*, *tort*, *deslayment*, *cas*, *advocat*, *president*, *apprentis*, *attourné*, and *pourchas*, which accord well with precise training in the profession.[66]

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[64] White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, p. 219. See the discussion of this passage in *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck, vol. 2, p. 16.

[65] See Fisher, *John Gower*, p. 57. Macaulay (4.xxvi) suggests the "possibility that Gower was bred to the law, though he may not have practised it for a living." Macaulay argues from the assumption that the poet had sufficient wealth that a legal practice, such as being a pleader, would not have been necessary. Fisher's argument is more sophisticated, based on historical details and the prevailing concerns of Gower's three major works.

[66] A "Gower" appears several times in Tottil's 1585 publication of the legal yearbooks for 1355 and 1356, though that may not be the same Gower. The legal records of property transactions that are almost certainly the poet's, however, are carefully prepared, suggesting to Fisher, at least, that when the poet had writs and charters drawn up he knew what he was doing. In the *Mirour* he speaks

Good laws stand behind and beyond the events of momentary crises. Again and again, as we have seen, when a tale is over its meaning — its stability — is linked to the benefits of long-standing civil rule. That, when all is said and done, remains a constant (if not quite a universal) that offers reassuring guidance amidst "worldes chance." In his introduction of the third point of policy, Justice, after celebrating the importance of "a kinges governance . . . in his ligance" (7.2697–98), Gower observes:

> What is a lond wher men ben none?
> What ben the men whiche are alone
> Withoute a kinges governance?
> What is a king in his ligance,
> Wher there is no lawe in londe?
> What is to take lawe on honde,
> Bot if the jugges weren trewe?
> These olde worldes with the newe
> Who that wol take in evidence,
> There mai he se th'experience,
> What thing it is to kepe lawe,
> Thurgh which the wronges ben withdrawe
> And rihtwisnesse stant commended,
> Wherof the regnes ben amended. (7.2695–2708) *kingdoms; restored (reformed)*

What is a king if there is no law in the land? Gower's exemplary stories supply "evidence" in its historied form that helps people experience the value of law for purposes of guidance. Such laws, monitored by the king, cut across generations; they cut across social divisions as well, linking lords and commons, helping each to understand "propre dueté" (7.2711). The evidence of law enables a king to perceive how he must "himself ferst justefie / Towardes God in his degré" (7.2730–31) — God, the King of Kings, who alone may chastise kings (7.2735). The righteous king, under God, works through law:

> If lawe stonde with the riht,
> The poeple is glad and stant upriht.
> Where as the lawe is resonable,
> The comun poeple stant menable, *compliant (in agreement)*
> And if the lawe torne amis,
> The poeple also mistorned is. (7.2759–64) *are skewed*

Gower articulates admirably a point of English history, namely, a widespread trust in the virtues of English law. As Kaeuper explains, "Law was a tough and flexible bond joining power and authority in kingship. Royal power was expressed through jurisdiction which expanded steadily and brought the king's government 'over the horizon' into the localities."[67] The proud expansion of the virtues of law was promulgated by the king's court, but espe-

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of wearing a garment with rayed (striped) sleeves, which suggests a professional involvement in the law. (See Fisher, *John Gower*, p. 57.) That Chaucer gave Gower power of attorney in 1378, when Chaucer went to Italy, is further evidence that Gower was at least competent in legal matters. But one undeniable fact is the prominence of legal interests in his greatest poem, the *Confessio Amantis*.

[67] Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order*, p. 140.

cially by the folk mythology surrounding good rule that Gower (and dozens of other English romance writers) arrive at in the catharsis of a good ending. The role of kingship is a central feature in public consciousness, and, when a king and his laws fail, the voice of the people cries out vociferously.[68]

Gower caps his remarks on the centrality of law to a good life with the Tale of Lycurgus. Lycurgus studied society and the welfare of its citizens to develop laws of equity and common profit (7.2956–57), which, once codified, become the laws of Athens. As he introduces his code to the Athenians, Lycurgus insists that "The lawe which I tok on honde, / Was altogedre of Goddes sonde / And nothing of myn oghne wit" (7.2961–63). That is, the laws that he posits are divine in origin, but come to him through natural law. Lycurgus gives credit to the god Mercurius for his concept of law. But to assure his people that the laws are maintained, not just imposed, he tells them that he must go away and makes them agree to adhere to the law and let it be their guide in his absence. That is, they must learn to maintain the law for themselves, not because of some king. Lycurgus establishes his law by disappearing. Words stand in his place as superior mediators. As long as the compact (forward, bond, that which is knit — see line 3008) is maintained the people have nothing to worry about. The state will survive. Lycurgus then disappears, never to return. But, we are told by Genius, the people of Athens maintain their oaths. Keeping of one's word is the key to all social contracts and personal ones as well.

Thus hath Ligurgius his *wille*,
And tok his leve and forth he wente.
Bot lest nou wel to what *entente* — *listen*
Of *rihtwisnesse* he dede so:
For after that he was ago,
He *schope* him never to be founde; — *contrived*
So that Athenis, which was *bounde*,
Nevere after scholde be *relessed*,
Ne thilke *goode lawe* cessed,
Which was for *comun profit* set.
And in this wise he hath it *knet*; — *established*
He, which the *comun profit* soghte,
The king, *his oghne astat ne roghte*; — *did not care about*
To *do profit* to the *comune*,
He tok of exil the fortune,
And lefte of prince thilke office
Only *for love and for justice*,
Thurgh which he thoghte, if that he myhte,
Forevere after his deth to rihte
The cité which was *him betake*. (7.2998–3017)[69] — *entrusted to him*

[68] For examples of satirical and polemical criticism of failed central authority and of faulty application of just laws, all of which affirms just rule indirectly, see Dean, ed., *Medieval English Political Writings*; the first seven passus of *Piers Plowman*, B-text; *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. Dean; or, especially, Gower in *Vox Clamantis* and *The Tripartite Chronicle*. But at the heart of such criticism is an affirmation of good kingship and law and how they *should* perform in unison.

[69] I have italicized those terms in the passage that focus attention on will, choice, and personal, social, and legal contracts that help Lycurgus' plan to succeed.

Lycurgus mastered the law and thus was never mastered by it. The words that he left to the city keep order, but not through an old law imposed by a king; rather, they are written by free assent on the hearts of the people, even in the king's absence. This law to which the people give assent perpetually provides the city with a common language, a language that sets boundaries and useful parameters for narratives that cut across the interstices of memory, yet still cohere. Gower's position is in keeping with specific royal statutes, like the first Statute of Westminster (1285) that, as Kaeuper puts it, "worried over 'the peace less kept and the laws less used, and the offenders less punished than they ought to be so that the people feared the less to offend'. The king announced in the opening clause that the peace of the Church and of the land will henceforth be guarded and that commonright will be done to all, rich and poor."[70] The law binds, but it also keeps the people free, as long as it is just and justly administered. The *Confessio* repeatedly makes the point that people who uphold law gain access to perpetuity, the universals of nature, which, though temporal, provide some relief from the traumas of time; people who abuse law, however, are bound to the wheel of their abuse.

From *Mirour de l'Omme* to the *Vox Clamantis* to *Confessio Amantis* to *Cronica Tripertita* and the shorter Latin poems in the early fifteenth century, Gower always had his eye trained on his literary exempla, the matter of his legal training, and the workings of the three kings under whose rule he lived his life — Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV.[71] His writings against the extravagances of Edward III, his concern over the education of the young King Richard along with his revulsion at the king's later indulgences, and his hope for the nation (embodied perhaps in Henry IV) are perpetually present under the surface of his writing. A good king must be the most excellent of people, the one to whom all look for guidance. "For if men scholde trouthe seche / And founde it noght withinne a king, / It were an unsittende thing" (7.1734–36), so "unsittende," in fact, that the people have the right to remove him from office.[72] But in the evidences of history, whether good or bad, one can see "What thing it is to kepe lawe, / Thurgh which the wronges ben withdrawe / And rihtwisnesse stant commended, / Wherof the regnes ben amended" (7.2705–08). It is a noble belief, the essence of the practique out of which Gower unfolds his appeal.

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[70] Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 108. The citation is from *Statutes of the Realm*, I, 19, 45, 26.

[71] See Peck, "Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower," especially pp. 224–38, on Gower and his critique of the ruling kings in his lifetime, particularly his moving away from the capricious behavior of Richard in the early 1390s. For an excellent discussion of Gower's understanding of the workings of law at the interface between justice and pity in his assessment of Richard II's behavior from 1388 to 1399 and after (as detailed in *Cronica Tripertita* and the *Confessio*), see Galloway ("Literature of 1388," *passim*).

[72] See, for example, Knighton (1386), where Richard II is being addressed on behalf of the voice of the people: "Yet there remains one other thing which we have to tell you on behalf of your people. They have an ancient law, which not long since, lamentably, had to be invoked, which provides that if the king, upon some evil counsel, or from wilfulness and contempt or moved by his violent will, or in any other improper way, estrange himself from his people, and will not be governed and guided by the laws of the land, and its enactments and laudable ordinances, and the wholesome counsel of the lords and nobles of the kingdom, but wrong-headedly, upon his own unsound conclusions, follows the promptings of his untempered will, then it would be lawful with the common assent and agreement of the people of the realm to put down the king from his royal seat, and raise another of the royal lineage in his place" (*Knighton's Chronicle*, p. 361).

MANUSCRIPTS

Indexed as item 2262 in Brown and Robbins, eds., *Index of Middle English Verse*, and Cutler and Robbins, eds., *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse*. In composing this new edition of the *Confessio Amantis*, I have consulted a select number of the dozens of manuscripts of the poem, manuscripts generally considered to be the best representatives of the various recensions of Gower's English poem:

- A: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 902 (*SC* 27573), fols. 2r–183r. [Revised first recension.]
- B: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 294 (*SC* 2449), fols. 1r–197r. [Second recension.]
- C: Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 67, fols. 1r–209r. [Unrevised first recension.]
- F: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 3 (*SC* 3883), fols. 2r–186r. [Third recension; base-text for this edition.]
- J: Cambridge, St. John's College, MS B.12 (34), fols. 1r–214r. [Revised first recension.]
- S: San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, MS Ellesmere (*olim* Stafford) 26 A.17, fols. 1r–169v. [Second recension.]
- T: Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.3 (581), fols. 1r–147v. [Second recension.]

For a complete listing of *Confessio* manuscripts, as well as a stemma of their relationships, see Fisher, *John Gower*, pp. 303–09.

CONFESSIO AMANTIS: BOOK 5 (AVARICE)

INCIPIT LIBER QUINTUS

i. *Obstat auaricia nature legibus, et que*
Largus amor poscit, striccius illa vetat.
Omne quod est nimium viciosum dicitur aurum,
Vellera sicut oues, seruat auarus opes.
Non decet vt soli seruabitur es, set amori
Debet homo solam solus habere suam.[1]

Ferst whan the hyhe God began — *created*
This world, and that the kinde of man — *and [when]; nature*
Was falle into no gret encress, — *Had fallen; aggrandizement*
For worldes good tho was no press, — *then [there]; eagerness*
Bot al was set to the comune, — *added to the common [good]*
Thei spieken thanne of no fortune
Or for to lese or for to winne, — *Either . . . or; lose*
☞ Til Avarice broghte it inne; — *(see note)*
And that was whan the world was woxe — *increased*
Of man, of hors, of schep, of oxe,
And that men knewen the moneie. — *became aware of money*
Tho wente pes out of the weie, — *peace*
And werre cam on every side — *war*
Which alle love leide aside — *put aside all love*
And of comun his propre made, — *made his private property out of the common good*
So that instede of schovele and spade
The scharpe swerd was take on honde.
And in this wise it cam to londe, — *in this manner it happened*
Wherof men maden dyches depe — *deep moats*
And hyhe walles for to kepe
The gold which Avarice encloseth.
Bot al to lytel him supposeth, — *it seemed all too small to him*
Thogh he mihte al the world pourchace;

[1] *Avarice obstructs the laws of nature, and those things that generous love requests, she (Avarice) very stingily denies. All gold that is excessive is called vicious; as a sheep preserves its coat, so an avaricious man preserves his wealth. It is not fitting that coin should be kept for one alone. So in love, one single man ought to have his sole woman.*

For what thing that he may embrace
Of gold, of catel or of lond,
He let it nevere out of his hond,
Bot get him more and halt it faste,
As thogh the world scholde evere laste.
So is he lych unto the helle:
For as these olde bokes telle,
What comth therinne, lasse or more,
It schal departe neveremore.
Thus whanne he hath his cofre loken, *treasure chest locked*
It schal noght after ben unstoken, *opened*
Bot whanne him list to have a syhte *Except; desires; glimpse*
Of gold, hou that it schyneth brihte,
That he ther on mai loke and muse. *gaze*
For otherwise he dar noght use
To take his part, or lasse or more.
So is he povere, and everemore
Him lacketh that he hath ynowh: *He feels deprived of that which he has plenty of*
An oxe draweth in the plowh,
Of that himself hath no profit;
A schep riht in the same plit
His wolle berth, bot on a day
Another takth the flees away.
Thus hath he that he noght ne hath,
For he therof his part ne tath. *does not partake*
To seie hou such a man hath good, *To say that*
Who so that reson understod,
It is impropreliche seid,
For good hath him and halt him teid, *bound*
That he ne gladeth noght withal,
Bot is unto his good a thral; *slave*
And as soubgit thus serveth he, *subject*
Wher that he scholde maister be.
Such is the kinde of th'averous. *nature of the avaricious*
Confessor "Mi sone, as thou art amerous, *behave*
Tell if thou farst of love so." *fare so in love*
Confessio Amantis "Mi fader, as it semeth, 'no.'
That averous yit nevere I was,
So as ye setten me the cas. *In the manner you posit this*
For as ye tolden here above,
In full possession of love
Yit was I nevere hiertofore,
So that me thenketh wel therfore,
I mai excuse wel my dede. *behavior (conduct)*
Bot of mi will withoute drede,
If I that tresor mihte gete, *(i.e., his beloved's favor)*
It scholde nevere be forgete,

That I ne wolde it faste holde,
Til god of love himselve wolde
That deth ous scholde parte atuo. *in two*
For lieveth wel, I love hire so *trust well*
That evene with min oghne lif,
If I that swete lusti wif
Mihte ones welden at my wille, *subdue according to my desire*
Forevere I wolde hire holde stille.
And in this wise, taketh kepe, *take heed*
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe; *If I possessed her*
And yit no Friday wolde I faste, *abstain [from her]*
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste. *(i.e., every day would be a feast day)*
Fy on the bagges in the kiste! *[money] bags; chest*
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste. *kissed*
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn *would rather have her*
Of gold. For al this worldes riche *earthly kingdom*
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good,
For mihte I gete such a thing,
I hadde a tresor for a king;
And thogh I wolde it faste holde, *tightly*
I were thanne wel beholde. *bound (obliged)*
Bot I mot pipe nou with lasse, *be content now with less*
And suffre that it overpasse, *endure until [this condition] ends*
Noght with mi will, for thus I wolde
Ben averous, if that I scholde. *greedy*
Bot, fader, I you herde seie
Hou th'averous hath yit som weie, *miserly*
Wherof he mai be glad; for he
Mai whanne him list his tresor se
And grope and fiele it al aboute,
Bot I fulofte am schet theroute, *shut*
Ther as my worthi tresor is. *From where*
So is mi lif lich unto this,
That ye me tolden hier tofore,
Hou that an oxe his yock hath bore *yoke*
For thing that scholde him noght availe. *benefit*
And in this wise I me travaile;
For who that evere hath the welfare, *profit*
I wot wel that I have the care, *know*
For I am hadd and noght ne have,
And am, as who seith, loves knave. *servant*
Nou demeth in youre oghne thoght,
If this be avarice or noght."

Confessor "Mi sone, I have of thee no wonder,
Thogh thou to serve be put under — *overcome*
With love which to kinde acordeth; — *accords with nature's demands*
Bot so as every bok recordeth,
It is to kinde no plesance — *nature*
That man above his sustienance — *beyond what is necessary to sustain life*
Unto the gold schal serve and bowe,
For that mai no reson avowe. — *sanction*
Bot Avarice natheles,
If he mai geten his encress
Of gold, that wole he serve and kepe,
For he takth of noght elles kepe — *pays attention to nothing else*
Bot for to fille hise bagges large; — *moneybags*
And al is to him bot a charge, — *burden*
For he ne parteth noght withal
Bot kepth it, as a servant schal. — *should*
And thus, thogh that he multeplie
His gold, withoute tresorie — *assets (resources)*
He is, for man is noght amended
With gold bot if it be despended — *unless; disbursed*
To mannes us; wherof I rede — *use; offer for instruction*
A tale, and tak therof good hiede,
Of that befell be olde tyde,
As telleth ous the clerk Ovide.

[TALE OF MIDAS]

Bachus, which is the god of wyn,
Acordant unto his divin — *status as a divinity*
A prest, the which Cillenus hihte, — *was called Silenus*
He hadde, and fell so that be nyhte — *by night*
This prest was drunke and goth astraied, — *went astray*
☞ Wherof the men were evele apaied — *ill pleased (see note)*
In Frigelond, whereas he wente. — *Phrygia*
Bot ate laste a cherl him hente — *lowly servant seized him*
With strengthe of other felaschipe, — *companions*
So that upon his drunkeschipe
Thei bounden him with chenes faste, — *chains*
And forth thei ladde him als so faste
Unto the king, which hihte Myde. — *who was called Midas*
Bot he, that wolde his vice hyde,
This courteis king tok of him hiede, — *heed*
And bad that men him scholde lede
Into a chambre for to kepe,
Til he of leisir hadde slepe.
And tho this prest was sone unbounde,
And up a couche fro the grounde

To slepe he was leid softe ynowh.
And whanne he wok, the king him drowh — *drew*
To his presence and dede him chiere,
So that this prest in such manere,
Whil that him liketh, there he duelleth. — *As long as it pleased him*
And al this he to Bachus telleth,
Whan that he cam to him agein.
And whan that Bachus herde sein
How Mide hath don his courtesie,
Him thenkth it were a vilenie,
Bot he rewarde him for his dede, — *Unless*
So as he mihte of his godhiede.
Unto this king this god appiereth
And clepeth, and that other hiereth. — *speaks*
This god to Mide thonketh faire
Of that he was so debonaire
Toward his prest, and bad him seie
What thing it were he wolde preie,
He scholde it have of worldes good.
This king was glad, and stille stod,
And was of his axinge in doute,
And al the world he caste aboute,
What thing was best for his astat,
And with himself stod in debat
Upon thre pointz, the whiche I finde
Ben lievest unto mannes kinde. — *dearest*
The ferste of hem it is delit,
The tuo ben worschipe and profit. — *[other] two; honor (esteem, fame)*
And thanne he thoghte, 'If that I crave
Delit, thogh I delit mai have,
Delit schal passen in myn age.
That is no siker avantage, — *What; certain*
For every joie bodily — *corporeal*
Schal ende in wo: delit forthi
Wol I noght chese. And if worschipe — *honor*
I axe and of the world lordschipe,
That is an occupacion
Of proud ymaginacion,
Which makth an herte vein withinne;
Ther is no certein for to winne, — *assurance*
For lord and knave al is o weie,
Whan thei be bore and whan thei deie. — *born*
And if I profit axe wolde,
I not in what manere I scholde — *do not know*
Of worldes good have sikernesse; — *certainty*
For every thief upon richesse
Awaiteth for to robbe and stele: — *Lies in ambush*