JOHN GOWER

Confessio Amantis

Volume 2

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

Second Edition



TEAMS
Middle English Texts Series

JOHN GOWER

Confessio Amantis

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INTRODUCTION

Confessio Amantis is a poem of patterns and postures. Book 1 establishes the frame: it is the pattern-book out of which the rest of the poem develops. The author, identified in Book 8.2908 as "John Gower," transforms himself into a frustrated lover who is set before the priest of Venus, Genius, to learn the proper ethics of love. Devoted to Pride, the book's single-sin pattern governs the poem's structure through the first half of the poem, with each subsequent book analyzing a different sin: Envy (Book 2), Wrath (Book 3), and Sloth (Book 4). As in Book 1, each sin has (at least initially) five attendants. Patterns make possible variation and development, and in Book 4, near the poem's center, Gower gives Sloth two additional henchmen and introduces digressive materials that radically change the presentational format as it evolves through the remainder of the poem.[1]

The sequence of sins and their subdivisions corresponds roughly to Gower's presentation of sin and her children in *Mirour de l'Omme*,[2] but within Gower's vernacular poem the tonal effect is quite different. Gower radically alters the voicing and the rhetorical conception of the argument. The *Mirour* is an extended *descriptio* narrative: it occasionally uses dialogue but views its materials in the third person. In the *Confessio*, Gower commits himself to a dramatic mode, using the Ciceronian technique of *ethopoesis*, the craft of impersonation.[3] He changes his voice as protagonist to that of Amans, the lover, who will be interrogated by an opposing aspect of himself, Genius, to review the byways of Gower's world until a conclusion might be reached. These two postures of self, Amans and Genius, address the audience and each other as characters in the first person. Thus, unlike Gower's principal earlier treatises, the *Mirour* or *Vox Clamantis*, *Confessio Amantis* has a plot. As audience we respond to the characters' exchanges as if we were witnessing a play.

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[1] On the distribution of materials in *Confessio* into groups of three (Books 1–3 and 5–7) with a pivotal moment at the center (Book 4), see Olsson, "Natural Law," pp. 244–47; see also Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, especially pp. 97, 102–06, and 140 ff.

[2] One significant change Gower makes in the treatment of sin in the later work is that in *MO* Sin (*Pecché*) is female, born of Satan. Espoused by her father, she gives birth to Death. Death, in a second generation of incest, breeds seven daughters by Sin; the seven in turn, in a kind of communal bigamy, each have five daughters through the service of World. In contrast, the seven deadly sins of *Confessio Amantis* are male; their work force is likewise male and is referred to mainly in political terms such as *ministres*, *felawes*, *oghne brother*, *deceivant*, *brod* (brood), *chief*, *chamberlein*, or servants *in his baille*, etc.

[3] The theoretical basis for my argument here is influenced by Specht, in his seminal essay "'Ethopoeia' or Impersonation." Specht applies his investigations to Chaucer; he makes no mention of Gower. Charles Runacres' essay on *exempla* has likewise been influential in the way I conceive my argument.

GOWER'S DRAMATURGY: VOICE AND THE STAGING OF IDEAS

Essentially, *ethopoesis* is an exercise in creating fictive personae who behave as if alive.[4] As a craft that invents images to stimulate the mind of the reader, *ethopoesis* facilitates philosophical consideration of the psychological drama of reading. In *Confessio*, Gower *enacts* voices and ideas. The methodology is more dramatic than any he had used in his earlier writings.[5] That he is thinking theatrically is evident by his creation of the debate between Amans and Genius and by speech markers that punctuate the margins of his text. He is not a dramatist like the Wakefield Master or even Chaucer. Chaucer is highly theatrical;[6] Gower, less so. But the term "drama" lends itself well to the *Confessio*, which, though more formal than Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is in the same mold of intellectual penetration as his friend and contemporary.[7]

Gower, like Chaucer, was certainly aware of the advantageous voicing of live theater and occasionally uses stage analogies in his poem. For example, in the Prologue, when Nebuchadnezzar relates to Daniel his dream of the monster of time, the king observes:

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[4] Latin rhetoricians subdivide the topos into subcategories such as *conformatio* (personification, the representation of "an absent person as present, or in making a mute thing or one lacking form articulate, and attributing to it a definite form and a language or a certain behaviour appropriate to its character"— Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.53.66 ff., pp. 398–99): "Conformatio est cum aliqua quae non adest persona confingitur quasi adsit, aut cum res muta aut informis fit eloquens, et forma ei et oratio adtribuitur ad dignitatem adcommodata aut actio quaedam"); *demonstratio* (ocular demonstration, "when an event is so described in words that the business seems to be enacted and the subject to pass vividly before our eyes" — *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.55, trans. Caplan, pp. 404–05: "Demonstratio est cum ita verbis res exprimitur ut geri negotium et res ante oculos esse videatur"); or other such devices as *enargeia* (vitality), *evidentia* (the evoking of detail), *repraesentatio* (lively description), *effictio* (portrayal), and *notatio* (character delineation) — all devices pertaining to that which "sets forth the whole incident and virtually brings it before our eyes" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.55.69, trans. Caplan, pp. 408–09: "statuit enim rem totam et prope ponit ante oculos"). See also Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.3, trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), on eloquence and its formal components.

[5] The exception here is the highly theatrical nightmare of the Great Revolt of 1381, where society goes insane and transforms into beasts pursuing the dreamer through woods. Gower added the vision to *Vox Clamantis* as Book 1 (c. 1382). In several ways that book, with its highly rhetorical, dramatic structure and its extensive use of Ovid, is a precursor to strategies of impersonation used in *Confessio Amantis*.

[6] On Chaucer's theater antics, see Ganim, *Chaucerian Theatricality*. Ganim argues emphatically that "theatrical" is a better term for Chaucer's mode than "dramatic," given the poet's "skeptical, almost modern version of creation" (p. 28).

[7] One might think of Gower in relation to Chaucer as Ben Jonson to Shakespeare. Like Jonson, Gower enjoys dramatizing humorous types and has strong interest in the inner workings of rhetoric per se, which accounts in part for Jonson's extensive use of Gower in illustrating points of grammar in *Timber: or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter, as They Have Flowed out of His Daily Reading*, an essay that neither Shakespeare nor Chaucer would ever have written, but that Gower, with his keen interest in rhetoric, could well have done. Like Jonson, Gower has a satiric disenchantment with human endeavor akin to Ovid's. His comedy of manners has more in common with Sir Epicure Mammon or Brayne-worme than with Falstaff.

> "Abedd wher I lay
> Me thoghte I syh upon a stage
> Wher stod a wonder strange ymage." (Prol.602–04)

Daniel, in reply, picks up the stage image to speak of the stone that destroys the statue, "The ston, which fro the hully [elevated] stage / He syh doun falle on that ymage" (Prol.651–52). The dream appears as a play performed in the mind of the dreamer, who, like an audience, is left to determine its meaning with whatever help he can get. Similarly, in the story of Ceix and Alceone in Book 4, Genius relates how Alceone's prayer is answered as Morpheus and a cast of helpers are summoned to appear in her dream:

> This Yris, fro the hihe stage . . .
> The hevene lich unto a bowe
> Sche bende, and so sche cam doun lowe,
> The god of slep wher that sche fond. (4.2977, 2983–85)

The image envisions an elevated staging area, a platform such as one used in the heaven scenes of a cycle play, from which the player descends to Morpheus in a lower world. In both instances "stage" implies a place where performances occur before the eyes and ears of an audience.[8]

These examples of theater in performance typify Gower's understanding of how the brain stages sensory inception. I am not suggesting that the *Confessio* is a roadside drama of the sort sometimes attributed to Chaucer,[9] or that he is writing with the flamboyance of Chaucer. Drama, for Gower, is more quiet and introspective; it takes place in the mind. Gower stages his narrative as a "confession." Confession is a performative art in which both parties have dramatic roles. Amans, a knot of volatile passions and needs, welcomes instruction; Genius, in the manner of a responsive priest, interrogates him through *exempla*, usually in the form of stories. Amans responds in a host of moods, ranging from the quizzical to the enthusiastic or forlorn.

In *Mirour de l'Omme*, lines 14761–905, Gower talks about confession, likening the soul to a mirror made by nature to receive in appearance and color what is placed before it:

> Just as the pupil of the eye cannot, despite its care, turn away from its stronghold the form and semblance of what passes before its view (whether that be ugly or beautiful) but rather must see it, so also the soul, despite what she should do, cannot at all take away the imagination that has

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[8] Sight and hearing function as primary agents in Gower's drama of interrogation and confession. On the primacy of the eye and the ear for human intuition see *Confessio Amantis* 1.294 ff. and the explanatory note to l.304–08. See also the Introduction to volume 1 of this edition, pp. 7–12, especially notes 25–26 on medieval notions of how the eye works in conjunction with the brain.

[9] See, for example, seminal works like Kittredge's proposition of *The Canterbury Tales* as roadside drama in *Chaucer and His Poetry*; or Lowes, *Chaucer and the Development of His Genius*; or Lumiansky's *Of Sondry Folk*. See C. David Benson's excellent summary of such readings of Chaucer in *Chaucer's Drama of Style,* pp. 3–25.

> first claimed her, but must send it to the heart. But then, for her protection, she wisely has to call on God.[10]

In this sense, a confessor helps one use the inner eye to assess the drama that unfolds upon the mirror. Gower goes on to cite Boethius' seven questions that should be asked to stimulate discussion, questions of who, what, what place, how, how many, how often, with whom. (Compare the seven "circumstances" in Chaucer's The Parson's Tale, X[I]958–81.) Gower concludes:

> Confession must be complete; nothing must be left out. Therefore, one should read through the book of the conscience so that the account might be complete. Boethius says this in his teaching, "He who is wounded and wants to be healed must without negligence show the physician his wound, however wide and grievous it may be; then he can heal." This analogy gives a good example of the matter.[11]

What is important here is the dramatic role of conscience, who serves both as audience / observer and adjudicator in the confessional poem.

Confession is rhetorically akin to dialogue (*sermocinatio*), or, rather, hypothetical dialogue (*sermocinationes consequentes*), where several voices come into play simultaneously in a kind of "open address"[12] that speaks to the audience out of its own fourteenth-century cultural background.[13] Simpson makes the point that an image requires not only a creator

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[10] Wilson, trans., lines 14773–84. "Car sicomme del oill la prunelle, / Ou soit ce chose laide ou belle, / Qe passe pardevant sa voie, / Malgré le soen de sa casselle / La fourme et la semblance d'elle / Ne puet guenchir, maisque la voie, / Ne l'alme auci, malgré q'il doie, / L'ymaginer q'au cuer convoie / Au primer point de la querelle / N'el puet du tout hoster envoie; / Mais lors luy falt pour sa manoie / Q'au dieu bien sagement appelle" (*MO*, in Gower, *Complete Works*, ed. Macaulay, vol. 1, lines 14773–84).

[11] "Confessioun doit estre entiere, / Qe riens y doit lesser derere: / Pour ce l'escript du conscience / Om doit parlire en tieu maniere, / Sique l'acompte en soit plenere. / Ce dist Boëce en sa science: 'Cil q'est naufrez et garir pense, / Devant le mire en sa presence, Sicomme la plaie est large et fiere / Descoverir doit sanz necligence; / Lors puet garir.' Ceste evidence / Essample donne a la matiere" (*MO*, in Gower, *Complete Works*, ed. Macaulay, vol. 1, lines 14893–94). The Boethius allusion is to *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book 1.pr.4, lines 3–6 (in Chaucer's translation): "Yif thou abidest after helpe of thi leche, the byhoveth discovre thy wownde." Chaucer's translation of Boethius' "oportet ut vulnus detegas tuum" as "the byhoveth discovre thy wownde" is brilliant in getting at the theraputic process of uncovering and discovering so central to confession. "Discovre," as he uses the word, is akin in function to epiphany or anagnoresis in drama.

[12] I borrow the term from Hill (*Stages and Playgoers*, p. 4). Hill identifies "open address" as a hallmark of medieval drama and differentiates it from "direct address" in that, rather than suggesting a "one-way dynamic, stage to audience only" as in direct address, it acknowledges the audience's returning of "the stage's gaze that they may be partners in the address" (p. 5). This distinction, as I hope to demonstrate, is crucial to the social/psychological focus of Gower's dramatic strategy as it shifts the staging area from text to the mind of the audience receiving the stimulus of the action.

[13] Cultural markers may be in the form of local allusions, proverbs, references to legal practices, the Latin epigrams and Latin marginalia of Gower's text, the voicing of natural science or theological propositions, and, of course, the *exemplum*-effects of the hundreds of stories and vignettes. And they will be expressed through a wide range of rhetorical figures that commonly expedite *ethopoesis* — *exclamatio* (emotional outcry), *repetitio/anaphora* (juxtaposition of detail through lists linked emphatically by repeated words and syntax), *interpretatio* (same meaning expressed differently), *significatio* (conveying

of the image but a viewer of the image as well, who, like the creator, gives the image shape. The viewer becomes an informer of the form, akin in some ways to the Creator who informed it.[14] That is, perceiving an image is a dramatic event — images in action, evidence on parade, ideas in process — that requires a responsive ear-and-eye audience. Gower's poem is written for an audience whose brain becomes staging area for its *poesis*. Simpson rightly considers Gower's poetic to be "centered in the imagination, in which ideas can never be wholly extracted from the images that produce them."[15] Nevertheless, although the content of images may not be wholly extracted or comprehended, conversely, the image perpetually stimulates imagination afresh, so that the mind, in its ceaseless open-address rehearsals of what has been seen, can re-create likenesses. On its new mental stage images form a procession that is quintessentially theatrical, "ernest in game," where ideas play out their moments on a hypothetical playing field.[16]

This open-address feature of performative games, especially the apprehending of "evidence," is crucial to understanding the way dialogic *adlocutio* works in the *Confessio*.[17] Indeed, such performance lies at the heart of Gower's art in compiling his poem. *Adlocutio* evokes combinations of voices that catch us up, as audience, in simultaneous linearities of thought. The effects of such tangents, each projecting from specific moments in the poem, perpetually alter the audience's perspective. Good drama keeps its audience alert to what is new. In drama images talk. Multiple "voices," each vying for attention, distribute their claims across the flat surface of one's consciousness and coexist by juxtaposition, as if on a

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more than is actually said), *translatio* (metaphorical meaning restated), *denominatio* (the naming of something by a part or quality), *ratiocinatio* (reasoning with oneself), and *adnominatio* (the use of words in different forms, as in rhyme riche, to focus attention through wordplay) — all of which devices abound in Gower's poem as part of his *sermocinationes consequentes* (hypothetical dialogue).

[14] See Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, especially pp. 1–21 and 230–71.

[15] Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, p. 235. Simpson is juxtaposing Gower's Aristotelian habit of mind with that of the Neoplatonist Alan de Lille, whose images give way to ideas. Gower's technique operates within a dramatic rather than an allegorical ideology, where the image provokes but cannot control the response of the audience and thus, like metaphor, "can never be wholly extracted" by mental representation.

[16] One of Gower's favorite phrases is "ernest and game" (e.g., Prol.462, 2.528, 3.549, 4.50, 8.856, 8.3109). Like Chaucer, he uses the phrase to juxtapose "sentence and solaas." He also frequently links "game" with "pleie." Both terms imply performative acts and appear dozens of times in the poem to feature activities that engage in imitative, diverting, festial, or contested and oppositional (albeit gentle) behavior — all activities that share social as well as personal perceptions. In this sense, both "game" and "pleie" reflect the vocabulary of drama. "Game" implies a representational activity, with conventions and rules that require adjudication by both performers and spectators. On "game" and "pleie" as signifiers of performative drama, see Kolve (*Play Called Corpus Christi*, pp. 8–32), who discusses many uses of self-referential terms in miracle plays.

[17] The rhetorical figure of *adlocutio*, a term used by Emporius as a Latin equivalent of *ethopoeia* (see Miller, Prosser, and Benson, *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, pp. 33–36, as cited by Specht), serves well in getting at Gower's dialogic uses of interresponsive impersonations as they debate, exhort, confess, allow, or request information and evidences of each other. See note 3.

single canvas.[18] The perpetual input destabilizes placement reception. What had initially seemed to be scenery becomes plot, an interlaced field of vision where we, as audience, mediate lines (margins or declared boundaries) in the way that a medieval audience might respond to the "lines" of miracle plays, those "quike [living] bookis" for unlearned folk.[19] Such drama, whether staged at church door, the public square, roadside, or in books, *exempla*, or gnomic maxims, improvises before our eyes, ears, and consciousness. As the intuited text becomes narrative in our minds, we (the observer/participants) must supply the life, as it were, as we play amidst/between interstices left by the playwright. All focal points call out for attention with their *first*-person demands, like "tell me," "see me," "hear me," as they pass before the pupils of our "eyes," each competing to win sympathy or to shock or disrupt (which is what "capture our attention" means). It behooves the audience to bend tangents incepted through the senses into circles of understanding.[20]

But to which voice should we listen? Think of a play like the Wakefield *Noah*, where Noah and his wife, Uxor, interrupt the diegesis of their microworld to address us as audience in their effort to gain advantage each over the other by pointing up in our consciousness their personally invested perspectives. *Confessio Amantis* is a study in just such personal investments, whether the agent be Amans or Genius or a conflux of characters within *exempla* that call thoughts into play.

DRAMA, PLAY, AND THE LIBERATION OF VOICE

Why, we might ask, would Gower, who had established himself authoritatively as a leading Latin polemicist amidst powerful circles in London, turn his efforts from political satire to the theatricalities of popular, vernacular fiction? The answer lies in the capacity of *ethopoesis* to create an open address for ideas not easily confined by philosophic or polemic

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[18] The proposition I wish to evoke here is akin to the Ockhamist notion that the mind is like a *tabula nuda*, what Chaucer refers to as "a whit wal or a table, / For hit ys redy to cacche and take / Al that men wil theryn make, / Whethir so men wil portreye or peynte" (*BD*, lines 780–83). Like an illumination, the scene of Gower's drama is a flat surface against which action is recorded.

[19] The language "quike bookis" and "lewed men" comes from a Wycliffite sermon in its critique of miracle plays (Davidson, ed., *Middle English Treatise on the Playing of Miracles*, p. 45, lines 48–50, and p. 40, lines 211–19). Kolve (*Play Called Corpus Christi*) discusses the Wycliffite critic and stresses the cultural value of "living" representations and the "need for a kind of theater that could stage mythic actions as well, which could make phenomena never experienced in the normal course of things visible and dramatically 'real'" (p. 25).

[20] This mental process of staging is akin to what Lady Philosophy speaks of in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* when she advises Boethius: "Whoso that seketh sooth by a deep thought, and coveyteth not to ben disseyvid by no mysweyes, lat hym rollen and trenden withynne hymself the lyght of his ynwarde sighte: and let hym gaderyn ayein, enclynynge into a compas, the longe moevynges of his thoughtes and let hym techyn his corage that he hath enclosid and hid in his tresors, al that he compasseth or secheth fro withoute" (*Consolation of Philosophy* 3.m.11.1–9 — Chaucer's translation). As images are incorporated by the mind, they are turned over again and again within the imagination, regathered into a compass, and placed in the treasury of memory as the intellect takes the recepted tangents, "longe moevynges of his thoughtes," and uses them to define both playing field and issues. The "play" becomes a study in vantage, the vantage of this voice as it is enfolded by the audience into discernable space.

modes. Although one would be hard put to find many similarities between the careers of John Gower and the late twentieth-century playwright Michael Frayn, one point of kinship is worth exploring in answer to just such a question. Both Gower and Frayn make radical shifts in their modes of writing along the way in their literary careers. Frayn explains how he turned from philosophy, journalism, and novel-writing to drama because of the limitations of voicing in those other modes.[21]

Like Frayn, Gower, who began with major treatises in French and Latin, turns in the *Confessio* to a different mode.[22] Gower too would become a conjurer, working with an audience much less predictable than that of his learned Latin coterie, an audience of all people — female and male, learned and lewed.[23] Mixed up with his decision to impersonate rather than declare ideas is his attitude toward the dramatic possibilities of vernacular writing per se and the relationships between text and audience that are affected by such a decision. Jacques de Vitry touches upon comparable issues when he writes about uses of *exempla* with regard to particular audiences:

> When we are speaking in Latin, in a convent and to a congregation of the wise, then we can say many things, and do not need to descend to particulars: to laymen, however, it is

[21] As Frayn puts it: "I found it increasingly difficult to locate my own voice. One of the pleasures of writing for the stage is that it's other people's voices" (Page, *File on Frayn*, p. 81). Frayn had begun his intellectual life as a philosopher, writing his senior thesis at Cambridge on Wittgenstein. Later he published a Wittgenstein-like exercise that he called *Constructions* (1974). He began his professional life as a journalist, then turned to writing novels. But he put aside novel-writing to concentrate on plays instead, which, as he explains in an interview with Craig Raine, liberated him from the constraints of novelistic voicing so that he might pose issues dramatically. In his plays he creates a platea, a kind of *tabula nuda* (a "Nothing On") upon which to juxtapose ideas embodied in the voices of others; accountability for the action falls through open address upon the audience, not on the personae of his play, who can behave as they choose. On the importance of audience Frayn explains: "I sometimes feel that the skill of audiences is not always sufficiently noted. Some theatregoers arrive late, certainly, some of them comment on the performance aloud and wait for the laugh-lines to cough. But the surprising thing really is how few behave like this, and how many understand the conventions and are prepared to abide by them. To find two, or five, or ten good actors to perform a play is difficult; to find two hundred or five hundred, or a thousand good people to watch it, night after night, is a miracle (Frayn, *Plays: One*, pp. xi–xii). Gower might sympathize with Frayn in this matter. Writing is worth the effort if the author finds fifty, or thirty, or even ten good readers.

[22] Gower begins his writing career with the *Mirour de l'Omme*, a moral treatise addressing the ills of the world that uses *exempla* in a more prescriptive way than is possible in the *Confessio Amantis*; then moves on to the *Vox Clamantis*, which addresses with its abstractions a particularly learned audience. In the *Confessio* his turning to the vernacular and its more general audience (the Wives of Bath, so to speak, for whom *experience* may well be the best authority), shifts the effect to receptors whose expectations, idiosyncracies, and biases of judgment are less stable, but, in their special ways, no less valid. We are the ones who, like the persona of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, must wonder if what he reads is true, and, if so, how? (See *BD*, lines 231–33.)

[23] As conjurer he is anxiously aware of responsibilities attendant upon his decision. At the conclusion of Book 6, as we shall see, conjurors like Nectanabus and Ulysses, who abuse their craft, are doomed to the curse of their own craftsmanship.

> necessary to demonstrate everything as though to the eye, and in a way perceptible to the senses.[24]

Vitry differentiates between Latin, a language of abstraction, which conveys well ideas to those of like assumptions, and vernacular, the common language of untutored laymen, which, to function well, depends upon specific details for a dramatic, rather than logical, effect, whereby the author/speaker, as at a demonstration, depends upon particulars perceived by the unstable senses of an unknown audience. No two people, regardless of station in life, hear or see the same thing.[25] But that is what makes drama so exciting: the audience may still receive instruction, albeit by their own judgment, even though they may not necessarily or predictably be instructed.

The vernacular is a playground for laymen, a vehicle through which sensual experience may be particulated. Drama is an intuited art, appealing directly to the eyes and ears of an audience.[26] This dramatic process of reception is key to Gower's middle-way strategy of fictive personae and *exempla*. We enter into a game of staged suppositions. Giles of Rome puts the matter this way:

> Therfore in moral matir the processe mot be by euydens and figures and likness. And so it is iwrite, primo Ethicorum, that moral matier is to louyng of the sothe, is ischewed boystousliche, and by likness, by soche preues and of dedes that faleth ofte tyme.[27]

The key terms here, *processe*, *euydens*, *figura*, and *likness*, although *boystousliche*, bring to life deeds and proofs for consideration by those who love the truth. As in a processional play, evidence and effect are fundamentally matters of staging.

GOWER AS DRAMATIST: CREATING THE FRAME

Gower and Chaucer begin writing *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales* at about the same time. Composed in narrative verse, both poems share dramatic components — character impersonation, dialogue, *exempla*, etc. To hold diverse strategies together both writers

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[24] In *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Crane, p. xxxixn; as translated by Runacres ("Art and Ethics," p. 117), to whom I am grateful for several ideas on how *exempla* function in the matrix of the *Confessio*. The Latin text reads (*Proemium*, p. 1): "Quando verò in conventu et congregatione sapientum Latino idiomate loquimur, tunc plura dicere possumus, eò quod ad singularia non oportet descendere: laicis autem oportet quasi ad oculum, et sensibiliter omnia demonstrare."

[25] Chaucer puts the matter succinctly (and wittily) as the folk in The Squire's Tale "gauren" (gawk) at the display before them: "Diverse folk diversely they demed; / As many heddes, as manye wittes ther been. / They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been, / And maden skiles after hir fantasies" (V[F]190, 202–05).

[26] See note 8, above.

[27] [Giles of Rome], *The Governaunce of Kings and Princes*, 1.1.1, p. 6, trans., Trevisa. Trevisa's word "processe" is well chosen, given its dramatic, processional connotations (*processus* is a term commonly used to identify plays in the fourteenth century), as evidences, figures, and likenesses unfold before our eyes and ears.

create narrative frames that serve as a staging area for the drama that ensues.[28] In the first volume of this edition of *Confessio Amantis*, I have included the frame of the poem (that is, The Prologue and Books 1 and 8). Volumes 2 and 3, as if affiliated staging areas, present that which is seen within the frame. As in any drama, whether set in the round or on a proscenium stage, the way in which the action is framed and what qualifies as frame are crucial to the audience's perception of the pageant. The scene defines a temporary intellective residence for the configuration of ideas within cultural practices.

V. A. Kolve suggests a parallel between framing in drama and framing in the visual arts: "The arch [i.e., the frame] determines our field of vision, our angle of sight; it includes and excludes, and it was the common inheritance of the Middle Ages."[29] This "common inheritance" of framing is evident in medieval stage practices as diverse as processionals, street scenes, architecture, decorated manuscripts, and the framing of ideas in logic and

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[28] A number of excellent studies have been done on medieval frame narratives, particularly with reference to Chaucer and the structure of *The Canterbury Tales*, with an occasional nod toward *Troilus and Criseyde*. See especially Pratt and Young, "Literary Framework"; Hinckley, "Framing-tale"; Clawson, "Framework of the *Canterbury Tales*"; Andersen, "An Analysis of the Framework Structure of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*"; Harrington, "Experience, Art, and the Framing of the *Canterbury Tales*"; Holley, "Medieval Optics and the Framed Narrative"; and Gittes, *Framing the Canterbury Tales*. Ganim comments on the concept of stability and placement that dominate such approaches (*Chaucerian Theatricality*), preferring a term like "quotation" to "framing," on grounds that it "suggests more forcefully the dialogic and self-generating style of the work" (p. 21). Framing "becomes enormously important not as drama, but as a context for each tale and as a model of reception" (p. 29). From my point of view, however, that placement as "a model of reception" is precisely the basis of the drama, in much the way that a stage set might be. Rather than establishing "stability," it opens the possibilities of projection whereby each tangent of reception is destabilized by the relativity of the scene. In Gower (as in Chaucer) there are dozens of conflicting frames at work, within which and out of which dramatic actions take flight.

[29] See *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 57. Kolve attempts to get at cultural components of the vernacular cycle's drama of human history by means of an analogy with the visual arts, a painting by Marco Basaiti, *L'Orazione nell'orto*, where, inside an arch, we see the three chosen disciples asleep in Gethsemane while Christ prays. The framing arch of the painting, he suggests, focuses the audience's attention upon the drama of a specific moment. Standing on either side of the arch are four observers, two friars, a bishop, and a saint, who, as they view the scene, help to focus attention, but, in doing so, become part of the scene, reminding us that, like all in the audience, they add another dimension to the experience, thereby turning an image being seen into a drama of seeing, since they too are being viewed.

For my purposes, an even more useful image than the Basaiti might be Girolamo da Santacroce's *Annunciation* (c. 1540) in the Minneapolis Institute of Art, where God and the angels, in the upper region of the painting, look down from eternity as Gabriel approaches Mary praying at the edge of time at her oratory. Gabriel crosses a tessellated floor to a three-dimensional area represented quite literally as an empty stage on which the subsequent action will be played out, once the Word has taken up its new residence in what Chaucer calls "the cloistre blisful of [her] sydes" (*CT* VIII[G]43). As Mary prays, the dove and baby shoot down, as if by proclamation, from God the Father. The stage is framed on the left by images of a woman and child riding a donkey, a woman drawing water at a well, and the Presentation as Mary climbs the stairs to enter the Temple; and, on the right, the frame consists of wood panel carvings of the creation of Eve, the Temptation in the Garden, and the Expulsion, before which the Visitation, in real life, is occurring. All phases of time and eternity converge in the blank space of this moment. For a fine color reproduction of the proto-drama see: <http://www.artsmia.org/uia-bin/uia_coc. cgi/query /2?uf+via_GOFYze>.

theology, where history itself is framed by eschatology. The same principle of seeing applies well to *Confessio Amantis* as situations are brought into play and the poet draws lines of perception that directly and indirectly affect our gaze. As in the cycle plays or a frame narrative like *The Canterbury Tales*, the frame is a positioning device that provides entrances into an action. Gower's plot is determined by the impersonation of Amans at the center, with Genius as his observer. A visual representation of this feature of the poem, its staging, so to speak, may be found in drawings in Book 1 of several early manuscripts of the lover at the foot of Genius who is receiving the lover's confession.[30] In Bodley 902, fol. 8r, for example, we find an image of Amans kneeling in shrift before Genius, who is blessing the acolyte with a benedictory gesture. The scene is framed by a decorated border with quatrefoils in each corner (see p. 34 of this volume).[31] The drawing is not, of course, by Gower; rather, it provides a reader's response from a time very near to (or perhaps even within) Gower's lifetime, a response that in itself enacts what I deem to be the essence of dramatic action as Gower conceives it — an action within the perspective of an observer who is reciprocally implicated in the process.[32] The tessellated background of the scene situates the activity in an artificial, rhetorical space (*ethopoesis* is a human activity of choice, not one that simply occurs within nature), as if to remind us that the whole posture of this "confession" is staged within a carefully crafted and culturally patterned idea. Imagistically, it projects a realizable idea, though never in the poem is it or can it be fully realized. What we get, rather, are *evidences*, *figura*, and *likenesses*, to borrow Giles of Rome's terminology.[33] On either side of the drawing, trees upon cliffs, linked by a meadow, provide borders to the central image, as if to remind us that the impersonation, though not natural, *is set* within boundaries of the natural world, just as the tessellated scrim indicates that it is also set within art. In this poem, as we shall see, nature is the most elusive complex against which human behavior is enacted. Nature's relationship with human craft creates an ambiguous, often conflicting tension. The sightlines from one quatrefoil to its opposite, that is, from the upper left to the lower right and the upper right to the lower left, intersect at Amans' crossed hands, as if to imply (as we shall see) that hands possess some kind of agency.[34]

What is remarkable about the Bodley 902 drawing of Amans is his presence as an old man, rather than as a young lover; a figure, perhaps, of Gower the impersonator, rather than simply

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[30] See the METS *Confessio* volume 1 for reproductions of three such drawings; the Bodley 902 image appears on p. xi of volume 1 and p. 34 of the present volume. See also Griffiths, "'Confessio Amantis': The Poem and Its Pictures."

[31] On traditional symbolism affiliated with quatrefoils, see Fein, *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, particularly her discussions of the four leaves of the truelove (pp. 161–68 and 206n66), where the four-leafed "truelove" suggests the love knot in contexts ranging from lovers of each other to the love of God and God's love of man from the Cross. See also "Bird with Four Feathers," pp. 255–88, in the same volume.

[32] I mean "process" as a theatrical term, the *processus* of events unfolding in a play, as in the banns for a pageant announced by the vexillators who bear the standards. For a useful study of Gower's illustrators as readers, see Eberle, "Miniatures as Evidence." See also Griffiths, cited above in note 30.

[33] See note 27.

[34] Hands, from the hand of God to hands of men, whether being thrust "agein the pricke" (3.116) or gently sustaining one in need, commonly stand as a metonymy for agency, the doing of deeds. People do things with their hands, and hands, in turn, make things possible.

the conventional lover being impersonated, as in other manuscript illuminations of the scene (see illustrations 3 [p. 71] and 5 [p. 235] of the second edition of volume 1). Although the Bodley 902 illumination is placed at the beginning of Book 1, it is as if we are at the end of the poem when Genius releases the old man, once he has been renamed "John Gower" (see 8.2898 ff.).[35] This linking of the image to an idea of "author" is heightened by the index finger of "Gower's" right hand, pointing toward Genius even as Genius, with his right hand, pronounces a blessing on the old man — an admirable representation of the ultimate reciprocity of *adlocutio* dialogics.

As if in accordance with Kolve's frame theory, the Bodley 902 illustrator presents dramatically a double idea — like that of the poem itself — where, within the diegesis of the poem's frame, the impersonation of the lover seeks nature's blessings in the mutable time world, but also where the author, while touching his heart with his left hand, points with his right the way to social and moral issues beyond the framework of nature *or* his impersonation. The pointing-hand gesture is akin to that of Chaucer the poet pointing the way in the Ellesmere manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*[36] or of Gower pointing arrows at the world in two of the *Vox Clamantis* manuscripts.[37] The frame sets the stage, while gestures define the plot. The interactive images in the interior space project upon the consciousness of the viewer a host of relationships. That is, hidden within the imagery is a staged version of the poetic processes of the whole poem.

As we view the image, we see more than Amans, the picture's (and Gower's) centering device. As our consciousness unfolds, we see that Genius, as priest/observer/interlocuter, is part of the scene as well. As Genius questions then releases the lover (whether here or in the poem itself) we catch ourselves observing cultural values — "kynde," proverbial lore, Ovidian and *Romance of the Rose* allusions, and dramatic conventions (whether of the church with its confessionals or the state with its laws,[38] or the psyche of the common people in its vernacular voicing) — within the surface linearities of imagery. These lines of vision affect our responses, often addressing us in the "first person," or, at least, an impersonation of their voices, so that we find ourselves caught up in a medieval drama of interlaced fields of vision, fields in which we as audience are required to perform as mediators and decide for ourselves what arch will frame which voice or whatever perspective we choose to invoke. As we proceed into the poem's playing space we become increasingly aware that we as readers are part of that vantage as well, a vantage structured for shifting effects against the artful patterning of the tessellated scrim.

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[35] The image represents the poet as poet, assuming *adlocutio* a role, yet at the same time maintaining his true character as instructor/preceptor (i.e., if Amans is Gower, so too is Genius).

[36] The image appears on Ellesmere fol. 153v, between The Tale of Sir Thopas and The Tale of Melibee, the two tales told by Geoffrey.

[37] On the political and ethical content of the drawing of Gower pointing his arrows at the world in British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.iv of *Vox Clamantis*, fol. 8v, see Pearsall "Gower's Narrative Art," p. 475, and Stockton (Gower, *Major Latin Works*), p. 342; and on the comical variant of the drawing in Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Laud 719, see Salisbury, "Remembering Origins," pp. 174–77, 182, 184.

[38] On the performative aspects of law, the staging of justice in medieval England through dramatic formulas, proclamations, summons, and reading aloud, see Clanchy, "Hearing and Seeing," in *From Memory to Written Record*, especially pp. 277–78.

THE SETTING: NATURE AS STAGE PROPERTY

In discussing the Bodley 902 illumination of the elderly Amans being blessed by Genius, I suggested that the tree imagery on either side of the illustration placed the action of the poem within hypothetical boundaries of nature. In many of the poem's sources and analogues, works like Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, Alan de Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* (confessional works with a Genius, or at least a counselor figure), Nature appears as a personification — Dame Nature, "the vicaire of the almyghty Lord," as Chaucer puts it in *Parliament of Fowls* (line 379). But although Gower is following ideas in all of these analogues, impersonating the lover and Genius in debate, he does not offer an impersonation of Nature. Rather nature is part of the scene, never given direct voice, never even placed in the reassuring position of God's servant, as in Chaucer. The point is absolutely crucial to our viewing of the play and the relativity of its personae.

What exactly is nature in the *Confessio*? Gower never settles on a single definition. Nature is ambiguous, sometimes referred to as *nature*, at other times *kinde*. Phrases like "the weie of kinde," "the weie of nature," "the lawes of kinde," and "the lawes of nature" occur dozens of times in the poem. They serve as a given in a proposition, a fundamental premise, but without exact definition of what the *weie* and *lawes* are. At times *nature* and *kinde* seem to be separate entities: e.g., in speaking of Iphis, Genius comments on the lore "that nature in kinde hath sett" (4.495), where *nature* seems superior to *kinde*. Or, he tells "hou God of His justice / Be weie of kinde and ek nature" (5.4918–19) damns the ungrateful, where *kinde* is preeminent while *nature* seems a pleonastic "also."

Mainly they seem equivalent. Feminine pronouns are used for both, which suggests a kind of persona, but she is never given a direct voice. Occasionally she is presented as an aspect of God's agency: "The hihe makere of nature / Hire hath visited in a throwe" (2.916–17); in 5.5961 she is "the goddesse" who brings spring. She is often identified as a teacher: "nature hem tawhte" (3.367); "Nature, tok hem into lore" (3.175), and "Nature techeth me the weie" (8.2232). Quite evidently, she has great force: she must be obeyed (3. 350), or may not be foreborn (5.3063), or compels "every wiht" (4.484). Gower differentiates between nature and reason (see 2.2594 and 2.3053), the point being, perhaps, that nature has power over the body but that reason, being that which separates man from beast, is God-given, which would demarcate a fundamental limitation of nature.

Genius commonly affiliates both nature and kind with natural instincts, particularly sexual, which reason is obliged to govern. This instinctual affiliation enables her to coerce lovers and make them bow to her demands. Sometimes she seems part of an Ovidian climate defined primarily by specific situations. The opposition of nature and reason and the power of natural drives place Amans and Genius in a duplicitous setting that is perpetually at odds with itself. Uneasy lies the plot where uncertainty persists. But, without a self-generated affirmation of nature's presence (i.e., without a designated *adlocutio* voice), *nature/kinde* remains mysterious, sometimes a powerful force for good — except when she is not.

Instead of an articulate Dame Nature, Gower gives us trees (so to speak), a *selva oscura*, to borrow from Dante (*Inferno* l.2), a tangled forest like that of the Black Knight in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, where shadows predominate and, in the darkness, the way is confusing, easily lost. Is the setting blessed, or is it cursed? Medieval writers take diverse positions on nature in an effort to deal with her apparent instabilities. One approach is to personify her as God's form-maker, through whose wondrous creations God's authority may be seen. The model for this approach appears in *de Trinitate* arguments, such as those by St.

Augustine and Boethius, asserting that the form of the Creator may be found in his work. This is a position picked up eloquently by St. Anselm in the *Monologion* and St. Bonaventure in *The Mind's Road to God*. It is a position implicit in Simpson's intricate discussion of form being informed by the will of the creator.[39] This has always been an attractive position, in that it imagines an orderly universe and a benevolent Creator whose will is evident in the patterns of creation, patterns in which all people participate. It has a psychological component as well that encourages self-knowledge as the surest way to understanding the Informer/Creator, since people have been created in a likeness to God. (See especially Augustine's *De Trinitate*, and to some degree Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*.)

But there is another traditional view of nature that operates in the same space but to opposite effect, a more disturbing view akin to Augustine's attitude in *City of God* and *On Christian Doctrine*, where the natural world is a divisive, fallen place, overwhelmed by cupidity, a place of "mortal strokes of the spere," a dry prison of which "Th'eschewing is only the remedye!" (as Chaucer puts it in *Parliament of Fowls*, lines 135, 40). This view is strongly emphasized in the *Mirour de l'Omme*, where, after the seven daughters of Sin (Pecché) are born, they seduce World to produce thirty-five devious offspring. Hugh White is most eloquent on this more cynical view as he allows that nature may, in Gower, have a few bright sparks for Amans' edification, but, for the most part, it is part of that triumvirate of evil influences — the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. White concludes:

> It has to be confessed that nature lines up with the forces of unreason, its influence in the critical area of human sexual love tending to operate against reason and goodness, and that therefore one ought ideally to seek to liberate oneself, near impossible though this seems to be — an acutely worrying fact — from natural sexual impulse. This fatally compromises any attempt to celebrate the things of this world as if they were not at root irreconcilable with the things of heaven and this is why *Confessio Amantis* ends in renunciation and a proclamation of its own failure.[40]

Simpson and White identify two poles between which Gower's natural setting vacillates. By leaving her unpersonified, Gower can avoid making nature into one thing or the other. The fact that an ambiguous *nature/kinde* is built into the setting of his poem heightens the insecurity of both Amans and Genius and places the reader, who attempts to evaluate the ethics of situations, on rocky ground. The locus from which the protagonists attempt their adjudications is subverted even before they utter a word.

A third approach commonly articulated in medieval lore resides with canon lawyers, where, rather than imagining a person or cursing a condition, we are advised to look at effects. We should engage reason, that component of human endowment given by God, to move beyond dilemmas of the flesh to examine patterns of nature's "laws." Kurt Olsson, in his seminal essay on natural law in Gower (1982), outlines medieval understandings of *ius*

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[39] See, especially, Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, pp. 1–21.

[40] White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, p. 219.

naturae that I take up in the Introduction to volume 3, where law and the order of nature, rather than impersonation, become the focal issue.[41]

For the most part, especially in the first half of the poem (Books 1–4), Gower leaves all hints of the jurisdiction of nature ambiguously embedded in the setting. To achieve a conclusion, the reader is left to apply propositions. The drama thus has different endings, depending upon which propositions the reader chooses to establish — the sour position of a White, the more benevolent position of a Simpson, or the more legal perspicuity of an Olsson. In effect the reader, through open address, is left to give nature her voice. But this ambiguity greatly enhances the drama of Amans and his stageworthy feelings. Much can be staged — whether comic or tragic — on a platform of shadows.

ADLOCUTIO AND THE ARTFUL CRAFTING OF AMANS

Amidst the parameters of nature and the tessellated patterns of the poem's rhetorical artistry, Gower projects Amans and Genius as two sides of one concern.[42] Amans is the quintessential ego, buoyed up by perpetual esperance until his illusions, in Book 8, come to nothing. Possibilities may fade, but Amans' yearning does not. Amans is a figure of desire; Genius is more akin to ingenuity and reason (though sometimes his local responses seem more like ratiocination). Both originate rhetorically in Ovidian treatises like the *Amores*, *Ars amatoria*, *Remedia amoris*, and *Tristia*.[43] Few works of the fourteenth century can rival the gentle reciprocities of *debat* between Amans and Genius. In terms of Christian ethics, Amans equates to some extent with *cupiditas*, but more of a Boethian sort than Augustinian, which is why he is so genial, so accessible to our readerly delights.[44]

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[41] See Olsson, "Natural Law." The five points of *ius naturae* that Olsson considers are (1) *ius naturae* as the law of animal nature, (2) *ius naturae* as an instinct leading to charity, (3) *ius naturae* as primitive nature, (4) *ius naturae* as cosmic order, and (5) *ius naturae* as natural reason.

[42] Simpson (*Sciences and the Self*) puts the matter well: "Genius is, after all, Amans's genius — his natural generative and imaginative power, whose sympathies extend in one direction into the senses and in the other into the reason" (p. 196). The pair of impersonations "represents the naturally regenerative powers of the soul interacting with each other, bringing the will back into its proper mediation with, or conformity with, the reason" (p. 197). For Simpson, this is the crucial drama at the heart of the poem.

[43] See Simpson's analysis of Genius and Amans as Ovidian progeny in their new Gower clothes (*Sciences and the Self*, pp. 134–66).

[44] On Boethius, see *Consolation of Philosophy* 2.pr.2 and 2.pr.11, where Philosophy presents *cupiditas* as a basic component of human nature, the will, so to speak, out of which all action is motivated. God planted desire for satisfaction in the minds of people (compare Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, where Nature pricks her creatures with "plesaunce" [line 389] as a motivator), though folly often turns them from the true good toward false goods, which heightens human frustration and anxiety (3.pr.2). Although desire perturbs people with perpetual anxiety (2.pr.4), without it humankind would be inert. Philosophy goes on to consider the important benefits of governing desire, but in even its most raw forms *cupiditas* is the starting point, whether for good or for ill. In this regard we should consider Amans to be a comic figure of potential, albeit not a very potent one. For Augustine's view, see *On Christian Doctrine* 3.10.16, where charity is defined as "the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God; but 'cupidity' is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one's self, one's neighbor, or any corporal thing for the sake of something other than God" (p. 88). See Jeffrey, "Charity, Cupidity." This Augustinian position

Amans is a good student, though perhaps for the wrong reasons. He repeatedly asks for more instruction. So great is his appetite for further inquiry into the possibilities of experience that one wonders whether it might not be the thrill of thinking about experience, rather than honest shrift, that motivates his ever-hungry interest. At the outset of Book 2 (Envy) Amans is quick to admit that he has had sorrow over another man's joy, especially if that joy involves his lady. Then his heart burns a thousand times hotter than Etna, and his torment is worse than a ship "forstormed and forblowe" (2.25). He is okay if the flirtation is public — that is simple courtesy — but when they whisper (especially "whan thei talen longe" — 2.47), his anxiety is so great that he becomes speechless: "I can noght telle my desese" (2.50). In his dialogue Amans proves himself to be a master of *adlocutio* as he *thinks himself* into lifelike scenarios that exemplify Genius' postures.

One of the finer strokes of Gower's technique is to give him imaginative talents, a capacity to project himself into animated situations at the merest suggestion. As he responds to Genius it is as if he, too, knows the admonitions of Quintilian to "display the inner thoughts . . . as though they were talking with themselves."[45] Quintilian is not concerned with presenting three-dimensional characters. Rather, he speaks of "inner thoughts" and hypothetical dialogue. The effect will be not a full character, but rather a cluster of rhetorical functions, like a cartoon, a lively kind of line drawing.[46] Improvisation may be spritely but flattened, nonetheless, by terms of discourse. Amans does not have resonances of personality like Chaucer's Criseyde. He simply does not function that way. Conversely, Criseyde may have desires and proffer courtly responses, as Amans does. But in her totality she has no place in a work like *Confessio Amantis*.

In *adlocutio* rhetoric, impersonation may lack depth, but, in the hands of a skillful writer like Gower, it can make up for that deficiency through a range of subtle nuances. The problem with Amans is that, as a conventional figure of desire, he is like a character from *commedia dell'arte*. His "inner thoughts" are so subjective, so fleeting, that it is hard to pin him down. This does not mean that he lacks conviction (certainly he has plenty of comic intensity and resilience); it is just that his conviction is perpetually overshadowed by the momentary situation in which he finds himself.

In Book 2, for example, Genius opposes Amans with questions. Amans impersonates in his nimble imagination what Genius suggests, as if his brain responds to whatever passes before his eye. His mind becomes a marketplace of transactions, as mental commodities are parsed in subtle though indiscriminate ways. Are you guilty of Falssemblant, Genius asks: "Now ley thi conscience in weyhte [balance scale] . . . If thou were evere custummer / To Falssemblant in eny wise" (2.1926–29). Initially, his answer is easy: "Mi goode fader, certes no" (2.1931). (He is still responding, perhaps, to the story of Demetrius and that deceitful scoundrel Perseus.) But as Genius presses him he becomes responsive: he can, indeed, imagine — with some gusto — such possibilities. Has Falssemblant, Genius asks, ever whispered in your ear when you are thinking of your lady so that you say to yourself, "'I am so celee

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is subscribed in the poem's conclusion, though it is not clarified or articulated during the course of the poem's development. Rather, like nature, it lurks as a subtext.

[45] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* vd.3 (9.2.30 and 34), as cited by Specht, p. 2.

[46] I do not wish to seem pejorative in commenting on the cartoon-like features of Gower's characters. Gower's metonymic style depends on fragments of ideas in action, rather than on anything akin to realism.

[secretive], / Ther mai no mannes priveté / Be heled [covered] half so wel as myn.' / Art thou . . . of such engin?" (2.1953–56). Put this way, Amans (though he is not Genius) can conceive ingeniously of plenty of ways in which he employs deceit, and he relishes telling about it: He feigns "beste semblant" (2.1964) to make his rivals friendly toward him so that he can learn their thoughts. Then he dampens his rival's ardor, catches "his carte amidd the myr" (2.1974), to overthrow him. He does not care about deceitful lovers as a category, providing they leave *his* lady alone. But he will deceive them in any way he can if they threaten him. To pick up information he keeps his ears ever alert, backed by his will, heart, and wit (2.1998) as he "feigne[s] compaignie" (2.2001). If any man speaks to his lady he forgives her fully in hope of gaining her thanks, but always he would "feigne compaignie" (2.2030) "til I knowe / Mi ladi lovers al arowe" (2. 2037–38).[47] In his mind he lines up her lovers in a row, intent upon using each against the other as he slanders them before his lady: "al the worste I can endite / I telle it to my ladi plat / In forthringe of myn oghne astat, / And hindre hem al that evere I may" (2.2046–49). So, though he knows nothing of the political deceits of a Perseus, when Genius activates his mind with regard to his own special peeves, he thinks of plenty of good reasons for false-seeming and savors the telling.

But the dramatic mechanism turns back upon Genius, who had been for a time audience to Amans, rather than questioner. Caught up in Amans' boisterous account, Genius reapplies the commercial metaphor with which he had begun his interrogation (recall the balance scale and "custummer" in lines 2.1926–28) and shifts from Amans' ego study to the false countenances of Lombard merchants who make "profit of oure oghne lond" (2.2111). Lombards are masters at "soubtil hond" behavior to obtain "[t]he beste goodes of the lond / And bringe chaf and take corn" (2.2125–27). The shift catches us as audience by surprise. It awakens us to the realization that Gower's concern is not simply character study, but cultural study and the very psyche of self-interest and capitalism.

In Book 3 (Wrath) we see comparable reciprocities between Amans and Genius, as well as a more analytic capacity on the part of Amans. Amans becomes increasingly aware of differences between inside and outside behavior, not simply in terms of false-seeming, but in terms of psychological effect. At the outset he acknowledges how the success of others makes him burn inside, not simply because of their success but because of his own lost opportunities, almost like a travesty of having left undone those things he ought to have done, which Chaucer's Parson sees as a crucial step in the psychology of contrition.[48] But if Amans is contrite, that has little to do with the restoration of his soul. Contrition for him is rather a feature of his frustration: "al wakende I dreme and meete / That I with hire alone meete" (3.51–52). Gower's use of *adnominatio* here, as he puns through rhyme riche (*meete*=dream; *meete*= encounter), focuses our attention on Amans' brain, which is indeed his meeting/dreaming place. In such a waking somnolence he becomes inwardly more angry and outwardly more frightened, distraught, and dismayed, as a thousand times a day her "nay" sounds in his ears (see lines 3.56–60). His lady, of course, does not in fact say "no" a thousand times a day. The fear and

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[47] Gower toys amusingly with the rhetorical device of *expositio* [repetition] as he plays on *feign* in lines 2.2001 and 2030 to dramatize Amans' fixation.

[48] See *CT* X(I)231–54. The Parson echoes the ancient prayer of forgiveness for doing things that ought not to have been done and also for leaving undone things that ought to have been done, a prayer which Amans here travesties in his lost-opportunities remorse. The prayer is based on Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42.

sense of rejection originate in his own brooding self-chastisement. The only outward effect of his melancholy is felt by his servants, on whom he stages his frustration (3.87–92).

But all such anger melts when he is in his lady's presence and she speaks "a goodli word unto me" (3.99). Then, "[f]or al the gold that is in Rome" (3.100), he could not be angry. In fact he becomes so "overgladed [in] my thoght" (3.106) that offenses are forgotten. Yet, the instant "sche miscaste hire yhe" (3.110) he falls back into a deeper despondency than before and is "withal so mat" (3.114) that everything seems vile to him. The extreme vacillation of his behavior dramatizes the merciless authority he has given to Fortune at the expense of his own will so that he is checkmated.[49] Gower uses a tessellation of rhetorical figures at this point to stage Amans' frustration:[50]

	And thus myn hand agein the pricke	*against*
	I hurte and have do many day,	
	And go so forth as I go may,	
	Fulofte bitinge on my lippe,	
120	And make unto miself a whippe	
	With which in many a chele and hete	*(i.e., emotional swings)*
	Mi wofull herte is so tobete,	*pummeled*
	That all my wittes ben unsofte	*ill-willed (prickly)*
	And I am wroth, I not how ofte;	*know not*
125	And al it is malencolie	
	Which groweth of the fantasie	
	Of love, that me wol noght loute.	*not obey me*
	So bere I forth an angri snoute	*Thus; angry expression (nose bent out of shape)*
	Ful manye times in a yer. (3.116–29)	

The account is rhetorically vivid in its study of the unreality of Amans' dilemma as he rages inside himself and at all about him. As Genius tries to instruct him further by means of the wretched Tale of Canacee and Machaire, he hides his pain as a Stoic: "Let every man love as he wile" (one maxim that the tale does *not* exemplify), though having said so, he immediately reasserts his pain, "Be so it be noght my ladi" (3.398–99).

As Book 3 proceeds we find Amans making increasingly fine distinctions. He is becoming a grammarian as he identifies hidden possibilities with his sly parsing. Does he chide? No. Has he complained to his lady? Yes. If, however, self-accusation is what chiding means, then he is utterly guilty, for he perpetually chastises his heart for having misspoken or remained silent when speech might have been to his advantage. In this regard his anger is so great that he could take vengeance on himself. He is like a beshittened owl who defiles itself on its own roost (3.585). When Genius gives him a precise Aristotelian definition of hate (3.857–63) he explains that he could not hate his lady — he has made a vow to that effect —

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[49] Chess is a common figure of Fortune's game, which she always wins with her "checkmate." See Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, lines 618–71.

[50] Rhetorical figures here include, to name a few, *sententia* (proverbs and biblical lore, 3.116); *chiasma* ("go so forth as I go may," line 118), *interpretatio*, *significatio*, and *synecdoche* (the masochism of lip biting and turning himself into a whip, 3.119–20), *denominatio* (his "hand" and "herte" as figures for himself, 3.116, 122), *translatio* (his converting of himself into an "angri snoute," 3.128), etc.

but when she gives him "schorte wordes" (3.874) he would they were "despent" (3.877) or that he was beyond the range of hearing them: "The word I hate and hire I love" (3.883). But certainly he hates janglers who lie about her. He hopes Cupid will smite them with the same rod that has smitten him.

With regard to Contek, his heart knows no end of such strife. As he loves perpetually but never succeeds, he shows shrewd insight into the psychological mechanisms of his dilemma. He stands in a "wer" (3.1148, "a doubt or confusion"), as he makes "werre" (3.1150, "war") against himself (more *adnominatio*) until he is weary of his life. He recognizes the evil effects of wilfulness upon his heart, and he gets plenty of counsel from his Reason and Wit (3.1157 ff.) as they oppose his Will. The political chaos within the estate of his heart (*denominatio* for soul) is debilitating. Will requires its own rule; Wit and Reason try to "put him out of retenue" (3.1166) or "holde him under fote" (3.1167). Hope sides with Will and sets his heart in jeopardy with wishing and fantasy. So Amans' heart is torn apart as Reason and Wit despise Will and Hope in vicious Contek. Genius defends Will as a faculty committed to love, though he acknowledges that one should also be reasonable. To illustrate his premise he tells the Tale of Diogenes, where Reason helps the philosopher subvert the willful Alexander and his minions. Likewise, the Tale of Pyramus and Thisbe illustrates how unmediated desire can lead to precipitous error. The suicide of the lovers leads Genius to consider Homicide. Are you guilty here, he asks the lover? Certainly in intention he is: he would gladly murder Daunger, his lady's counselor (3.1537 ff.). Amans then sides with the lover in the *The Romance of the Rose*, in his antagonistic summation of the behavior of Daunger.

Genius opposes Amans' comedy of agitation with words of caution against rashness in a series of "better" proverbs: Better to float than sink (3.1628); Better to chew the bridle than be thrown in the mud (3.1629–31); Better to cast water on the fire than to let the house burn down (3.1632–33). Genius' well-placed use of *anaphora* (the better, better, better repetitions) leads to a summary sentence: "Suffrance hath evere be the beste / To wissen him that secheth reste" (3.1639–40). My point is that Amans is less a creature of nature than of *ethopoesis* and the rhetorical figures attendant upon it. His origin is more in Ovid and Cicero than in red-blooded Englishmen. Yet in Gower's setting he coexists with nature and English society in virtually irreconcilable terms.

DRAMATIC TALES OF BOOKS 2 AND 3

Several tales in Book 2 (Envy) stand out for their theatrical precision. The Tale of the Travelers and the Angel (2.291–372) is unusual in that rather than being an abridgment of its source, as is usually the practice with Gower, it is an expansion.[51] Still it is a gem of efficiency that offers insights into how Gower constructs a dramatic narrative. Avianus (his source) begins his fable by speculating on the riddle of men's minds and tells how Jove sends Phebus Apollo with a gift that will test the mettle of men. Phebus finds a pair of squabblers, watches the rage in their faces, and offers the gift: one will get whatever he wishes; the other will receive the same, only twofold. After one man chooses to be blind in

[51] Fable 22 of Avianus is twenty lines long; in Jacques de Vitry and other *exempla*, it is even shorter. See explanatory note to 2.291. Gower's adaptation is eighty-two lines in length.

one eye so that the other will lose both eyes, Apollo returns to report to the gods, "who wept to hear his words about mankind's astonishing meanness."[52]

Gower expands the narrative by means of interior monologue laced with legal sentiments. He begins with a proposition somewhat reminiscent of the beginning of Job: Jupiter, in heaven, looks down at humankind, who are perpetually sending him petitions. In order to have better criteria for judging cases, he sends an angel to walk among people. The angel assumes a human form in order to go unnoticed.[53] He comes upon two travelers walking along a road and listens to their quarrel: "ech of hem his reson hadde" (2.311). The angel, with a nice Gowerian touch, tells "tales" to get a sense of what motivates the two. He soon deduces that one is covetous and the other envious. Knowing what he knows, the angel feigns departure and in gratitude explains who he is — God's messenger. He conceives of a scheme to expose their shamelessness (in Avianus the scheme originates with Jove) and offers each a gift that, like a fairy-tale wish, will reward the petitioner with whatever he desires. But there is a contractual component to this gift that will test their humanity: one will choose and the other will receive twice what the first asked for.

Both travelers are instantly aware of the legal implications of the gift and plot how to use it to their advantage. The covetous man is first to respond. He defers his wish, coveting a double portion of what his companion desires. The envious man is hard put as he stages possibilities in his mind along with the consequences contingent upon his choice. In his envy he scripts a strategy that will give him joy at the other's sorrow and keep him from sorrow at the other's joy. He chooses to be blinded in one eye so that his companion will be made totally blind. Instantly the gifts are bestowed. The covetous man weeps in grief over the other's success, and the envious man, despite having lost one eye, laughs at his blind companion's tears.

We are not told what the angel thought of the choice or what he reported to Jupiter; rather, Genius simply dramatizes the workings of Envy and Covetousness. His point has unfolded before our eyes, without description or corollary propositions, only irony as each man fares according to his wishes. The *exemplum* ends with a demonstration: "That on wepte, and that other lowh" (2.362). Instead of a report to Jupiter or a *deus ex machina* conclusion with the gods condemning the mean-tempered companions, Genius pessimistically observes that the world worsens everyday,[54] because men, their imaginations infected by Envy, perpetually seek to aggrieve their kinsmen (2.365–72). In Gower's version the two companions provide their own conclusion, leaving Jupiter and angel as audience rather than as judges. The fault is not with nature ("it acordeth noght to kinde," 2.369) but with selfish people. The drama ends in the particular, where all problems originate. The cause holds center stage in open address to the beholder.

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[52] Avianus, *Fables*, p. 30.

[53] This detail is, as far as I have been able to gather, unique to Gower. That the angel goes in human form reminds us of Chaucer's The Friar's Tale, where the fiend, who has no form of his own, chooses the one most likely to win for him what he seeks. Jupiter's angel seems to be following the same tactic.

[54] Genius' view of degenerative time and history echoes the parable of the monster staged in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the Prologue, lines 595–602. That is, among sinful men, times get progressively worse. But in temporal matters Gower commonly uses opposition and juxtaposition to provide the ambiguous balance characteristic of his poem. Elsewhere in Book 2 Genius will tell tales (particularly the "historical" tales) that dramatize redemptive time, just as Gower did with the story of Arion that follows Nebuchadnezzar's vision in the Prologue.

The Tale of Deianira, Hercules, and Nessus (2.2145–2307) is likewise a masterpiece of efficient dramatic staging. The tale exemplifies the dangers of Falssemblant. Gower's conflation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 9.101–272 and *Heroides* 9.1–168 shifts the focus of the story from Hercules to Deianira. He streamlines Ovid's extended reviews of Hercules' labors, the hero's cowardly demeaning of himself as he becomes a transvestite "lover," his appeals to the gods when in the throes of death, and Ovid's rhetorical flourishes as Hercules is metamorphosed into a god. That is, he shapes the narrative brilliantly to suit its new context. He changes Nessus from centaur to giant, omits the Hydra's blood to substitute instead the poison from Hercules' own arrow which, through Nessus' blood, infects the shirt that will destroy him.

Genius casts the plot in four scenes. The first presents the situation: Hercules, feeling great tenderness toward his bride, is concerned about crossing a river. As he busies himself with her safety, the deceitful villain Nessus feigns friendship and, with "double entente" (2. 2192), works out a stratagem to have the woman for himself. What the bride and groom see "tofore here yhe" (2.2200) is his semblance of trust (2.2185). This scene climaxes with Hercules, having seen the ruse, slaying the giant with the poisoned arrow shot from afar. A good beginning, indeed. The brief second scene complicates the plot, as false-seeming Nessus gives his would-be lover his bloody shirt, saying it has "such a grace" (2.2250) that it will make one whose affection has wandered return his love to her. "Who was tho glad bot Deianyre?" (2.2255). With potent dramatic irony Gower tells how her heart is on fire (2.2256) in response to her good fortune as she locks the blood-hot gift in her coffer.

In the third scene the development occurs as time passes and Hercules' love drifts to Eolen. Gower details this section more fully as we see Eolen making Hercules "so nyce" (2. 2268) that he, in his infatuation, wears her clothes. Several of the ideas here Gower takes from Deianira's lament in Ovid's *Heroides*, especially Hercules' loss of strength (2.2273) and his embarrassing behavior, as the greatest of warriors becomes so hopelessly debilitated that none can help him (2.2274).[55] As in the *Heroides*, Deianira hears of the tragedy and in great sorrow attempts to save him by means of the shirt. She, of course, has "double entente" too, namely to save him from his folly but also to restore their relationship.

The final scene is the denouement, where Gower reduces the 113 lines of Ovid's conclusion (*Met.* 9.159–272) to five as Hercules puts on the shirt and, burning with the poisonous blood, rips up trees, makes his own pyre, and cremates himself. The dramatic irony is exact as each shapes his own doom. Gower's adaptation of the story focuses on Falssemblant. There is no Jupiter to take pity on the hero and turn him into a god. He simply becomes victim of his own falseness, which is the subject of Gower's play. Gower shapes his plot and sightlines in terms of what he wants his audience to see. The scenes keep "tofore here yhe" (2.2200) all that the audience needs to know.

More than any other part of the *Confessio*, Book 2 deals with "historical" materials — the Tale of Constance, the Tale of Pope Boniface, and the Tale of Constantine and Silvester. The fact that Genius identifies the source of the Tale of the False Bachelor as a chronicle suggests that it too bears upon this configuration of "historical" materials. The point is that for Gower time itself is a drama, with a beginning, middle, and end. We are caught up in

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[55] The passage resonates well against *Vox Clamantis* Book 5, chapters 1–6, where Gower stresses the incompatibility of knighthood and love antics: "What honor shall a conqueror have if a woman's love can conquer him?" (5.1.20); "The man who is once free and subjugates himself voluntarily [to silly love] ought to be reckoned more idiotic than an idiot" (5.1.31–32) — Stockton's translation, pp. 196–97.

the middle of its bewildering ways. As we have observed in the discussion of nature, in the fallen world time often seems utterly degenerative. The Tale of Boniface and the Tale of the False Bachelor confirm this view, as good but naïve people are drawn to destruction by the treacherous strategies of stewards and counselors.

Gower characteristically works by contrast. Opposite to the pessimistic Tale of Boniface and the Tale of the False Bachelor, he stages the Tale of Constance and the Tale of Constantine and Silvester, redemptive tales more congenial in their views of history. The two are linked by wordplay on the names of the title characters (Constance/Constantine), whose subsequent behavior defines constancy, the very quality that thwarts patterns of degeneration. Both Constance and Constantine know how to live where they live, despite whims of fortune and evildoers. Though Constance is moved all about the world, she is stable in her faith. Her movements demonstrate that God is the perfect audience: His eyes behold all spaces on earth.

Unlike Custance in Chaucer's The Man of Law's Tale, where all agency is attributed to the will of God, Gower's Constance is more empowered. In her we watch a heroine in performance. As in Trivet, Genius represents her activities in discrete scenes. Messengers approach her in Rome, and she converts them, proselytizing "with hire wordes wise" (2.606). She explains the faith, and they are baptized. Her busy behavior propels the plot. The messengers return to Barbarie, bearing her mark upon them. The Sultan must see and wed her. But Constance is not the only female force in the poem. The Sultan's mother reads the events in her mind's eye, and Envy enters her heart. Rather than describe the Sultana's behavior, Genius stages her thoughts as she imagines that the marriage of her son will diminish her estate (2.646–49). In a deceitful speech that would make the rhetorician Matthew of Vendôme proud,[56] she feigns words "in his ere" (2.654): "Mi sone, I am be double weie / With al myn herte glad and blithe, / For that miself have ofte sithe / Desired thou wolt, as men seith, / Receive and take a newe feith" (2.656–60). The "double weie," of course, outwardly suggests the twofold measure and delight that the wedding would bring her, as she enjoys her son and his bride's wedding. But, secretly, "double weie" means that "through double-dealing" she will destroy him. Her speech impersonates a loving openness, all the while concealing her vicious scheme. She refers to Constance as a "worschipful" wife (2.662), the daughter of an emperor, who will bring them great honor, and asks that she herself be given "such grace" when "my doughter come schal, / That I mai thanne in special, / So as me thenkth it is honeste, / Be thilke which the ferste feste / Schal make unto hire welcominge" (2.666–71). Bette Davis could not have played it better: the motherly affection, the eagerness to help, the desire to go all out, the loving vanity of wishing to be first in preparing the welcome feast — and the vicious, homicidal treachery. We know as we watch that only she, "be double weie," could bring it off. Gower's sight lines focus on the slaughter as all but one are butchered "in a sodein rage / Endlong the bord as thei be set" (2.688–89). She kills even her own son, so that her actions may not be hindered. But Constance she would torture, rather than kill as, with élan, she watches the bride in shock amidst the dishes and cups —"Bebled [covered with blood] thei weren overal" (2.700).

Gower's story is straightforward, vivid in its detail, and quite different from Chaucer's, which is heavily punctuated with the overwrought Man of Law's rhetorical outbursts and di-

[56] See Matthew's *Ars versificatoria* (1.63, 67, 74–82), delineating requisites for impersonating character and personal attributes.

gressions. Gower's heroine is strong, whether as teacher, mother, or decision maker. Her intelligence and ingenuity are especially evident when the wicked steward Theloüs, spying her ship adrift, boards thinking he will "[d]emene hire at his oghne wille" (2.1101). But he fails to reckon with her shrewdness. She allows that "he scholde hire wel conforte" (2.1113), providing he check to make sure no one is near. As the villain peers overboard, Constance prays to God and "sodeinliche he was out throwe" (2.1121) to drown. Constance's duplicity is juxtaposed with that of the Sowdeness; self-defense contrasts with calculated homicide, a subject to be explored further in Book 3. Here the villain is undone by his lust; she is saved by her faith. The tale leaves us to contemplate the workings of redemptive history, as God helps the faithful.

The concluding tale in Book 2, the Tale of Constantine and Silvester, likewise provides an *exemplum* of redemptive history, but with a twist at the end. Constantine is smitten with leprosy. His counselors advise him to bathe in the blood of infants as a cure. Babes are rounded up, but as the emperor sees the oncoming slaughter and the grieving mothers, he recognizes that every person must choose vice or virtue — "Thus stonden alle men franchised" (2.3263) — and he chooses virtue. So instead of murdering the children he feeds them and clothes them, realizing in his actions that one who would be lord must "be servant to pité" (2.3300). Instead of cursing him the community now prays for him. The next night God sends him a vision of Pope Sylvester on Mount Celion. There he receives instruction in the history of humankind in the scope and impact of a cycle play, from the Fall to the Last Judgment, where every man, whether plowman or knight, "lewed" man or clerk, "[s]chal stonde upon his oghne werk" (2.3424). The cup designed to bath him in babies' blood now becomes his baptismal vessel, and his malady falls away like "fisshes skales" (2.3456). In appreciation he endows the church on earth with wealth. But then comes the twist. Unlike the Tale of Constance, the Tale of Constantine does not end on a happy note. Despite Constantine's redemptive deeds, we abruptly return to the notion of degenerative history as a voice from on high declares: "Today is venym schad / In Holi Cherche of temporal, / Which medleth with the spirital" (2.3490–92), a curse that history has borne out.[57] The only hope lies in charity, which helps one in both worlds (2.3499): "If charité be take on honde, / Ther folweth after mochel grace" (2.3502–03). But that is a matter of individual choice, not decree, just as it was, in fact, for Constantine.

The chilling conclusion to the story and to Book 2 anticipates the dark conclusion of the *Confessio*, as White reads it. The point is that in the fallen world, social agendas are often doomed to failure. Constantine would do a good deed by way of his donation, but, given the materiality of the gift and the envy of the world, the stark, heavenly pronouncement comes as no more of a surprise than "John Gower's" hapless rejection of the world in Book 8.

Gower's dramatic tactics work by juxtaposition — this tale set against that. The same dramatic strategy holds true for Book 3 (Wrath). The tactic reminds us of a basic principle of all exemplary machinery, where fiction addresses the truth, in the meditative circumlocutions of the audience. The Tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is another of Gower's Ovidian tales, here exemplifying Folhaste. The tale is told with pleasing variation of syntax, run-on rhythms, witty wordplay, aphorism, and rhetorical questions; it has two well-placed speeches, and an

[57] In Book 2, the phrase "venym schad" perhaps resonates against Hercules' envenomed shirt, as wealthy churchmen, benefactors of the Donation of Constantine, can now dress themselves in splendid vestments.

abundance of charming details and touching pathos, whereby any reader would regret with heartfelt pity the hastiness of each lover's suicide.

The plot is laid out cinematically through a straightforward sequence of visual "takes." Apart from the brief speech by each lover, the tale is virtually a dumb show. First we are given the setting — the town that Semiramis walled, with a wall of its own that separates the lovers, "wow to wow and wall to wall" (3.1341); then the narrative zooms close up to the lovers' situation, their efforts to communicate, and their plan to meet. Thisbe sets out in the dark alone, encounters the lion, drops her wimple, and hides in a bush. From another angle we witness Pyramus' discovery of the wimple, his prayer, and his death. Thisbe discovers the corpse, faints, utters her last speech in the manner of the *Heroides* (though vastly more brief), and commits suicide. The moral: "Bewar that of thin oghne bale / Thou be noght cause in thi folhaste" (3.1496–97).

In his refocusing of the story, Gower takes a number of liberties with Ovid's narrative, all of which work well in his modulation. In Ovid, the couple's parents forbid marriage. In Gower the parents are simply ignored; nature provides all the reasons necessary for lovers. As Cupid casts his fire on them (3.1353), their passion ignites. They do not find a chink in the wall through which to whisper; in their eagerness, they make one (3.1371). Gower puns on Pyramus' fiery name (what he was "hote" ["called"] and their "hote" love [3.1375–76])[58] as they devise a way to "winne a speche, / Here wofull peine for to lisse" (3.1360–61). There is no stopping this burning passion, Cupid has seen to that. After they agree to meet at the well, Gower focuses, with characteristic affection for female agency, on Thisbe's lonely but determined journey through the night disguised with quiet steps so that none will know (3.1384–91). To heighten the drama he changes Ovid's well-fed lion to a hungry one setting out to take its prey in a field, thereby making the situation more dangerous for Thisbe than it was in Ovid.

Though Gower's play heightens the natural compulsions of appetite, its tone is nonetheless courtly. Rather than hide Thisbe in a forest, Genius gently compares her to a bird in a mew as she takes refuge in a bush. Once she is secure Genius imagines how she might have passed the time and invents an occupation for her, namely thinking warm thoughts about Pyramus as unto herself she "pleigneth ay" (3.1415). But, although gentler, Gower's version is also more bloody than that of his sources. After the lion kills his prey "in his wilde rage" (3.1398) and, "with his blodi snoute" (3.1400), comes to the well to drink, he finds the wimple, which he mauls: he "hath [it] todrawe, / Bebled aboute and al forgnawe" (3.1405–06). It is as if he does to the wimple what he would have done, given the chance, to Thisbe. He drinks and then returns to the wood. The lion, following its ravenous nature, exposes powerful forces within natural behavior. Perhaps if Pyramus and Thisbe had better understood such forces they would not have found themselves in so bad a position.

When Pyramus finds the bloody wimple, all totorn, he thinks she has been devoured and, in a hasty move, "sodeinly" (3.1428) draws his sword and kills himself. Gower gives him his only speech in the tale at this point as he melodramatically accuses himself of "felonie" and concludes that he is the cause of her death (3.1431–33). When Thisbe finds him she cannot speak "for hire herte schette [closed]" (3.1453), and she swoons. The shutting of her heart is a remarkably precise explanation of her swoon, as if Genius considers fainting to be caused by blood deficit to the brain, which is alleviated only when she starts breathing again ("Sche cawhte breth," 3.1461) and comes to. She then makes her one and only speech

[58] *Pyros*: Greek for fire; *pyra*: Latin for funeral pyre, see explanatory note to 3.1375–76 on *hote/hote*.

(3.1462–81). Gower gives her greater powers of analysis than Pyramus (she gets twenty lines, he got three) as she calls out to Venus and blind Cupid, who has so painfully been her guide.

Gower plays up the pathos of the situation as she touches Pyramus, gives him yearning looks, embraces him, and kisses him. Her wits are overcome, and she puts the sword's point against her breast and falls upon it. Thus "bothe on o swerd bledende / Thei weren founde ded liggende" (3.1493–94). No mention is made of her removing the sword from Pyramus' breast before she falls upon it, so apparently they are skewered together on the one bloody sword when people find them, a fitting together-at-last image of their passionate love.

Book 2 (Envy) featured histories; Book 3 (Wrath), stories pertaining to the Trojan war, Thebes, and the conquests of Alexander. Gower links war with anger, rage, and homicide. The Tale of Orestes introduces multiple issues of homicide so pivotal to the concluding of the book. Based upon Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the tale focuses on legal issues even more than vengeance. Orestes is raised by a worthy knight Taltabius, who teaches him strong family values. When his mother murders his father, Orestes vows vengeance against the "moerdrice" (3.2003). In his anger he would tear off her "pappes" (3.2010) with his own hands, have her drawn by horses, and then fed to dogs as a warning against patricide. Having made up his mind (no oracle commands him here), he prays to the gods for guidance; they hear his prayer and send him to Mycene. Egiste has married Climestre; he is a great scoundrel, having "forlai" (3.2031) his daughter and then abandoned her. Clearly he has no regard for the sanctity of family structures. As in Benoît, when Orestes returns his mother locks herself in her castle,[59] which Orestes puts under siege. At last he is victorious and his mother is publicly executed according to Orestes' vow. He recognizes the unnaturalness of his act, but justifies his vengeance: "Unkindely for thou hast wroght, / Unkindeliche it schal be boght" (3.2065–66). Egiste returns, is defeated, and is hanged on the gibbet, as befits traitors.

This moment in the poem provides a fine example of Gower's seamless shifting of his play from narcissistic comedy to hard social critique. As debate ensues on the justice of Orestes' behavior, Gower raises various points of law, complicated by the fact that the slaying of kin is involved. Genius exonerates Orestes on grounds that a murderer deserves death. But then Gower gives the story an unexpected twist. Egiona, Egiste's daughter and sister on his mother's side to Orestes, hangs herself: "Vengance upon hireself sche soghte, / And hath of hire unhappi wit / A moerdre with a moerdre quit. / Such is of moerdre the vengance" (3.2192–95). This eye-for-an-eye assessment makes a kind of sense, but tenderhearted Amans (3.2203), apparently distressed by the death of Egione, recognizes the difficulty of right discernment: "What is to done, and what to leve" (3.2205). Is murder ever justified, he asks? Genius gives a textbook response, delineating three legal situations for homicide: (1) to punish traitors and robbers, (2) to support law and common rights, and (3) to defend one's country (3.2210–40). When Amans challenges him further on the ethics of "dedly werres" (3.2242), Genius insists that the "evidence" is "[t]o rewle with thi conscience" (3.2249– 50) and proceeds to assail the evils of war (3.2251–2360), based on authorities from Jesus to the Apostles. To know what to do and what to leave is indeed a matter of conscience. Amans presses the point, wondering about justification of homicide in war.

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[59] An interesting feature, very different from Aeschylus, is Benoît's medievalization of the story as Orestes, knighted by Idomeneus, raises a powerful army garnered by friendship, obligation, and marriage, and puts the city under siege. Orestes butchers his mother, then ambushes Aegisthus at a pass and brings him bound to the city for public execution. His friends see to it that Orestes is made king.

This diatribe against war, so timely in the late 1380s as Richard attempts to maintain peace with France, is the first major political digression that Gower has allowed his impersonations. For a moment the drama moves from one stage ("character") to another ("international politics"). The shift confuses our sense of voice and vantage as the tone moves from *ethopoesis* toward the polemics of the Prologue, albeit still within the jurisdiction of his protagonists. Genius acknowledges that nature opposes war: War burns churches, slays priests, is an excuse for rape of wives and maidens and a distraction from law and God. The motives behind war are evil, and its effects horrendous: conscience is suspended, as war becomes a raw excuse for plunder.

Genius gives the war digression *exempla* of its own. To illustrate the evil effect of war upon the state Genius tells the Tale of Alexander and the Pirate (3.2363 ff.), the gist of which is that one criminal is promoted by another. This example is followed by an account of the wars and death of Alexander, a scenario that Diogenes had predicted earlier while sitting in his tub (3. 1201 ff.). Rather than being heroic, Alexander's life is desolate. He dies far from home: "Thus was he slain that whilom slowh" (3.2461).

Amans immediately applies Genius' ideas and questions him further: Are the crusades lawful? When pressed, Genius allows that no homicide is acceptable. Supporting his argument largely from the Bible (Moses' commandments, Christ's nativity, and the shepherd's song of peace), he concludes that shedding of blood is, in short, unlawful; only blind conscience can approve of it (3.2541). Deadly wars should cease:

> For who that wolde ensample take,
> The lawe which is naturel
> Be weie of kinde scheweth wel
> That homicide in no degree,
> Which werreth agein charité,
> Among the men ne scholde duelle. (3.2580–85)

Homicide negates natural law, the proof being evident in Solinus' account of a strange bird with a face of blood and bone like a man's, who murders people and devours them. But when he goes to drink and sees his own manlike image, like a mime, reflected back at him, he becomes so distraught that he dies. The implication seems to be that Homicide, the taking of a life of one born with human countenance, is a form of suicide. The *exemplum* underscores the fate of Egiona, as murder looks upon murder and destroys the self.

Genius concludes Book 3 with the Tale of Telaphus and Teucer, a story that admirably goes back to propositions considered in the Tale of Orestes, namely the evil of families destroying each other. This tale ends in positive accord, however, as Achilles, about to slay his enemy Teucer, is asked by Telephus (Achilles' son) to be merciful since at another time Teucer had been merciful to him (Telephus). Later, Teucer makes Telephus his heir. The story demonstrates the value of mercy, the antidote to homicide, whereby a family is restored rather than destroyed from within. The materials shaping the conclusion to Book 3, from Orestes on, juxtapose vividly drawn short subjects interlaced with commentary to provide a peaceful ending to the Book of Wrath. The tone is quite different from the dark prophecies of doom following the donation of Constantine at the end of Book 2. The posture is one of hope even in the face of outrageous slaughter in continental campaigns, bishop's crusades,