JOHN GOWER

Confessio Amantis

Volume 1

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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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FOR THE FIRST EDITION

I am greatly indebted to Professor Andrew Galloway for all the work that he has put into this volume. Not only has he translated Gower's Latin, which is no easy task in itself, but he has written explanatory notes for the Latin passages, read the whole manuscript twice, and made innumerable suggestions, both in glossing and with regard to critical issues. He has been a splendid colleague to work with. Quite simply, the edition could never have been completed without his expertise and support. I am also grateful to Derek Pearsall for years of encouragement in my Gower studies, from the time I first met him at York in 1967 until recent days when he still has had good advice to offer. The shape of this volume is his idea — a complete edition of the poem's narrative frame, that is, the Prologue, Book 1, and Book 8 — that includes a good number of Gower's most famous tales. Robert Yeager has likewise been a great friend over the past two decades. Over the years we have had many a conversation about Gower and shared a multitude of insights.

Eve Salisbury has provided a helpful critique of the Introduction. She has been particularly kind in pointing me to bibliography that I had not come across in my own readings. So too R. Allen Shoaf, who has helped me identify materials on Usk and Gower. Dana Symons, Ann Robinson, and Angela Gibson have also read the manuscript and offered useful criticism along the way. They have all checked my text against the Fairfax 3 manuscript, helping me to catch errors of transcription that might otherwise have slipped by. Dana has been responsible for formatting the volume and preparing the camera-ready copy. Her intelligence and patience in addressing editorial problems, carelessness, and inconsistencies in my several drafts of the volume have been all-surpassing; she has the eyes of Argos and the wisdom of Othea. Melissa Bernstein has made comments on the Introduction and, with Ann Robinson, has made an electronic check of the glosses cited in the *MED*. Mara Amster proofread the final copy.

I wish to thank Alan Lupack, the Associate Editor of the Middle English Texts Series, for his encouragement of the project from beginning to end and for his careful reading of the manuscript and the glosses, a task at which he is extraordinarily adept. Alan and the Robbins Library, of which he is curator, have proven to be resources of the first magnitude. Alan's care in helping me to find materials has been valuable beyond measure. At Kalamazoo the camera-ready copy has been reviewed by Tom Seiler who has shown steadfast devotion to the series over the years. Finally, I wish to thank my wife Ruth, who has seen me through two editions of Gower, and been supportive and reassuring even when my understanding of the poem wearies or seems too daunted to continue. Her counsel in finding the right tone and content for the Introduction has been much appreciated.

Thanks go to the National Endowment for the Humanities for its generous support of the Middle English Texts Series and this volume in particular. I am grateful to the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to use the Fairfax 3 manuscript as my base text and also for the use of Bodley 902 and Bodley 294 for those portions of the earlier recension which I have included. I am likewise grateful for permission to reproduce the pictures from those manuscripts.

Since beginning work on Gower in 1967 I have developed an increasing admiration for the pioneering work of G. C. Macaulay. Even after a hundred years, his notes and carefully edited text stand as exemplars of fine scholarship that may be emulated but not surpassed. At Indiana University, as I was finishing up my dissertation on Chaucer in the early 1960s, John Hurt Fisher joined the faculty and first introduced me to Gower. For nearly four decades, he has been a kind friend. It is to him and the memory of G. C. Macaulay that I dedicate this edition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FOR THE SECOND EDITION

First I would thank those who have used the METS edition of *Confessio Amantis* in their classes. Several have made helpful suggestions for the revision. Thanks go especially to Derek Pearsall who suggested a different format which would assist the reader in finding his or her way around in the volume. The Table of Contents has been greatly enlarged and new page headers make it easier to move about without going back to the contents page. Thanks next go to Michael Livingston, Assistant Editor of the Series, for his help at all phases of the revision. He converted the book to its new format, checked the Latin marginalia against Fairfax 3, catching several errors that had slipped past us in the earlier printing, and has been a good listener with forthright advice on various problems. Jacqueline Stuhmiller read the whole volume once again against Fairfax 3 and frequently consulted the Stafford manuscript (Huntington Library MS Ellesmere 26), St. John's College, Cambridge MS B.12 (34), and Bodleian Library MS Bodley 294 (*SC* 2449) as well. She caught many errors that had initially gone unheeded and was helpful in creating a number of new textual notes. Emily Rebekah Huber gave a careful reading of the explanatory notes, checking the accuracy of citations, and created the Index to References for the volume. John Chandler helped with the index and entered the final corrections. It has been a pleasure working with such accomplished people.



PREFACE

The *Confessio Amantis* has been an important part of my thinking for more than three decades. This volume, the first in a set of three, includes the frame of the poem; that is, the Prologue, Book 1, and Book 8. The three-volume edition provides readers with a complete text of Gower's poem, along with extensive glosses, bibliography, and explanatory notes. Volume 2 of the edition includes Books 2–4, and volume 3, Books 5–7. Books 2–4 follow one kind of development, following in its structure the outline of Vice and its children found in Gower's early French poem, the *Mirour de l'Omme*; then in volume 3 (Books 5–7) Gower offers another kind of development as he shifts his internal structure from romance banter and a formulaic confession to philosophical inquiry.

Despite the surface simplicity of the *Confessio,* the smoothness of its verse, and the apparent normality of its vocabulary, the poem is not easy to read. Gower's syntax is sometimes convoluted, using word order that is unfamiliar to modern readers, particularly in its placement of coordinating conjunctions in medial positions instead of at the head of the clause, but also occasionally imitating French idioms. Often we encounter inverted word order, and occasionally headless clauses and unusual use of hidden prepositions. Gower is a writer keenly aware of how to make language work for him, however, and he shapes the syntax pointedly toward his purpose. His vocabulary is not as broad as Chaucer's, but he uses words with distinctions of connotation that shift subtly from one context to another as shades of meaning change. One often encounters *rime riche*, which focuses attention on wordplay and the interiority of sense. Gower is alert to the innuendoes of language pertaining to law and legal matters. He also is well versed in French and Latin romance literature, which he uses with a grace and confidence that may slip past the casual reader. Thus this edition has sought to provide abundant glosses and notes to make his Middle English more fully clear to modern readers.

The *Confessio Amantis* is bilingual. This edition includes all Latin components of the poem along with translations. The Latin poetry is often graceful, although it sometimes seems to strive for difficulty and enigma; this opacity occasionally results in brilliantly significant ambiguities, at other times in collisions of partial metaphors. Both effects are challenging to translate. The Latin prose of the marginalia often has a legalistic ungainliness of style. But this quality provides congruities of idea that are important to the larger sense of Gower's poem. His Latin skills affect his English as he refashions the vocabulary with neologisms, such as "reprise"; likewise, his Latin is occasionally a calque of fourteenth-century English. For example, Gower will use the infinitive of "to desire" (*velle*) to mean the noun "desire" (normally this would be *desiderium* or *cupiditas* in Latin — words that do not scan well in iambic hexameter or its hemistiches used in elegiac couplets). But this is a case where in using *velle* he is thinking of the English word "wille," as in "to have your will," where in his Latin he says *habere velle*, the two words *wille* and *velle* sounding alike. When he

writes English he is sometimes thinking in Latin, and when he writes Latin he is sometimes thinking in English.

Gower's poem is written in essentially the same dialect as Chaucer's poetry, that is, the literary dialect of cultivated Londoners of the late fourteenth century. The orthography of Fairfax 3 looks different from Chaucer's Ellesmere MS, however, largely because of the greater influence of French and Kentish spelling conventions in Fairfax. Commonly Gower (or his amanuensis) used *ie* as a digraph for /e/, a convention common in Anglo-Norman and in the Kentish dialect. So one finds *chiere*, *hiere*, *hiede*, *siek*, and the like in the *Confessio* where in Chaucer one would expect *chere* or *cheere*, *here* or *heere*, *hede* or *heede*, *sek* or *seek*. Gower's scribe will not hesitate to use both Chaucer's and the Kentish forms in rhymes like *dede/wommanhiede*, and so on. Where Chaucer uses *e* or *o*, Gower regularly uses the Anglo-Norman digraph *oe*, as in *poeple*, *proeved*, *moerdre*, and *coevere*. Gower probably pronounced the vowel as /e/ or /o/ as did Chaucer. In the *Confessio* one also finds spellings that reflect Romance etymology instead of actual pronunciation, such as *doubte* which rhymes with *aboute*, *deceipte* which rhymes with *conceite*, and *pleigne* which rhymes with *peine*.

One encounters a few Kentish phonemes in Chaucer, but in Gower they are frequent, especially Kentish *e* from Old English *y* where we would expect in Middle English *i* or *y*. So we find in Gower *ferst*, *senne*, *helle*, and *pet*, where we would normally find *first*, *sinne*, *hill*, and *pit* in Chaucer. Gower's scribes occasionally use *i* in all these instances, but we also find the Southern *u* for *i*, as in *hulles* or *puttes* for *hills* or *pits*. Finally, we find the Kentish participial ending *-ende* in the *Confessio*, where Chaucer normally uses *-inge*, though the latter form is also common in Gower.

In this edition of the *Confessio* I have followed the guidelines of the Middle English Texts Series and regularized *u/v* and *i/j* according to modern spelling conventions. I have also followed modern practices of punctuation and capitalization. As an aid to pronunciation I have placed an accent over *-é* if the vowel is long and given full syllabic value. So, instead of *charite*, *cite*, or *pite* the text will read *charité*, *cité*, and *pité*. According to this practice *honeste* and *honesté* will be distinguishable words, the adjective in two syllables, the noun in three. Sometimes unstressed *-e* is pronounced as *-ə* or not at all. In the fourteenth century, pronouns and prepositions are undergoing rapid change and thus often prove to be confusing. Gower commonly uses *hir* for "her," *her* for "their," *hem* for "them" or "themselves," and *him* for "him" or "himself." Distinction between the second person pronoun and the definite article is made by spelling the one *thee* and the other *the*. I have capitalized pronouns referring to the Christian deity along with proper names for the deity, though these capitalizations do not necessarily occur in the Middle English or among many modern stylists. But the practice saves on glossing and often makes hard passages clear where, in Middle English, no ambiguity seems to have been intended.

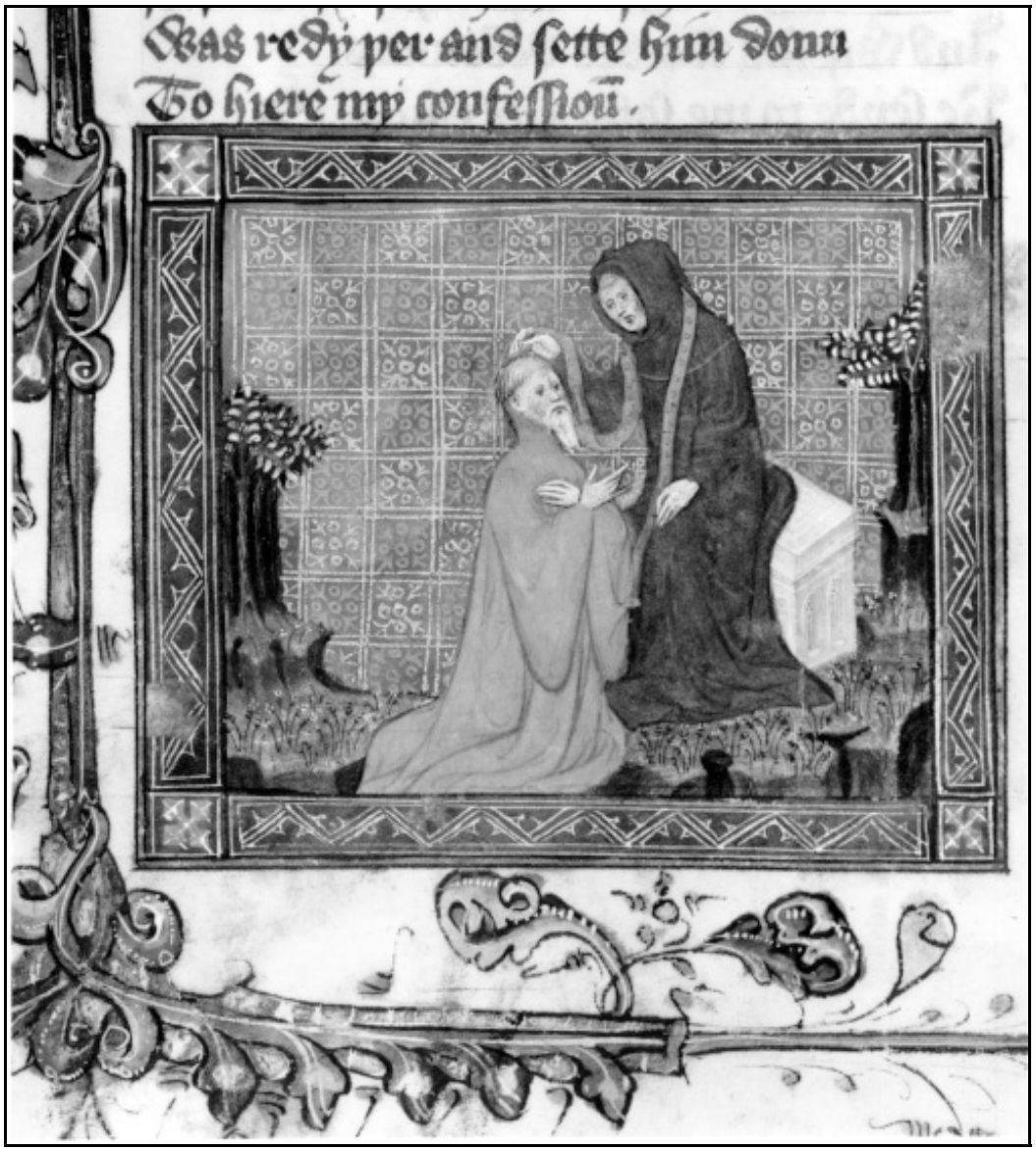


Illustration 1: MS Bodl. 902, fol. 8r. Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Confessio Amantis [The Confession of the Lover]. The representation of Amans as an old man is unique to this manuscript. (Contrast illustrations 3 and 5.) The artist seems knowledgeable of the conclusion to the poem where the lover sees his face defaced "[w]ith elde" [8.2828]. Some have argued that the portrait is of Gower himself as he points the way. See notes to Book 8.

ENTER GOWER

To sing a song that old was sung,
From ashes ancient Gower is come,
Assuming man's infirmities
To glad your ear, and please your eyes.
It hath been sung at festivals,
On ember-eves and holy-ales;
And lords and ladies in their lives
Have read it for restoratives:
The purchase is to make men glorious,
Et bonum quo antiquius, eo melius.[1]
If you, born in these latter times,
When wit's more ripe, accept my rimes,
And that to hear an old man sing
May to your wishes pleasure bring,
I life would wish, and that I might
Waste it for you like taper-light.
. . .
I tell you what mine authors say.
— William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, I.Prol.1–16, 20[2]

[1] "The older a good thing is, the better." The phrase is proverbial, though Hoeniger (Arden Shakespeare edition, p. 6) notes that *communius* is more common in the proverb than *antiquius*. Shakespeare's choice of *antiquius* is well attuned to the poet Gower's concerns. Ancient texts provide the purchase necessary for cultural amelioration and for their "restorative" value to the psyches of men and women "in their lives." The proverb with *communius* is found in T. Lodge, *Wits Miserie* (1576), where it is quoted as an axiom of Aristotle, and in Marston, *The Dutch Courtezan* (1605).

[2] Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. Hoeniger, pp. 5–6. For a brief discussion of Shakespeare's understanding and use of Gower in *Pericles*, see the Explanatory Note to Book 8, line 271 (below).

INTRODUCTION

Scripture veteris capiunt exempla futuri,
Nam dabit experta res magis esse fidem.
[Writings of antiquity contain examples for the future,
For a thing experienced will afford greater faith.]
— Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, Prol. to Book I, lines 1–2[1]

Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon
Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.
For lewed peple loven tales olde;
Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.
— Chaucer's Pardoner, *CT* VI(C)435–38[2]

GOWER, MAKER OF TALES

For Gower, old tales and their power to shape a "lewed peple" (to quote the Pardoner) are not something to be scorned.[3] Tales enable the mind to rethink itself. Coming as they do from outside one's immediate consciousness, they embody a culture's sense of order and help to place the reader within the ethical terms of the culture. They clarify the meanings of right and wrong and thus can serve as the restorative of which Shakespeare's Gower speaks. Tales forge identities. The *Confessio Amantis*, like the "writings of antiquity" that Gower mentions in the *Vox Clamantis*, is written to provide a bridge between the past and an anticipated future, a bridge that gives its audience a better sense of the present.[4] As

[1] The Latin text of *Vox Clamantis* is from Gower, *Complete Works*, ed. Macaulay, 4:20. The translation is based on that found in Gower, *Major Latin Works*, trans. Stockton.

[2] For discussion of these specific lines from the Pardoner's Prologue with regard to tale-telling, see Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, pp. 18–19, who offers thoughtful considerations on "holding" tales in the memory for purposes of mental dialogue.

[3] Some portions of this introduction are adapted from the introduction to *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck (1968).

[4] As medieval writers frequently recognized, the present is an illusion. It can only be sensed. St. Augustine puts the matter succinctly: "it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time" (*Confessions* XI.xxvii.36). Having contemplated the "present" as a lifetime, a year, a day, or an hour — all of which measures are instantly more a matter of past than present, he observes, "if you can think of some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous moments, that alone is what we can call 'present'. And this time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration. If it has duration, it is divisible into past and future. But the present occupies no space" (*Confessions* XI.xv.20). Compare *The Cloud of Unknowing*'s theory of atoms of time which, if surpassed, place one momentarily in the presence of God, the only true present (see chs. 4 and 6).

Gower explains, the reading of old tales affords its participants "a thing experienced" (*experta*), a means of testing knowledge personally the way one might momentarily test any kind of sensual information, whether from nature or parchment, by trying it out in the mind to find out how it might be true.[5] In the *Confessio*, the experiencing of a tale equates with testing it. Each tale demarcates a trial through which one has the potential to learn and grow. In this sense, the plots of Gower's stories are deliberately *experiential*. They are *about* experience, but likewise they provide examples *to be tested in the mind*. Their plots develop through choices made by characters who, like the readers assessing them, anticipate some hoped-for denouement.[6]

Gower thinks within concepts of knowing that are ancient, though mainly articulated in the fourteenth century by writers steeped in the ideas of St. Augustine, who explored relentlessly the illusions people spin about themselves as they explore the interstices between time, memory, experience, consciousness of the present, and one's relationship with language.[7] All such ideas are crucial to Gower the storyteller.[8] In his attempt to understand temporal relationships and the psyche, Augustine takes his example from literary experience, as if reading affords the best means of perceiving how time and mind work:

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[5] Fourteenth-century writers repeatedly insist that truth is relative to the perceiver. Consider Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, where the narrator rereads his Ovid to test it in his mind, wondering "yf hit were so" (line 233). See note 12. Petrarch's observations on the value of old sayings and ancient writings are useful in understanding what Gower means by *experta* and how a medieval reader might "experience" old books and ideas. In a letter to Giovanni Colonna di San Vito (25 September 1342) Petrarch writes: "Nothing moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men. I like to rise above myself, to test my mind to see if it contains anything solid or lofty, or stout and firm against ill-fortune, or to find if my mind had been lying to me about itself. And there is no better way of doing this — except by direct experience, the surest mistress — than by comparing one's mind with those it would most like to resemble. Thus, as I am grateful to my authors who give me the chance of testing my mind against maxims frequently quoted, so I hope my readers will thank me" (*Letters from Petrarch*, p. 68).

[6] Hope, anticipation, and need of a good ending, despite the lack of certainty of where we are now or where we are going, is one of the most characteristic considerations of Middle English literature. It is found repeatedly in questions such as Chaucer's "not wot I . . . Ne where I am, ne in what contree" and his search for "any stiryng man / That may me telle where I am" (*House of Fame*, lines 474–79), or Will's perpetual search in *Piers Plowman*, or such poignant lyrics as "Kindely is now my coming" with its "Scharp and strong is my deying, / I ne woth whider schal I" (Luria and Hoffman, *Middle English Lyrics*, #237, lines 5–6).

[7] St. Augustine is the doctrinal authority most cited by philosophers such as Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Roger Bacon, theologians such as Wyclif, and writers such as Gower, Chaucer, Langland, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

[8] For Augustine, time is movement, a "shuttling of the future into the past, moving through an immeasurable point" (Wills, "Augustine's Magical Decade," p. 30). That immeasurable point is the present, which we try to understand or make exist sensibly through the abridgments of mental acts. Augustine argues that "without creation, no time can exist" (*Confessions* XI.xxx.40). Being a phenomenon of creation, time can be understood only by measure, by relationships of moments (see *Confessions*, XI.xxvi.33 and XI.xxvi.34–36). Time is thus a kind of fiction — a tale, if you will — a distension of once-upon-a-time moments, stretching feeling according to measures made "real" as the mind expands itself through anticipation of the future and recollection of the past (*Confessions* XI.xxxi.41). Time enables one to frame the present even though we cannot know what it is. We make tales of time through which we imagine that we can grasp its being.

> Say I am about to recite a psalm. Before I start, my anticipation includes the psalm in its entirety, but as I recite it, whatever I have gone over, detaching it from anticipation, is retained by memory. So my ongoing act is tugged [*distenditur*] between the memory of what I just said and the anticipation of what I am just about to say, though I am immediately engaged in the present transit from what was coming to what is past. As this activity works itself out, anticipation dwindles as memory expands, until anticipation is canceled and the whole transaction is lodged in memory. And what happens with the whole psalm is equally what happens with each verse of it, each syllable — and with the whole long liturgy of which the psalm may be a part, or with the whole of any man's life, whose parts are his own acts, or with the whole world, whose parts are the acts of men.[9]

Augustine privileges reading as a synecdoche for the mind's capacity to create a present in relation to the confines of the past and the anticipation of the future. Such a practice provides a useful substructure for Gower's ideas about tale-telling in relation to the moral goals of his *Confessio*. The present he wishes to understand is perpetually transitive. His tales are parts of a whole that offer diverse access to the present. In the *Confessio* tales testify through fiction what the case may be.[10]

Gower's conceptualization of literary "experience" as useful testimony compares well with Chaucer's. In the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer, like Gower, honors books as a key of "remembraunce," observing, "Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve / These bokes, there [where] we han noon other preve" (*LGW* Prologue, F.26–28). Initially, the juxtaposition seems to be between the experience of reading and that of daily practical experience, as if to say, we believe books until some better empirical proof may be found.[11] But upon reflection "the other preve" is, like a thing experienced (*experta*), better understood as the testing of any deeper understanding or perceptual revision, whether practical or theoretical. That is, books are understood mainly in the head; but so too is nature. Both nature and books are texts that perplex the viewer. Belief and thought are not, however, binary oppositions; rather, thought, with its perpetual reinvention of both past and present, challenges and sustains belief, whether in the writings of Gower or Chaucer.[12]

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[9] *Confessions* XI.xxviii.38, as translated by Garry Wills, *St. Augustine*, p. 90; Wills' brackets.

[10] Garry Wills notes that Augustine's term *confessio* is synonymous with *testimonium*, *confiteri* meaning "to testify." For Augustine "even inanimate things confess — testify to — their Creator: 'Their beauty is their testimony' (*Pulchritudo eorum confessio eorum*, *Sermones* 241.2)" (*St. Augustine*, pp. xiv–xvi). Wills' explanation of Augustine's concept is useful in grasping the intentions of Gower's confessional tactic where telling serves a key part in a restorative procedure. The many parts of his poem challenge the reader even as Genius and Amans provoke and test each other.

[11] Compare Gower's *Nam dabit experta res magis esse fidem* (for a thing experienced will afford greater faith). See the opening epigram of this Introduction.

[12] For example, in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* the narrator reads a text from Ovid, then goes over it repeatedly ("[I] overloked hyt everydel") to discover "yf hit were so" (lines 232–33); that is, he rereads to get at what *might* be taken as the "truth" of the matter. That "truth" is, of course, contingent upon the capabilities of the perceiver, capabilities qualified by the reader's prejudice and intellectual capacities. Boethius puts the matter shrewdly: "alle thing that is iwist nis nat knowen by his nature propre, but by the nature of hem that comprehenden it" (Chaucer's translation, *Boece*, 5.pr.6.2–4). Gower works from a similar concept, fully cognizant of the relativity of experience to language. Although "experience" may be no authority, as Chaucer's Wife of Bath amusingly explains (*CT* III[D]1 ff.), it is the primary means available to people for testing the possibilities and proba-

Like *Vox Clamantis* and much of Chaucer's poetry, *Confessio Amantis* is deliberately a bookish poem, rooted in old texts — *scripture veteris*. But it is likewise empirical, albeit within the fictive framework of an imagined "lover of the world" quizzed by a responsive intellect, a "genius" that puts to the test memory in response to history (the texts of the past). Rooted in old texts, this testimonial confession is a poem *of* and *for* the present, a poem for King Richard *now* in 1390 or for England in 1392.[13] This precise historical positioning introduces a philosophical proposition akin to the problematics of understanding experience. Janet Coleman sees this locating of texts within specific historical contexts as a new and distinguishing feature of later fourteenth-century English literature.[14] The point is, of course, not simply to locate fiction within historical contexts; rather, it is part of an attempt to explore the relativity of time itself to fictive formulations within the mind. The mind is a perpetual plot-maker as it invents narratives it imagines to be the present (the way things are at the moment) within a metaphysic of temporality. In this regard, the *Confessio*, like so many other late-fourteenth-century poems,[15] creates a fiction of soul-searching. But it is soul-searching of a special kind. Gower's argument takes as its goal the accessing of the present by reconfiguring the past. Although the poem is ostensibly textual — that is, an interweaving of old maxims, proverbs, tales, social propositions, political alignments — it is also a subtly psychological work, a poem that through its rhetoric explores *how* the human psyche can understand itself within history — *now*.

Gower is the first English writer to use "history" as an English word.[16] He regularly rhymes the term with "memory," for to his way of thinking history and memory are correlative. That is, without history, there can be no memory; and without memory, there can be no history. But the point of historical knowledge is not to enable people to live in the past, or even to understand the past in the way we would expect a modern historian to proceed; rather, it is to enable people to live more vitally in the present — "The present time which now is" (*CA* 8.258), as Gower puts it. The present is, for Gower, a state of mind every bit as much as the past or future must be. And it is for this reason that the tales must be told and "experienced." Just as the past must be perpetually reinvented (and Gower is a master at such

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bilities out of which they discover the relativity of knowledge. For discussion of the philosophical issues here see Peck, "Phenomenology of Make Believe," pp. 250–58.

[13] Gower first circulated the poem in 1390 with a dedication and concluding prayers addressed to King Richard. In 1392, he changed the dedication and conclusion to honor Henry of Derby (later King Henry IV) and to conclude with prayers for the state of England. See "Politics and Society," below, pp. 19 ff.

[14] Compare Chaucer's setting the Man of Law's Tale on April 18, or the dream in *HF* on the tenth day of the tenth month, or his frequent use of May 3 as an auspicious day. The effect is to relate fiction to historical moments in "real" time.

[15] For example, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *Book of the Duchess*; Langland's *Piers Plowman*; the anonymous *Pearl*; and Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pélerinage de la vie humaine*.

[16] Gower probably borrows the term from OF *estoire*, which is in turn derived from late Latin in the twelfth century to indicate "a (vernacular) narrative of past events, presented as true, and whose authenticity is attested by an authority" (Damian-Grint, "*Estoire* as a Word and Genre," p. 198). The term was perhaps borrowed to differentiate *romanz* from more "historical" kinds of writing. Chaucer never uses the word "history," though he does use the aphetic form, "storie" (which he rhymes with "memorie"), in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Criseyde, considering her life, observes: "Men myght a book make of it, lik a storie" (5.585).

invention), so too must the present be perpetually reinvented if one is to have any notion of oneself in a locatable way. One claims the present by locating it within the terms of memory. In his tale-telling, Gower enters into a refined phenomenology where time, history, memory, and a fictionalizing of the past make discourse of the "now"-world presentable.

In *Confessio Amantis*, Gower is preeminently a storyteller. Through the voice of the poet and Genius, his surrogate contact with practical matters and the wisdom of antiquity, Gower revitalizes a treasury of old tales, thereby provisioning his new vessel with reclaimed ideas — a "tally" of tales for taking mental stock of the natural order of things.[17] Like Chaucer's Pardoner, who shrewdly uses tales to influence people — "For lewed peple loven tales olde" (VI[C]437) — Gower conjures old tales as a means of wooing an audience toward a confessional self-reassessment. Like the Pardoner, he is well aware that people use stories to "reporte and holde" (*CT* VI[C]438). He is also aware that tales can deceive. Genius' stories are full of manipulators who, like the Pardoner, tell tales as a means of satisfying their greed; in fact, Gower creates some of Middle English literature's most notorious deceivers, characters like Mundus in the Tale of Mundus and Paulina in Book 1 or Nectanabus in Book 6. But unlike Genius' villains or Chaucer's Pardoner, Gower's motive is not venal. That is, his tales are bound to the good intention of the teller and what he imagines the desirous intentions of his audience to be. Certainly Gower would entertain, but he is shrewdly aware that he has little control over his willful readers. He can only woo them and attempt to manipulate their responses through his rhetoric. The tales, he says, are to be "Somwhat of lust [pleasure], somewhat of lore [wisdom]" (Prol.19).[18] But, inevitably, his intention is intuitive — a feeling that people commonly yearn for the good and that the soul's welfare is generative within the outlines of a Christian doctrine that conforms with the goals of his society at large.

This earnest side of Gower's intention received adverse criticism in the early part of the twentieth century, which tended to view him as a moralist rather than as a poet of the first rank. But more recently the challenge of writing moral verse artfully has been better appreciated. John Fisher praises Gower's "absolute integrity, his coherent grasp of the ideals of his day, and his fearless expression of the moral judgments growing out of those ideals."[19] In his *Vox Clamantis*, a poem written c. 1378–82, Gower spoke as a moralist, delineating the ideals of social behavior through the genre of complaint. In the *Confessio* (c. 1386–90) he

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[17] I make the "tally" pun to heighten the connotations of *tale* in Gower's usage. Both *tale* and *tally* have the same root, the Old Teutonic **tala*, as in the verb *taljan*, meaning to mention things in their natural or due order, to relate, enumerate, reckon (see *OED*). Both words, along with *tell*, imply a process of ordering, of taking account. When the wife in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale tells her husband to score the debt on her "taile" (*CT* VII[B^2]416), she makes a triple pun on tail/tale/tally, with related puns on accounting. Gower regularly utilizes two components of the pun, those of tale and tally, in the economics of his narrative, though he does not make puns on *tail* as readily as Chaucer.

[18] The "lust" and "lore" phrasing is akin to Chaucer's telling of tales for "best sentence [wisdom] and moost solaas [entertainment]" (*CT* I[A]798). Coleman (*Medieval Readers and Writers*, p. 16) argues that most works in the period were written not merely to entertain but rather to inspire readers to criticize and eventually reform social practice. While this may be true, it is also true that the writers of the 1380s and 1390s were acutely aware of the limitations of literary assertion, as well as the dangers of political criticism and attempts by writers at reform. See Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, on the use of Latin traditions as a means of disguising discontent in advice literature. See also Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," pp. 101–02, and Peter, *Complaint and Satire*, p. 70.

[19] *John Gower*, p. v.

now offers a new, more subtle formulation where moral assessment takes place through the nuances of fiction. As Kurt Olsson puts it, "This poem is as effectively moral in its 'game' as it is in its earnestness, and in both things together Gower will challenge and ultimately reward the careful reader."[20] Gower's tales stand as "ensamples" for stocktaking and are central to the poem's overall strategy of using entertainment for the winning of mental health and God's pardon. Though his own intention is good, Gower knows that the success of that triangulation between writer, text, and reader, and therefore the success of his whole enterprise, lies in the relativity of language and the intention of his reader.

For Gower, the value of a tale resides in its capacity to take its audience some place. Plots, like time, move, and they move people, stretching their feelings, as Augustine puts it;[21] they lay out an ethical geography and provide direction through an imaginary terrain. But the direction is never single-dimensional. The poem speaks with many voices simultaneously — the voices of Genius the confessor and Amans the lover, and with the voices of all the characters within the examples. These fictive voices are framed by another more subtle fiction, the voice of John Gower the poet, with his concerns about the welfare of England. Just as the voicing of the poem is multidimensional, so too are its settings. Sometimes the settings may be specifically identified places or times, or they may lie in the spaces between Genius' attempts to guide Amans in his confusion and erratic love and his efforts to account for that love. Although the voicing of "Gower the poet" functions in a narrative parameter within the poem larger than that of Genius, the poet's frame "story" is, nonetheless, akin to Genius' confessional scheme in that the "poet," like Genius, wishes to take his audience simultaneously in two directions: 1) toward a better understanding of the commonweal of the state, and 2) toward a better understanding of the welfare of the soul.

READING AS THERAPY

Hundreds of old stories will be envisioned in *Confessio Amantis* before the therapy of the distracted lover can be concluded. For Gower, reading is powerful medicine. As a concept, "reading" has provocative implications in Middle English. It connotes engagement of the reader through sight and (especially in a culture where books were commonly read aloud) hearing, as we might expect, but it likewise signifies engagement of the mind in a broad range of interior activities, such as learning, teaching, interpretation of riddles, dreams, and parables; it also denotes perception, discernment, deduction, and the ability to estimate, enumerate, count, or think. But it is further used with the sense of giving counsel and advice. It can mean to confer, advise, decide in council, or to agree or decide in the mind. The term has political implications as a word connoting acts of decreeing, guiding, governing, controlling, preparing, making ready, or exercising authority. And reading has a crucial psychological implication of carrying out one's intention. In the course of Gower's poem Amans learns to read by listening to tales and contemplating their implications. He is not an adept reader any more than he is an adept listener. The tales provide him with information, but, given his preoccupation, their significance often passes him by. Like all readers, he is obliged to be inventive — to find a personal means of framing the ideas of the tales within his unique consciousness.

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[20] *Structures of Conversion*, p. 2.

[21] *Confessions* XI.xxxi.41.

Confession nurses by healing the cracks in the psyche which have come about through the degenerative anxieties of time and careless beholding. The one confessing must provide a narrative for his chaotic behavior, a "tale" that can be read and weighed by the interrogator. To approach the psychological demands of the poem, Gower introduces a debate between competing mental components — Amans, Venus, Genius, a mistress of the imagination who never appears but is ever yearned for, a forgotten sense of common profit, and so on — who are personified to give testimony to the ramifications of ill health. Augustine discusses the mental faculties at length, providing a terminological basis for analysis of aberrant human behavior, particularly of the brain enfeebled by the Fall.[22] Augustine argues that the mind of humankind was created to reflect the Trinity and thus consists of three principal agents: Memory, Intellect, and Will.[23] Early in his writing Augustine sees the Intellect (cognate with the Second Person) as the superior faculty upon whose right use healthy human behavior depends; later, as his theology becomes increasingly subtle, he shifts the primary focus of problems in human behavior to the Will (cognate with the Third Person).[24] It is to the later writings of Augustine that the fourteenth century, with its latent distrust of reason (though not of Christ), found itself most attracted. With the new fourteenth-century emphasis on empirical thought and an individual's responsibility for personal governance, attention in ethics is increasingly concentrated on free choice and the struggle to assess the intermingling of desire and moral behavior.

Augustine's focus on willful behavior was developed by Boethius into questions of intent,[25] which relocate Will (love) as a function of heart as well as brain. Intention is bound to desire — what one wants and wills — and often develops from an imagined deficiency that one wishes to remedy. By the eleventh century "brain science" had developed spatial models of the brain which are akin to Augustine's, but with some modifications deriving from Galen.[26] Medieval diagrams of the brain introduce a new faculty to Augustine's scheme, *ima-*

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[22] It is perhaps noteworthy that medieval medical diagrams of the brain often label the figure as "Disease Man." The diagrams identify the areas of the brain where specific diseases might be located. See Clarke and Dewhurst, *Illustrated History of Brain Function*, figs. 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 17.

[23] Augustine's most detailed discussion of mental faculties appears in *De Trinitate*, Books 9–11.

[24] A comparable shift of focus occurs in northern Europe between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries as the ideology of a monastic culture, focusing upon the Intellect, sees pride as the primary sin. But gradually, as the commercial revolution takes place and the educational centers shift from monasteries to universities, inns of court, and a culture of guildsmen, the focus shifts to the Will as the faculty most often abused, with sins of avarice and greed as the greatest threats to human welfare. See Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice"; Lopez, *Commercial Revolution*; Yunck, *Lineage of Lady Meed*; Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*; and Baldwin, "Medieval Merchant."

[25] On the prominence of intention in Boethius see *Consolation* 3.pr.11 and 12, 4.m.1 and pr.2, and 5.m.4 and pr.6. By the fourteenth century intention has become a central concern of civil law as well. See Chaucer's Parson's Tale on the complexity of self-adjudication as every aspect of motive becomes essential to the assessment of behavior. For general discussion of the concept see Bowers, *Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman*, and Dihle, *Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*.

[26] See Clarke and Dewhurst, *Illustrated History of Brain Function*, pp. 10–48. The concept of three primary functions of the brain, namely, Imagination, Reason, and Memory, goes back to Galen, as far as medieval writers are concerned. Nemesius, bishop of Emesia (c. AD 390), and Augustine first propose a cell doctrine of brain function (Clarke and Dewhurst, p. 10), which dominates diagrams until well past the medieval period.

ginativa, which functions as a cognitive server for intellect and memory. A representative account of brain functions may be found in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopedia *De proprietatibus rerum*, written before 1250, but translated into English by John Trevisa in the later fourteenth century:

> The innere witte is departid aþre [into three] by þre regiouns of þe brayn, for in þe brayn beþ þre smale celles. Þe formest [the frontal cell] hatte [is called] *ymaginatiua*, þerin þinges þat þe vttir [outer] witte [i.e., the senses] apprehendiþ withoute beþ i-ordeyned and iput togedres withinne. . . . Þe middil chambre hatte *logica* þerin þe vertu estimatiue is maister. Þe þridde and þe laste is *memoratiua*, þe vertu of mynde. Þat vertu holdiþ and kepiþ in þe tresour of mynde þingis þat beþ apprehendid and iknowe by þe ymaginatif and *racio*.[27]

Ymaginative works with intuitions from the senses to create the mental experience of images in the brain, separate from the external forms. Under the influence of will, *ymaginative* can combine forms into new forms not found in nature. In some brain diagrams the first cell is subdivided between *sensus communis* and *ymaginative*.[28] This image-making component of the brain is particularly attuned to sight and hearing.[29] Gower draws upon the concept when he discusses the primacy of sight and hearing as the senses most influential in cognition. As he puts it in the Latin verses early in Book 1, before line 289: *Visus et auditus fragilis sunt ostia mentis*, "Vision and hearing are fragile gateways of the mind." Genius then goes on to excoriate abuse of these two senses which are deemed crucial to understanding.

As a personification in the *Confessio,* Genius is closely related to the frontal lobe of the brain, *ymaginative*, as he presents and manipulates images while putting tales together. In Chaucer's Second Nun's Tale, St. Cecile explains to Tiburce the "sapiences three" of the brain — "Memorie, engyn, and intellect also" (VIII[G]338–39). "Engyn," derived from *ingenium*, is that tale's term for *imaginative*, a term in whose jurisdiction Genius is an evident component. In Gower, Genius is the principal agent of therapy as he presents tales to the willful Amans in hope of engaging his intellect. Gower develops Genius from two well-known medieval counterparts, one in Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturae*, and the other in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose.* In these two antecedents Genius represents a combination of natural reason, ingenuity (what we would call invention or "creativity"), and procreativity. He is subservient to Nature, and Nature, being God's creation, is essentially good. That she is subject to time and mortality is not her fault, but rather humankind's, who, in sinning, act "unnaturally." There is an essential ambiguity here: desire is natural and may lead to natural fulfillment; or, if ungoverned (i.e., willful), it may lead to "unnatural" disaster. The rightness

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[27] Capitulum x [f. 21va], Bartholomaeus Anglicus, I.98.

[28] E.g., the three-cell diagram of the brain in Triumphus Augustinus de Anchona, in *Opusculum perutile de cognitione animae*, revised by Achillini (1503), printed by Kolve (*Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, p. 25; discussed, p. 23). See also Clarke and Dewhurst, *Illustrated History of Brain Function*, p. 27.

[29] See the diagrams in Clarke and Dewhurst, *Illustrated History of Brain Function*. In some instances, the cells in the frontal lobe, identified with sensation and imagination, are linked directly to the eye. E.g., the drawing c. 1310 in Cambridge University Library Gg.l.l, fol. 490v (figure 39 in Clarke and Dewhurst; see also figures 24, c. 1410, and 32, c. 1501, which also link the eyes directly to the brain). One conclusion that might be drawn is that a diseased brain is simply an unbalanced one, often unbalanced by a failure to guard the eye or ear.

of desire depends upon the functions of both will and intention. Genius looks after Nature's mortal creatures; he is pleased when each finds satisfaction proper to its created purpose. So too in Gower, where Genius' primary means for judging behavior is to decide whether an act is natural or "unkynde." Genius is a most felicitous choice for analyzing the witless love crimes of Amans against Nature. It is to Genius that Amans must turn for penance, since, in his idleness, "genius" and his right use of inward visualization are what have become twisted.[30] The confessor, with his "lust and lore," attempts to help Amans re-create a more balanced view of himself.

Within the strictures of Gower's psychomachia, Genius serves as Venus' priest, but this does not make him necessarily subservient to her or even entirely sympathetic with her motives. In Alanus, Venus and her son Cupid help Genius to fulfill his office of replenishing Nature (that is to say, the sexual urge for singular pleasure which Venus and Cupid instill in creatures does help Nature to reproduce her kind). But although Gower's Genius enjoys the assistance of Venus and the god of love, he nevertheless objects scornfully to their selfish demands when they turn natural love into unnatural fantasies or mutually exclusive and unfruitful games. In fact, from the beginning of the poem it is clear that his interests are more imaginative than Venus'. He will speak of more things than love, at least love as cupidinous Amans has come to define the term. Usually he tells tales pertaining to specific sins, then, at Amans' request, tells additional tales pertaining to the lover's particular relationship with the sin. In order to help Amans see beyond his infatuation, Genius will, as the poem progresses, ultimately instruct him in all the humanities. The climax of his argument is Book 7, in which he explains the education of a king, lessons in governance which Amans must learn if he is to reclaim and rule the lost kingdom of his soul. Genius knows that love founded on mutuality, on what both Gower and Chaucer (among others) call "common profit," is the only love that is consistently satisfactory. Although Genius' understanding of higher love is limited, he can appreciate it as history has revealed it, just as Jean de Meun's Genius appreciates without fully understanding the "beau parc" of the good shepherd with its "fontaine de vie" toward the end of *Roman de la Rose.* Most certainly he can see from his natural vantage point that in the events of human behavior the love of Cupid is inconstant and that that of Venus usually ends in mockery. History demonstrates that this is so. That Venus would send Amans to Genius is understandable, however, in that she owes her very existence to the phenomena of time and nature over which Genius has perceptual jurisdiction.

Genius provides the impetus for Amans' therapy. His tales serve as a visual guide for the inner eye.[31] But the therapy itself can take place only through Amans' choices, under the guidance of his memory and intellect. Just as the first cell of the brain is subdivided into *sensus communis* and *ymaginativa*, likewise the second cell, that of the intellect, is divided into two parts too, namely *phantasia* and *aestimativa*. Intellect enables humankind to reason, estimate, and calculate. Some diagrams of the brain refer to this cell as the residence of *logica*,

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[30] See Kolve's perceptive discussion of the role of the inner eye and seeing ear particularly as adjuncts to memory in the process of cognition (*Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, pp. 27–58).

[31] See Kolve (*Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*) on the prominence of visual images and the inner eye in the therapeutic process of reading. Even the nose has an "inner eye" capable of projecting images in the brain. See illustration 63 in Clark and Dewhurst (*Illustrated History of Brain Function*, p. 43) for a fourteenth-century drawing of the eye in relation to the brain that also crudely depicts the eye of the nose.

others of *ratio*. This cell too is subject to will and intention. *Phantasia* is an especially volatile area and, like reason, can be perverse. That is, through misintent reason can become ratiocination, and fantasy, instead of providing a godlike, generative function, can become a foolish wishfulfiller of the sort that the lover commits himself so strongly to in the middle books of the *Confessio*, where he projects scenario after scenario on how he will win his lady or humiliate his opponents.

The third cell, *memoria*, which Augustine had compared to God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity from which all else comes, is more than simply a storehouse of past recollections. For Gower, memory is central to his psychopharmicon whereby, as in Boethius, the whole process of therapy might be seen as self-recovery after a severe case of forgetfulness.[32] Memory and motive are linked by Triumphus Augustinus de Anchona and others, *motiva* being the impulse toward the good that is deep-seated in memory. Augustine had linked the idea to what he called divine illumination, a Platonic recollection of eternity and divine purpose with which every person is born and for which every person unwittingly yearns. In the *Confessions,* Augustine uses container metaphors to describe memory — a treasury or storehouse, a vast hall (X.viii.14), caves and caverns (X.xvi.20), or "the stomach of the mind" (X.xiv.21–22).[33] Although, as we have seen, it may be difficult to realize the present within time, it certainly may be realized in memory, where a whole lifetime may be present, except for what is lost by forgetfulness (see Augustine, *Confessions* X.xvi.24). Memory is "an awe-inspiring mystery . . . a power of profound and infinite multiplicity," Augustine observes (X.xvii.26). For everyone, the desire for happiness is located in the memory. Memory enables the mind to put fragments together and in this regard is a primary source of happiness in the processes of therapy (see *Confessions* X.xx.29–xxv.31–32). Of all faculties, memory, more than any other, makes possible the grasp of numbers that helps satisfy the soul's need for right order.

Boethius and Augustine emphasize that confession is remembering. So too in Gower, where memory provides the key to Amans' restoration. It is his means of reclaiming his forgotten, natural self in order that he may be released from its fantastic, willfully unnatural substitutions. The *Confessio* begins by asserting that lore of the past needs to be drawn into "remembrance" (Prol.69, 93); by remembering we begin not only to perceive the agencies by which men have corrupted themselves but also to rediscover the meaning of "common profit." Repeatedly, Genius emphasizes that the tales are to be held in remembrance, and Amans again and again asks to be questioned so that he might recall what he has forgotten. The process of forgetting, confessing, and remembering is neatly epitomized in the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, based on Daniel 4. Gower places the story near the end of Book 1, as a model of therapy. In a vision Nebuchadnezzar saw what his fate would be if he continued in his vainglorious pride. He called Daniel to him, who explained what the dream meant. But the king forgot; he let the counsel "passe out of his mynde" (1.2951). The consequence of his forgetfulness is loss of human status. He is turned into a dumb ox and for seven years eats grass, drinks from the slough, and sleeps among the bushes, until finally

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[32] See especially *Consolation* 1.pr.6, where the disconsolate narrator has been diagnosed as having forgotten who he is.

[33] Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in *Poetria Nova*, a work known to both Gower and Chaucer, devotes his concluding chapter to the metaphor of memory as stomach of the mind and to the right ways to feed it (ch. 5, trans. Nims, pp. 87–91).

he remembers what he has lost and prays for forgiveness. He makes a covenant with God and vows to follow humility, at which point, in the twinkling of an eye, just as he reformed his mind so too his body is reformed. Needless to say, when he returned to his throne he remembered to reform his behavior as a king also. Only his vainglory he forgot: "Evere afterward out of memoire / He let it passe"(1.3038–39).

Gower presents memory as the Lover's means of drawing the loose ends of his distracted self together. Memory enables him to see himself wholly. The antithesis of memory and unified vision is forgetfulness and "divisioun."[34] In the Prologue Gower uses the metaphor of division extensively to depict the decrepitude of fourteenth-century England. For Gower, sin is intimately tied to his concepts of memory and time. Sin equates with forgetting. Forgetting is the mind's willful divergence from the ordained order of things. As Gower puts it, sin is "moder of divisioun" (Prol.1030), and division is "moder of confusioun" (Prol.852). Time as we know it began with the Fall. As "moder of divisioun" sin substitutes illusion in place of divine presence. Genius' therapeutic tales are designed to provoke memory and serve as an antidote that makes possible the objectifying of illusion so that the deluded sinner might regain control of a just sense of being. By providing a position outside one's "confusioun," therapeutic tale-telling helps to make possible a reconsideration of the self-deceit of sin.[35]

To forget one's ordained purpose is to disintegrate into disjunctive fragments. Gower's favorite emblem of disintegration, an emblem he used in *Vox Clamantis* as well as the *Confessio*, he took from Daniel 2: the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the monster of time, with its head of gold, chest of silver, belly of brass, and legs and feet of iron and clay (Prol.585 ff.).[36] Gower places the narrative immediately after his critique of the three estates. Although most of the scribes of Gower manuscripts place an image of the dreaming Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of the story (c. lines 578–96), the illustrator of the Fairfax 3 manuscript begins the poem with the image, as if to establish the Prologue's central theme (see figure 2), namely, the degeneration of time in the divisive decades in England at the end of the fourteenth century. Like others, the Fairfax illustrator depicts the king asleep, dreaming of a monster who towers over him. Significantly, the monster is in the shape of man for, as Gower explains, the corruption of time is the consequence of man's severance from God: "al this wo is cause of man," who is himself "the lasse world" (Prol.905 ff.). Like the Bodley 294 illustrator, the Fairfax illustrator follows the marginal gloss to lines Prol.1031–41 and

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[34] On the evils of division and dividedness see the Prologue, lines 127, 333, 576, 654, 782, 799, 830, 851, 889, 893, 966, 967, 971, 992, 996, 1010, 1022, and 1030.

[35] It is noteworthy that many of the manuscripts of *CA* include a miniature of Amans kneeling before Genius in hope of receiving a blessing. The image provides a visual meditation on the therapeutic ideal of reading the cultural ideology of Genius' orderly narratives as they, addressing Amans' confusion through his eye and ear, encourage moral reconsideration. See illustrations 1, 3, and 5.

[36] See Griffiths, "*Confessio Amantis*: The Poem and Its Pictures," pp. 163–78, and Emmerson, "Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture," pp. 167–70, for discussion of the recurrent illuminations in Gower manuscripts. The illustration depicting Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the most often repeated of any representation. Griffiths refers to it as "the dream of precious metals," an inadequate title given Gower's pointed use of the image and the narrative on which it is based. Aside from the fact that iron and clay can scarcely be called precious metals, the point of the account in Daniel and Gower is to demarcate the divisive degeneration of time as human society becomes progressively fragmented by the monstrosities of sin. A preferable designation might be "the dream of the monster of time and the monstrosity of sin." See illustrations 2 and 4 for examples of this image.

picks up the detail from Daniel 2:34 that tells of a great stone cut from the mountain not by human hand that will crush to powder the clay feet of the monster (see illustrations 2 and 4). In both illustrations, the boulder hurtles toward the statue at that apocalyptic moment when time and the monstrosity of sin will instantly be destroyed and time and sin shall be no more.[37] In the text of the poem, as Genius introduces the story of Nebuchadnezzar, he reminds the reader of a perspective beyond time, where sits

> The hyhe almyhti pourveance *foreknowledge*
> In whos eterne remembrance
> Fro ferst was every thing present. (Prol.585–87)

As people become increasingly forgetful, they lose that sense of the present to become progressively divided from God and eternal memory. Gower extends Daniel's exposition on the vanity of princes beyond that of the Bible so that it reaches even into the fourteenth century. The clay feet epitomize wars with France and civil strife in England as bitter divisions within Christendom crumble into such factions as the Great Schism and Lollardy.

By analogy, these times of division apply to "the lasse world" of the lover, as well. Through metaphors of division Gower links the romance plot of Books 1–8 with the estates critique of the Prologue. Like England, Amans too is a state at war with itself, unable to arrive at a treaty suitable to the demands of its many factions. He is, indeed, his own worst enemy. Toward the end of his confession, Genius will compare him to a burning stick that reduces itself to ashes.

Intimately related to Gower's views on memory and division are his views on poetry. He concludes his discussion of Nebuchadnezzar's monster of time with the story of Arion, the bard whose song was so sweet that it restored peace wherever it was heard:

> . . . of so good mesure *meter/harmonic ratio*
> He song, that he the bestes wilde *wild animals*
> Made of his note tame and milde,
> The hinde in pes with the leoun, *deer*
> The wolf in pes with the moltoun, *sheep*
> The hare in pees stod with the hound;
> And every man upon this ground
> Which Arion that time herde,
> Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
> He broghte hem alle in good acord; *them*
> So that the comun with the lord, *citizenry (common people)*
> And lord with the comun also,
> He sette in love bothe tuo
> And putte awey malencolie. (Prol.1056–69)

This second exemplum that concludes the Prologue functions with a thrust opposite to the fractiousness of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, introducing a poetic of amelioration within which

[37] See Apocalypse 21. In *VC* 7 Gower explores ideas of the apocalypse in detail; there he depicts his narrator as one who bears the name of John of the Apocalypse as he begins his diatribe against the ills of the fourteenth century. See Salisbury, "Remembering Origins," pp. 175–77, on Gower's riddling on his name.

the poem operates for the betterment of humankind. The poet is society's rememberer who sees with a unified vision to charm people out of their melancholy and "divisioun." He teaches people to laugh, not hate (Prol.1071). Gower must surely have seen his own purpose in the example. His poem, like the music of Arion, or like the songs of Apollonius and his daughter Thaise in Book 8, would provide therapy in troubled times. We shall see, in fact, that before the poem is over even Amans will smile and become England's poet.

GOWER'S RHETORIC OF ABRIDGMENT: THE "MIDDEL WEIE"

Gower's rhetorical strategy claims to locate the argument of his English poem along a "middel weie" (Prol.17), a pathway *between* rigorous instruction and entertainment. One might make much of the "in-betweenness" of Gower's poem. The *Confessio* mediates between audience and idea. But it is also in-between in its fictional relativity. Gower is sometimes labeled old-fashioned and conservative in his ethics,[38] but there are ways in which quite the opposite is the case. Gower's method is part of a radically new fourteenth-century philosophy of reading (albeit based on ancient literary principles), a method that might be labeled phenomenological epistemology, where one knows mainly by exploring spaces *between* fictions. His radical epistemology is akin to Chaucer's where the poet presents his persona as a figure caught indeterminately between magnets of equal strength (*Parliament of Fowls*, lines 148–49); or Boccaccio, attempting to know truth through fiction;[39] or Langland learning truth through peregrinations amidst the false; or the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* attempting to unknow what is "known" because of the limitations of realizable knowledge. A middle way can never be stable. It is always configured by what it is between. Yet this relativity of middling may be the only means through which stability can be imagined in a temporal world. Betweenness is inevitably a matter of metonymy, where the name of one thing is used to get at the features of another. It should come as no surprise that the subjunctive mood is more prominent in Gower's poem than the imperative. Through its fictive propositions, the *Confessio* is more a study in possibilities than in moral certainties.

To travel his "middel weie" Gower claims that the style of his English poem, like that which is proper to confession, will be "plein" (see 1.357); that is, "me liketh to comune / And pleinly for to telle it oute" (1.70–71) in order to make the message more accessible to an untutored as well as a clerkish audience. From its stylistic medial point, the Prologue addresses all three estates; that is, although initially dedicated to the king, this poem addresses all people — the lewed as well as the learned. Its primary themes are similar to those of Chaucer in his contemporaneous ballade, "Lak of Stedfastnesse," with its strongly Boethian hope for security of place rather than permutation, stability rather than fickleness, truth rather than deceit, pity and mercy toward fellow men rather than covetousness and oppression. Chaucer's appeal to King Richard in the envoy to that poem puts the matter succinctly: "Dred God, do law, love trouthe and worthinesse, / And wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse" (lines 27–28) — all themes recurrent in Gower.

In the *Confessio*, Genius' tales often admonish, but the strength of Gower's proposition, like Chaucer's, is that tales do have the capacity to "wed" people in a tie that, despite tur-

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[38] Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 127–28.

[39] See *Boccaccio on Poetry*, ed. and trans. Osgood, especially Book 14, chs. 8–14, on the possibilities of knowing through fiction.

bulent times, could reunite social practices with ideologies. The fickle divisions within the state and within the soul perpetually require mending. Gower would have his tales participate in that remedy. When read carefully they may help to provide the only therapy possible for heart and soul, a therapy that comes from one's own assessment of the fictionally mediated experience. That is, the moral effect of Gower's argument can only be found in the most uncertain realm of all — the inceptive intuitions of his audience. How the audience will respond, Gower can only guess, and, like Chaucer, pray for the reader's good intent.[40] As Gower puts it in Book 8, "kep the sentence of my lore . . . [and] go ther vertu moral duelleth" (8.2923–25),[41] a sentiment exactly in keeping with the ethical economy of both Gower and Chaucer. But "keeping" is, he knows, a tricky business.

Part of the moral strength of the *Confessio* lies in Gower's mastery of his craft, a mastery of design that tallies the smallest of details. Measure defines his verses, a concept pivotal to the poem's utopian vision. There is a singing quality to Gower's tales. Indeed, in this poem he writes some of the most mellifluous, precisely measured verse in Middle English.[42] This textual richness contributes well to the keeping of the sense. Likewise, Genius' tales always have a strong storyline — a sense of going some place. His plots are as rich in invention and as carefully crafted as the narratives of the ancients rediscovered by Genius for his (and Gower's) particular purposes. He has, moreover, a keen awareness of differences of voice not only between characters and levels of fiction, but between himself and all constructed versions of himself as poet.[43] C. S. Lewis points out, "Gower everywhere shows a concern for

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[40] In Book 8 Gower prays with "hol entente" (line 2968) that he and others will find a means of understanding the confusion of their lives. In the concluding section he prays for the state of England, first that the clergy act justly and "[a]ftir the reule of charité" in "*hope* that men schuldyn se / This lond amende" (lines 3003–05; emphasis mine) and that the king will "entende" toward "rightwisnesse" (line 3069). As Gower laid out so clearly in the Prologue, after God destroyed the Tower of Babel, His *entente* (line 1023) was to isolate humankind within diverse languages. For comparison, see Chaucer who, like Gower, repeatedly invites his readers, trapped in their diverse personal languages, to amend his verse, the implication being that, given the instability of language and his own limited understanding, the most important text lies in the reader's perception. See the Retraction (*CT* I[X]1082), The Parson's Tale (I[X]60), and *Troilus and Criseyde* (3.1332); with an amusing variant in *HF* (lines 92–93). On the limitations of humankind's dullness of wit as a psychological inevitability as well as a modesty trope, see Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century."

[41] The lines are spoken by Venus as she admonishes "Gower" to leave her court to return to his books. Gower may have got the idea from the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (F text), where Alceste sends Chaucer back to his books to work apart from Cupid's court, albeit still exploring the modes of courtesy within society.

[42] See Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, pp. 201–13, on the merits of Gower's plain style. It "has a sweetness and freshness which we do not find in the 'polite' style of later periods. Often a couplet in Gower sounds like a snatch of song" (p. 201). See also Burrow's *Ricardian Poetry*, especially pp. 50–51. Gower's metrical proficiency might be compared with that of Ben Jonson, who much admired Gower and often referred to him in his discussion of grammar in his treatise, *The English Grammar*. So attracted is Jonson to Gower and his more famous contemporary Chaucer that, in *Timber, or Discoveries,* he warns teachers to "beware of letting them [students] taste of *Gower*, or *Chaucer* at first, lest falling too much in love with Antiquity . . . they grow rough and barren in language onely. When their judgements are firme, and out of danger, let them reade both, the old and the new" (*Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, 8:618).

[43] Excellent examples of Gower's careful manipulation of fictive voicing of his persona occur in *Vox Clamantis* where, in the headnote, line 16, he presents himself *quasi in propria persona* [as if in his

form and unity which is rare at any time and which, in the fourteenth century in England, entitles him to all but the highest praise. He is determined to get in all the diversity of interests which he found in his model, and even to add to them his own new interest of tale-telling; but he is also determined to knit all these together into some semblance of a whole."[44] We should not think of this "whole" as an aesthetic absolute, however, though his poem certainly is well constructed. Its aesthetic is shaped not so much by its completeness as by its tangential probing. The tangents may contradict one another, though they proceed from common questions. From beginning to end, the *Confessio* is a cluster of tales (texts and propositions) that require one to respond. It is a poem best understood as a sequence of queries rather than an anthology of answers.

THE GENRE OF THE *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

In setting up his romance narrative Gower creates an expository frame that, in the manner of complaint, excoriates the ills of the world as they are manifest in the three estates, and then, in the end, he returns to the persona of "John Gower" to pray for the welfare of the kingdom.[45] All but two of the tales are found in the "framed" portion of the poem, where Gower moves more intricately into his multilayered fiction. The two exceptions are the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue of degenerative time (Prol.585–880), followed by the story of Arion (Prol.1053–88). Both tales are exemplary of key issues in the Prologue, namely, 1) the destructive effects of divisiveness in modern times, and 2) the need for imaginative amelioration through restorative tales. As we have seen, they identify the critical and salvific concepts that support the basic thesis of the poem's progress.

The interior section of the poem (Books 1–8), composed in the genre of confession/consolation, presents hundreds of tales in diverse subgenres drawn from dozens of sources and organized in terms of the seven deadly sins. Recent critics have referred to Gower as a "compiler," an archivist who collects examples according to some system of organization.[46]

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own person] while speaking of the uprising of 1381. Macaulay observes: "The author takes care to guard his readers against a too personal application of his descriptions" (*Complete Works*, 4:377). But Gower also wants to keep his reader aware even in this expository moment of issues of fictive voicing. Compare the Latin gloss in the margin adjacent to lines 59 ff. in *CA* 1, where Gower explains *Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem* [Here the author, fashioning himself to be the Lover as if in the role of those others whom love binds]. See Galloway ("Gower in His Most Learned Role") on Gower's differentiations of persona in *VC*.

[44] *Allegory of Love*, pp. 198–99.

[45] See Dimmick, "'Redinge of Romance' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," for considerations of *CA* under the umbrage of romance conventions.

[46] On Gower as compiler see Minnis, "Late-Medieval Discussions of *Compilatio*," pp. 386–87, and *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 194–200; Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*, pp. 1–15; and Edwards, "Selection and Subversion." Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, speaks of Gower as "a compiler who tried to present himself as an author" (p. 210). But Olsson challenges the imputation of failure in Minnis' assertion (p. 5); he finds in the term *compilator* "a means of identifying issues and strategies that become central to Gower in the work; the procedure of compilation impinges significantly on how he understands history and organizes moral experience itself." Such activities "energize his authorship" (p. 5) rather than weaken it. See Schutz, "Absent and Present Images," on the poem as a mixed genre that functions through mirroring.

It is a useful term, since Gower several times refers to himself as *compilator* in his Latin marginalia. But "compiler" scarcely gets at the poetic vision Gower is attempting to construct. Kurt Olsson has demonstrated a shift in terminology from compiler to author as the poem progresses, suggesting that Gower is becoming aware of what his work is capable of accomplishing as he gets further into it.[47] It may well be that the shift in terminology is part of the poem's dramatic design. What seems initially to be compilation — a treasury of lore for a culture-hungry audience — becomes upon reflection something much more "original." Every act of memory is a step toward originality as details of the past are reviewed. Gower must have been acutely aware of this creative dramatic process from the outset. I can think of no instance in which a "story" is simply retold as it is found in its source. Sometimes the transformations are broad, like his rewriting of the Tale of Narcissus; sometimes they are subtle, as in his adapting of biblical accounts. But the old material is always reworked according to his plan and re-presented, one might say, according to the new contexts of the present world. Divisive times require prolific exempla as remedy, along with a good bit of wit. Through the several personae that Gower manipulates one is perpetually alerted to what Anthony Farnham refers to as the poet's "keen awareness of the didactic value of misdirected seriousness" and an "almost perverse comic sense."[48]

The later fourteenth-century literary scene in England, newly attuned to incipient strategies of history, delights in diversity of signification. In rhetoric and the arts it is a time of multiple signifiers,[49] where, instead of *this* being equitable with *that*, the sign is equivocal, linked provocatively with *this*, *that*, and several *others*.[50] Gower himself is a master at multiple voicing. A tale may be read one way in terms of its immediate context, another way in

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[47] *Structures of Conversion*, pp. 5–15.

[48] "Art of High Prosaic Seriousness," pp. 164–65.

[49] Part of the delight may be attributed to a new awareness of the relativity of knowledge and a loss of confidence in abstract equations. If direct knowledge of truth is impossible for temporal creatures, then one can only know through likenesses, which is a kind of knowing and not knowing simultaneously. See Myles, *Chaucerian Realism*, particularly the second chapter, and Peck (*Kingship and Common Profit* and "Phenomenology of Make Believe").

[50] A good example of delight in multiple possibilities of meaning may be found in Pierre Bersuire's "De formis figurisque deorum," the opening chapter to his *Ovidius Moralizatus*, in which he discusses numerous ways in which classical mythology may be interpreted. See Peck's discussion of Bersuire and the complexities of irony and multiple voicing in Gower ("Problematics of Irony, pp. 219–21). Behind such hermeneutics lie the playful practices of the Victorine school in the twelfth century, particularly works like Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca noe*, with its piling on of meanings for the ark in diverse contexts, or Anselm's propositions on the volatile relationships between fiction and perceived truth in the *Monologion*, or Boethius' representation of wordplay and the house of Dedalus, in the popular *Consolation of Philosophy* (3.pr.12). In the fourteenth century, contemporaneous with Gower, consider the heteroglossic ideation of *Margarete* in Usk's *Testament of Love*, or the daisy in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, or the pearl in the poem of that name, or the perpetually shifting semantic valences of Piers in *Piers Plowman*. One is reminded of Duns Scotus in his use of suppositional logic in his development of an empirical science, where four quite different arguments are given to explain a proposition, an *if this, then that* strategy in which all propositions become correlative to the procedure of the argument. This "newe science," as Chaucer calls it (*Parliament of Fowls*, line 25), becomes a way of looking at things with results contingent upon the suppositional premises of initial propositions. What Usk called "delight in making" becomes a concept for reading as well as a formula for composing, a matter rather different from compiling.

relation to its source, another still in relation to its narrator (usually Genius), or in a further way in terms of Amans' prejudicial response to the tale; and finally it must be read in terms of the historical Gower and the several purposes of the whole poem.[51] Gower is perpetually conscious of the relativity of meaning to the different voices in his poem along with the alterable meanings of signs in relation to their sources and contexts. This hermeneutic of conditional perception anchored in diverse suppositions underlies the flexible choices of genre through which he makes particular statements.

There is, however, a distinctly definable plot to the fictive section of the poem — namely, the "tale" of Amans in debate with Genius. In a broad view, the *Confessio Amantis* is one of several Middle English poems that may be classified as poems of consolation. It is a genre with a powerful philosophical appeal to the later fourteenth century. The confessional aspect of the genre owes much to St. Augustine though, in the fourteenth century, the principal model behind the soul-searching is Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. The likenesses of the group (which includes poems such as *Pearl*, Usk's *Testament of Love*, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, and, in a more complex way, Langland's *Piers Plowman*) lie in both subject matter and plot structure. Frequently consolation poems are dream visions, though the Boethian model is technically not a dream vision (nor is the *Confessio Amantis*, for that matter),[52] but rather a projected condition of displacement. In each the primary subject is the narrator's restless state of mind, which may, in turn, reflect upon some unstable social situation. The plot is the narrator/dreamer's search for repose, a search which, given the contingencies of time, can never be completed with full satisfaction. Given the uncertainty of circumstances, the means of argument within the plot is confrontational as well as confessional.[53]

The skeletal structure of a Boethian consolation plot normally follows four main steps.[54] 1) There will be an opening description of the narrator's physiological confusion and spiritual inertia, his displacement and alienation. His psychological turmoil will be presented as an illness he suffers within Fortune's domain. Usually, the illness will manifest itself in some form of death wish. The invalid may express a desire for help, but at the same time

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[51] See Donaldson (*Speaking of Chaucer*, pp. 1–12) on the voicing in Chaucer, particularly in *CT*, which comes closest to the considerations required in the assessing of Gower's voicing. In the same vein see Olsson (*Structures of Conversion*), who, after observing that Gower, according to a Senecan model of voices in a chorus wherein multiple voices speak as one, observes that Gower, nonetheless, "works to separate, to create for the work an impression of *compilatio*, and does so by authoring divergent outlooks. Indeed, as he breaks his own voice out into many voices in his fiction of a compilation, he does by very different means what Chaucer does through his pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*" (p. 12).

[52] Though technically not a dream vision, Boethius' *Consolation* was consistently regarded as one, given the fact that the narrator is lying ill upon his bed and Philosophy comes to him as if in a vision. In setting up his exemplum Gower might have put his narrator to sleep, then had him meet Venus and Genius, but such a literalization of the shifting categories of mind was not necessary. All the poet needs to do is to project fictive situations which serve the same requirements as the discrete boundaries of a dream world. All thought is a kind of dream, and as Chaucer puts it in *HF*, "dreme he barefot, dreme he shod" (line 98), that is, whether he is sleeping or awake, he is still dreaming.

[53] The best discussion that I know of the debate components of the poem is Olsson's discussion of the *tumultuator* conventions through which Gower creates dispute and discord for the unbinding of ideas. See especially *Structures of Conversion*, pp. 13–15 and 70–72.

[54] This portion of my argument is adapted from my earlier edition of *CA* (1968), pp. ix–x.

acknowledge that he does not know where to find it. 2) The distracted, dis-eased narrator will then perform some act of choice that will precipitate a change of scene, whereupon new "characters" will appear which are projections of different fragments of his anxious self or his environment. The new setting is now in the realm of the mind, where the heart of the quest will take place. 3) The argument of the poem will be conducted through dialogue between the narrator and the new characters. This multiplication of voicing is the most elastic part of the genre. It enables the poet to explore conditional propositions through the suppositions of each, thus opening for the reader an intellectual playground in which problems may be dramatized. It is here and in the conclusion that the author will exercise the most originality as he chooses particular devices suitable to the intention of the argument. But regardless of the device, whether it be a hart hunt as in *The Book of the Duchess*, a walk beside a river coming from Paradise as in *Pearl*, a hunt by a poacher in a deep wood as in *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, a search for salvation amidst a field full of folk as in *Piers Plowman*, or a confessional debate with Genius as in the *Confessio Amantis*, the argument will most likely begin with questions of identity, such as "What or who am I?" "Where am I?" or "What is the trouble with my soul?" It will then progress through a series of partial revelations (tales, if you will) which present themselves dramatically and bear some similarity to Boethius' baring of his wound in order that Philosophy might apply the appropriate medicine. 4) The analysis and therapy will end with a tense moment in which the disturbed persona will waver, then achieve a revelation, usually partial, that will precipitate his return to the dilemma that initiated the search. The narrator may still be baffled by the meaning of the dreamlike experience, but he will, at least, have a better sense of what is at stake.

The *Confessio Amantis* is organized along the lines I have outlined, though Gower will, as we shall see, exercise a great deal of ingenuity in working within them. His most radical change is the introduction of a complex social analogue in the frame narrative that qualifies readings within the romance plot. Such a scheme is highly ambitious and even daring[55] as Gower attempts to conjoin social criticism presented in a nonfictional mode with fiction. At least the effect leaves no doubt in the reader's mind about Gower's convictions regarding the urgency of his argument; we find ourselves dealing with England as well as the Lover,[56] aware that the two are somehow interconnected. Since this political side of the poem's frame narrative is likely to give modern readers of the *Confessio* the greatest difficulty, I will preface my discussion of the poem's romance structure with an attempt to locate the concerns of the poem within the divisive political circumstances of the late 1380s to which the Prologue and the conclusion to the frame allude.

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[55] The daring lies in criticizing people of higher social station in the fourteenth century but also in imagining that the moral force of the form might make a difference. See Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, pp. 31–38 and 108–36, and Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," pp. 91–92 and 95–104, on the danger of such literary activities.

[56] His model for such a strategy might have been Chaucer or, perhaps, Jean de Meun in his continuation of *Le Roman de la Rose*. See Middleton, "Idea of Public Poetry," pp. 89–90, on the bridging of metaphysical and moral philosophy in fourteenth-century English literature.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Prologue focuses emphatically on division within the state as cause of the woes of the times. As a social document the *Confessio* is securely anchored in the time of its origins — Gower has seen to that. The social concerns are not simply conservative or aristocratic,[57] though conservation of social structures is, for Gower, a primary concern. Few poets have been so deeply committed to the welfare of present times as Gower. That commitment was evident in his Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l'Omme*, where he first assesses English society within a gridwork of sins and remedies. Likewise, in his subsequent Latin work, the *Vox Clamantis*, one finds a comparable commitment toward understanding aberrations of the present time. Both of these earlier works are devoted to discursive analysis of the layout of social and political culture. The welfare of the kingdom remains a focal concern of the *Confessio Amantis*, especially in the Prologue and in the diatribe against war in Book 3 (Wrath), the discussions of labor in Book 4 (Sloth), of religion in Book 5 (Avarice), in the extended discourse on the pedagogy of the king of Book 7, and, finally, in the appeal for good rule in the conclusion to Book 8.[58] But the *Confessio Amantis* is more densely layered than Gower's earlier works. The frame narrative and the digressions of Books 4, 5, and 7, lay out what Gower perceives the sociological problems of the day to be, particularly factious aggressions within the three estates that disrupt the commonweal, peace, and unity.

In 1390, when Gower first completed and began circulating *Confessio Amantis*, England was at a relatively quiet moment between two turbulent decades. Peace after turbulence is indeed a concern of Gower's poem, from its beginning to its conclusion.[59] To a Londoner like Gower, living close to the seat of England's government, the decade of the 1380s had been an extended nightmare. The decade had begun with pervasive economic and political crises that led to the Uprising of 1381, a bloody protest that, as it descended upon London, reverberated through all levels of society but solved little. Gower might well have witnessed the burning of John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace and the siege of the Tower from his residence at St. Mary Overeys, across the river in Southwark. When young King Richard had shown

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[57] As Gower's critique cuts across all three estates, his position is not too dissimilar from Langland's in *Piers Plowman* B.6, where Piers sets up rules of governance on his half acre. In Gower the commons is governed by the king and the church, though all three share responsibility for good rule. It is an evil time when the commons rebel, but an especially evil time if proud churchmen or aristocrats promote themselves at the cost of the kingdom. See Emmerson, "Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture," pp. 171–75, on *CA* as a public poem.

[58] None of the expository sections — on the difficulty of justifying war, on the origins of labor and the professions, on the history of religion, and on the education of the king — appear in this volume, though they will occur in volumes 2 and 3 of this edition. For detailed summaries of the expository sections, see my one-volume edition of selections from *CA* (1968), pp. 192, 222–23, 242–48, and 368–414.

[59] Peace became for Gower almost a mania in his recurrent attempts to address the political chaos of England during his lifetime. It is not only central to his three major works, *Mirour de l'Omme*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*; at the end of the 1390s, after the deposition of Richard, he wrote the *Tripartite Chronicle*, lamenting the greed of Richard's party and celebrating the justice of their overthrow. His final English poem is *In Praise of Peace*, c. 1400, a poem that hopes Henry's new administration can restore peace to the nation. The theme of peace is also found in such works of Chaucer as "Lak of Stedfastnesse" and The Tale of Melibee, both of which works bear close ties with *CA*.

his mettle in facing the rebels in Smithfield,[60] it must have seemed a demonstration of royal courage that Gower would have admired greatly, an action that might well have added a note of sincerity to the dedication to Richard in the Prologue and concluding dedication of the *Confessio* in 1390.

But the king had reason to admire Gower in return, which may have been a factor in his inviting the poet onto his royal barge (see Prol.*24–*92, the first recension account of the particular occasion out of which the *Confessio* grew). Earlier, in the late 1370s, Gower had attempted to address the factiousness of that "disastrous decade"[61] by means of the *Vox Clamantis* (c. 1377–81), a precautionary complaint against greed and private aggrandizement among the aristocracy as well as the unruly behavior manifested by the dissidents. In the 1370s the executive government of Edward III had been attacked on all sides by often vicious factions that assailed the clerical ministers of state, impeached the king's chamberlain and a number of lesser officials, murdered the chancellor and treasurer, and indiscriminately massacred officers of the law and minor civil servants. In the *Vox*, Gower's attack on such behavior is forthright and carefully reasoned, albeit in Latin. The social critique of *Vox Clamantis* was read primarily by ecclesiasts and men of law, though it must also have been known to some in the royal court and perhaps even the king himself. At least, he would most likely have known something of Gower's recounting of the terrors of the revolt in 1381.

As kings go, Richard was remarkably learned. In the prince's adolescence Simon Burley had served as his tutor, and it is possible that Richard's interest in books may have been instilled by Burley.[62] The extent to which he was affiliated with or encouraged writers in English in the younger days of his rule can only be surmised. He was evidently fond of Chaucer and may have been aware, at least, of the literary interests of others. Anne Middleton, in her discussion of Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, projects a literary coterie in London in the last two decades of the fourteenth century who took pride in the composing of vernacular literature and wrote for each other.[63] These wordcrafters — men like Chaucer, Langland,

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[60] See Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 126–56, for an account of Gower as a witness to history in *VC*, and Staley, "Gower, Richard II, Henry of Derby, and the Business of Making Culture," for discussion of *CA* in its day. For a general survey of social events and responses to the "hurling time" of the uprising see Peck, "Social Conscience and the Poets." For a useful anthology of literature of protest from the period see Dean, ed., *Medieval English Political Writings*.

[61] The phrase is McKisack's, in *Fourteenth Century*; see p. 384, for a summary of the "disastrous" events.

[62] See Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 15–16, and Maude V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies*, pp. 120–23. Burley's library holdings included Egidio Colonna's *De regimine principum*, a book akin to *VC*. See Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 18–19, on Burley's book holdings. It is likely that Richard would have understood and appreciated the advice-to-princes genre, at which Gower was particularly adept. See also Michael J. Bennett, "Court of Richard II and the Promotion of Literature," and Kerby-Fulton and Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles."

[63] The most thorough discussion of Gower's relationship with his fourteenth-century audience is Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 126 ff. The genius of Middleton's more succinct observations lies in its shifting of the audience of Gower from an aristocracy or coterie of ecclesiasts to a group of writers whose bond lies not in their social privilege but in their delight as men of letters in wordcrafting and the clerical arts of bookmaking, what Usk refers to as "perdurable letters" (3.923), those "sleigh inseer[s]" who "can souke hony of the harde stone, oyle of the drye rocke" and "lyghtly fele nobley of mater in my leude ymagination closed" (*Testament of Love* 3.104–06). See Middleton,

Gower, Usk, the *Pearl*-poet, Strode, Clanvowe, Hoccleve, and later Lydgate, along with the craftsmen of dozens of other anonymous literary gems, such as *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, *The Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, *The Storie of Asneth*, and *The Pistel of Swete Susan* — wrote with the resourcefulness of a new Renaissance mentality that defined what Coleman calls "England's literary golden age."[64] Gower, along with Chaucer, was at the center of the group. We know something of the genius of these writers through their comments upon each other. Their reputation, particularly that of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, lasted into the high Renaissance of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, where they were praised for the marvelous inception in England of literary delight.

Although the degree to which the king was aware of such remarkable beginnings is unclear, he must have known something of what was happening. Gower's Latin *Vox Clamantis* may be the work to which Richard alludes in the 1390 Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*, when he invited Gower aboard the royal barge on the Thames to encourage him to write "Som newe thing . . . That he himself it mighte looke / After the forme of my writyng" (lines *51–*53).[65] It is after this meeting that Gower presumably began working on the *Confessio Amantis*. Whether he actually began writing the poem with the Prologue we do not know. It is conceivable that the Prologue was written later, though certainly no later than 1389. Perhaps the meeting on the Thames that the Prologue refers to occurred c. 1385, before the machinations of the Appellants began, though the remainder of the Prologue probably alludes to the later events.

Like the *Vox*, the Prologue to the *Confessio* offers a critique of the times. The critique is similar to that of the *Vox*, perhaps not so much because Gower thinks in patterns as because the times of the 1380s are so similar in their factionalism to those of the 1370s. In the years immediately after the great revolt, England could scarcely be seen to be at peace, even though the unruly bloodshed had been quelled. The punitive and restrictive laws that were enacted offered little security or satisfaction to anyone. In 1386, baronial unrest in opposition to the young king spilled over into Parliament. Anticipation of the impending attack on the king and his counselors may explain Chaucer's resignation from his position in the Customs Office and his move out of London. Chaucer was certainly loyal to the king as he took up residence in Kent where the queen resided. He served in the Parliament of 1386 as a member from Kent, perhaps to act in support of the crown. But during the next year and the year following things did not go well for the king.[66] In November of 1387, three powerful barons — Gloucester, Arundel, and Warwick — attacked Richard through his counselors. With support from Derby (Henry of Lancaster) and Mowbray, they "appealed" five of Richard's administrators and principal supporters — Neville, De Vere, Suffolk, Tresilian, and

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"Thomas Usk's 'Perdurable Letters,'" pp. 63, 68–70, 88n35, and 94–104, where she specifically considers Gower.

[64] *Medieval Readers and Writers*, p. 14.

[65] Another possibility of work by Gower known to the king might be early love poems (in French) which later were incorporated into the *Cinkante Balades*. See Macaulay, 1:lxxiii, on the history of the *Balades*.

[66] For succinct discussions of the events following 1386 and Usk's execution, see Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 193–94, and Scott, "Chaucer and the Parliament of 1386." For a more detailed analysis see McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, pp. 424–61. See also Stow, "Richard II in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," pp. 13–24.